

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at [dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## Placement – Kate Howard

### Treak Community Centre

10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 – 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019

#### Pre-departure

Pre departure preparation started with attending a social event held by People and Places in Reading about 8 months before. I was able to talk to Dianne Ashman who had actually visited various projects where they needed business support – her first hand account of the projects and the volunteering opportunity was what convinced me to go for it!

People and Places sent me a lot of very helpful background information about the community centre and Cambodia. I also had an outline of a placement from Michael, the NGO Director which helped to confirm that this would be a good role for me. In addition, I was in contact with a volunteer I had met at the social event who I knew (Chris Williams) and who about to go out to Cambodia to volunteer at Treak. Kate at People and Places was very patient and encouraging whilst I was making all the arrangements that would enable me to actually confirm I was going with a booked flight – I appreciated her keeping in touch and gentle prodding at the right moments. They recommended who to contact for flights, sent me stories from other volunteers which were all so positive and I had a chat again on the phone with Dianne about various things including what to pack.

They efficiently handled all the administrative aspects such as getting me CRB checked, invoicing and liaising with the Cambodian partner to ensure everything was lined up when I arrived.

I was a bit surprised when I got the actual formal project outline through about a month before as it was very different to the initial outline, however, I was able to contact the NGO Director and he reassured me that it would be a combination of both.

Note from *people and places* – because volunteers often plan their placements well in advance placement outlines do on occasion alter as the needs of the project develop. However the skills share needs will remain the same.

#### Orientation

My orientation in Siem Reap was excellent and the way they welcomed and cared for the welfare of their volunteers was what helped me to settle in quickly and start functioning as a useful member of the team as soon as possible. Particular thanks go to Sophea who made sure I knew the cycle route, arranged a SIM card for me, got my VISA extension sorted and was just a reassuring, friendly English speaking person if you weren't sure about anything.

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The school had also clearly given serious thought to my placement and had planned out an induction week. The NGO Director, Michael, also took the time to come out to meet me with the Head Teacher so that we could all formally introduce ourselves and he helped provide some useful background information about how as volunteers we could best work alongside our Cambodian colleagues. He also gave a very interesting and in-depth talk about child protection and how volunteers should behave when at a project so as to safeguard children and themselves. I can honestly say that the atmosphere was so professional, warm and welcoming with a large dose of humour that you couldn't possibly not feel that you were a valuable part of the team even though it's quite clear they have volunteers coming and going very regularly.

## **My placement**

In that first week I drew up a plan for my time for the placement period so that I could apportion the hours I had available to the various tasks and not spend too long on one particular thing to the detriment of something else. This proved to be useful as a month isn't a huge amount of time and I did want to achieve something by the end of it rather than start a lot of things but not finish them.

My placement supporting the Head Teacher was very clearly defined so I was able to get going with that very quickly. To support his professional development he had asked for training in time management and team management so I delivered three coaching sessions on these topics tailoring my knowledge to his specific needs. I used one of my CIM textbooks which I took with me to support me with preparing material for this.

He required help with getting some administrative systems up and running so I had the big task of taking pictures of all of the children and uploading them to the attendance lists. I was also asked to come up with a better method of managing the stationery supplies. As I don't have an education background, getting input from a Head Teacher friend in the UK was really useful as it gave us some models which we discussed. One of the reasons for managing supplies was scarcity and cost. Walking round the classrooms it was clear that some teachers had their supplies very well organised and labelled so everything got put back at the end of the day where it should be and it would be easy to see what you had run out of. Others were much less organised. My Cambodian colleague, Mealea, who was the new Administrative Assistant and I spent a useful few hours creating proper classroom storage for the latter – we hope they appreciate it! I also spent time showing Mealea how to use the attendance lists in Excel so that she could use the programme when I was gone.

Dara and I also set up a link between Treak and Eardisley Primary in Herefordshire where my friend Bridget Knight is Head Teacher. Their first project was for a class to exchange postcards that they had designed and written. Viphou's class at Treak wasted no time in getting on with this and I was able to bring them back in my suitcase (drop off yet to be arranged!).

