

# Erasmus Broadening Horizons

**BA Languages student Jennifer Murray, who is blind and has mild cerebral palsy, successfully completed a year abroad on an Erasmus work placement.**

**Jennifer worked as an English Language Assistant at a school, Nuestra Señora De Belén, in Murcia, Spain, from October 2011 until the end of May 2012, as part of her degree.**



## The Language of Success

I really enjoyed spending time in a different country, learning more about its culture, its language, the customs and traditions and everything else that happens along the way. I have been able to tackle various situations and have experienced many opportunities which I would not have had back at home. I would highly recommend a work placement abroad, as it is a truly life-changing experience. You learn so much and you have opportunities and experiences which you would not have otherwise. My confidence has greatly improved as a result and my Spanish has come on in leaps and bounds.

## Planning Ahead

Good preparation is essential. I did a pre-visit to Murcia for a week in the summer and met all the people involved, something I strongly recommend as I found this invaluable and extremely useful. I met up with the people who worked for the Spanish organisation for the Blind (ONCE), the local/regional authorities in Murcia, the host family organisation and my host family. What's more, I met my mentor from the school, the head teacher and another of the English teachers and I had the opportunity to have a quick look around the school building.

I would also highly recommend to anyone thinking of doing a year abroad to contact their employer or university and other key contacts straight away. Send lots of e-mails, keep good records, make follow-up phone calls and keep on asking questions. In Spain, things do seem to take longer -so keep on chasing up!

## Challenging

Moving abroad for any student can be challenging and although I soon adapted to my new environment, I did have to overcome some obstacles that can affect anyone living abroad on their own for the first time. I struggled to cope initially as I lived with a host family who didn't go out very much and left me to my own devices. I was quite homesick at first and considered staying with another family. However, in the end, I decided not to move as I had started to make friends with some of the other Language Assistants. While you are abroad it can take time to get to know other people, but you will, and once you do, it is an amazing experience. If you want to do something, don't be afraid to just ask the other Erasmus students or Language Assistants.

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After Christmas, things really improved for me and I had a great year abroad because I made friends for life and I had an amazing support worker who helped me in and out of school. I kept myself busy meeting up with as many of my friends as possible and spending time with my support worker. As a result I think the year abroad has changed me as a person, I feel more confident, have learnt so much, and I now know that I can cope with any new challenges that I face.

Under the Erasmus scheme, students with disabilities get additional funding which I found really useful. I used it to help with my rent, additional teaching materials and to pay my support worker when we did activities outside of school or when I needed extra help. I also used it to help towards the cost of taxis which was crucial for me, as I really depended on them to get around, especially when travelling on my own.

As for the work placement itself, I really enjoyed the experience; it was very interesting to see how things are done in a different country and to learn about the host country's culture, customs and education system. The children were fantastic with me as they just accepted me for who I am.

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I really do miss being there, the time went so quickly and I can't wait to go back at the earliest opportunity! It was a life-changing experience which has helped my personal confidence and I would love to do it all over again. With the British Council, you can be an English Language Assistant at least three times so maybe I will! I would also love to do another Erasmus placement, perhaps over the summer of 2013, going to a French Language school to improve my French.

I have already been abroad again, as I went to Romania where I ran a workshop at an international summer camp for visually impaired people (Adventure in Europe/International Camp on Communication and Computers) based on my year abroad experience of living, studying and working away from home.

My aim is to become an interpreter/ translator and I think this experience will give me the confidence to try and achieve this goal, as well as being an excellent addition to my CV.

I encourage everyone, of all abilities, to take up these opportunities when they come your way!