

## **My Experience as a Seva Mandir Intern**

**By: Wendy Nuttelman**

When I came to Seva Mandir, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I had no idea that it was such a well-established NGO, which has been doing development work in rural Rajasthan for over forty years. I was given an assignment within the Health Department, which involved documenting the experiences of village youth who had participated in Adolescent Health Camps. I would use the stories and pictures that I collected to produce an informative brochure that would illustrate the importance of the program.

I was excited about my project, but I realized that it would be a somewhat difficult task, given my limited knowledge of Hindi. I headed out to the villages with an Indian volunteer, who would act as my interpreter. Being out in the field was an incredible experience. The countryside was absolutely beautiful, and I was greeted with warm smiles from many of the villagers. Procuring information from the adolescents proved to be harder than I imagined. The females were particularly shy, and there were times when they provided me with very little information. I sometimes found that it was difficult to feel like I was connecting to people, because of the language and cultural barriers. I often fell into the role of a silent observer, and questioned whether or not my presence was actually beneficial. As I gradually gained a better understanding of the culture, this feeling of disconnect began to dissipate. I noticed the way that a friendly smile, a respectful greeting, and some simple Hindi brought me closer to the villagers.

My time at Seva Mandir passed too quickly. After three months, I felt like I had barely begun to crack the surface of the complex and fascinating community where I had been so warmly accepted. Speaking with other volunteers, I heard stories similar to mine. I found out that it was common for volunteers to extend their stay, or to come back to visit and volunteer again in the future. I myself hope to return someday, and to continue to contribute to this organization where I have learned so much.