

Brenna has always been passionate about everyone having access to a quality education and also about empowerment and equality for women and girls. The schools where she volunteered were all based in the Solukhumbu district – the home of Mt Everest. Access to these schools was difficult, involving a 12 hour drive along muddy roads and then at least a further day's walking! Literacy rates in Nepal are extremely low. Only about 50 % of the population can actually read and in rural areas, many children will never attend school, because they are needed to work on the family land or to earn money to support their families. Any children who are able to attend school will often walk up to two hours to school each day and then two hours home again. Some families send their children to boarding school in Kathmandu but this threatens their local communities and traditions. And, as in many developing countries in the world, when girls reach puberty, the majority of them drop out of school due to the lack of resources and understanding surrounding this taboo topic.

Brenna spent time in five villages helping to set up libraries, and to deliver first aid and menstrual health training to students, teachers and families in the communities. For many of the village people, the libraries were the first time they had ever seen a book, let alone a whole room full of them! Brenna helped paint and decorate the simple classrooms and she also taught the children how to use pois. Beyond the school, village life was beautiful but very primitive. There were no real showers or toilets, no power in many places and certainly no wi-fi. The villagers only eat what they can grow, so much time was spent gardening and night times were spent with families instead of watching television or being on devices! Brenna surprised the boys by playing volleyball with them and she herself was surprised when walking home in a downpour to find herself infested with leeches. Not a comfortable experience!

Phambi Rai is the teacher sponsored directly by our Rotary club. Unlike in NZ, teaching is male-dominated in Nepal and most women are expected to stay at home and mother children. Phambi is a modern woman defying the traditional beliefs and her knowledge is key to being able to implement the menstrual health training. Brenna is passionate about extending this training, and so she is donating \$1000 towards supporting this education. The price of what one NZ woman will spend on one month's sanitary products is \$10, and this amount will deliver a lifetime of products for a Nepali girl.