

This summer I spent eight weeks with a women's weaving cooperative in Ain Leuh, a small village in the Middle Atlas mountains of Morocco. With them, I worked to establish the cooperative's online presence by setting up a website, Facebook page, flickr site, youtube account in the hopes to expand their business internationally. In many cases, these artisans are the primary wage earners of their family.

During my eight week experience, I learned how to shoot and edit simple videos and photos, update a website with basic HTML, and how to fully utilize social networking sites like Facebook and twitter. More than this, though, I came to understand more about Moroccan Amazigh (indigenous) culture. I was able to improve my Moroccan dialect, learn some key Tamazight (Berber) words, understand the importance of weavings to Amazigh culture and catalogue traditional motifs used in their weavings.

I was invited into cooperative member's homes and they shared their lives with me. I met their husbands and children, and in many cases, their entire extended families. I broke the Ramadan fast with them, celebrated a birth and a circumcision, mourned at a funeral, attended a birthday party and countless lunches. Each day I spent at the cooperative felt like spending time with friends as I got to know them and understand what was important to them. I thank them for their generosity and for welcoming me in as part of the family.

I will be attending a master's program in International Educational Development in the hopes to become an effective researcher in international educational programs and projects in North Africa. This summer of volunteer work was an excellent way to familiarize myself with Moroccan culture and understand how to work as a professional in their context.

Thank you so much for funding this experience. Although it was only eight weeks long, I believe the partnership between myself and the artisans of Ain Leuh will continue to positively affect the village of Ain Leuh and the lives of myself and the artisans.