The second project was working with the Project Manager, Sa Lin, on the product development, sales and merchandising of the fledgling social enterprise sewing group. Her main aim for me was to create a display area in reception for the products. As part of this, I needed to get a bigger picture of who the market was for these products, what products would appeal, what price they should be, what the costs were for each product and how they could be marketed with the display being one part of that.

I spent some time looking at shops and markets in Siem Reap that sold handicrafts to see how they did it and to get ideas. I shared these with Sa Lin and together we picked ideas we liked that we thought would work. I also wrote down my findings into a plan which they can refer to in future (doc i) and costed out the products that were already in existence to get prices (doc iii).

One of the products that the sewing group had made was a foldaway shopping bag and it needed a design on it. We decided to get the children to draw a design as it was felt this would be a memorable souvenir of a visit to Treak. One class came up with a couple of good designs and we took them to the local silk screen printing company to discuss. With a few tweaks they should be able to progress this. A side

benefit of this visit was that they were impressed by the quality of the workmanship and said they might sometimes have a bit of work they could put Treak's way when a customer wants a small run of bags.

The project are already very good at posting on Facebook and Instagram but needed more guidance on how to use it strategically to create wider awareness and to drive action. I did a coaching session for Sa Lin on Instagram which helped towards that. All in all, I think a good start has been made but I think there are some ongoing actions which need to be done to ensure the best chance of success. I have listed these below and am happy to be a point of contact for help or advice.

### **Sewing group social enterprise – ongoing actions**

- as they add new product lines they will need to plan the layout so it looks visually attractive and not cluttered.
- if new product lines are created it needs to be clear who these will appeal to and how will they be marketed
- need to make sure that there is an update to date price list or find a way to ticket each item (doc ii) – this was one thing I hadn't managed to complete by the time I left.
- need to make sure that each product item is clearly costed and priced accordingly so that costs are covered and the project gets a small contribution towards overheads (we multiplied costs by 2).
- Instagram – Admin support here would be helpful to keep a record of relevant hashtags for different aspects of the projects work so that they can be easily sourced by Sa Lin and spelt correctly!! 😊
- Measure sales and income received – for this they will need to keep a record of product lines, quantities made, quantities sold, monies taken and dates. Again some admin support will be needed for this. This will be useful to see if income is matching expenditure; to drive improvements and celebrate success!

Finally, in the course of my research into other NGO's and social enterprise, I came across ways to take donations securely through an online payment gateway. I looked into these and the costs and made a couple of recommendations which I hope Concert will be able to take forward so they have such a facility on their own website. I also was able to see that donations and fundraising do form quite a significant percentage of the income of many NGO's in addition to other activities such as volunteers and social enterprise. Michael and I had some interesting discussions about this and I have promised to come up with a plan to create a Friend's Programme for Treak to hopefully generate sustainable annual giving.

### **Documents left on file**

All saved under Treak Common Files>DATA>Volunteers>Kate

- i) Products.doc – simple business plan for products made by sewing group
- ii) Label.doc – wording for a price label
- iii) Product costings.doc – costings for sewing group
- iv) Instagram.doc - How to use Instagram including recommended hashtags for different parts of the project – plastic bricks, handmade products, volunteering
- v) Copy written about the sewing group and the school uniform
- vi) Stationery order form.doc – list of stationery items for teachers to order
- vii) Improving your time management.doc - handout

### **Future volunteers**

Someone with a fundraising background could work on the Friends Programme, create a case for support, help set up back office systems with the Cambodian staff and plan ongoing donor communication.

Marketing – someone with marketing experience could continue to develop the sewing group's activities, review the success of the display, develop product lines, plus the things outlined above

Dara – in due course Dara would probably benefit from more management coaching.

### **Highlights**

Finding out how much of a difference you can make, how keen they are to learn new things and have your support.

Feeling part of the team at the school and at the NGO office – you feel like you are a valued part of their organisation

Working with Dara who is such a super chap and so keen to learn!

The unusual things that happen because it's Cambodia! Having the audio backdrop in the office of a Buddhist funeral on loudspeaker throughout the whole village for 2 days running and being allowed to go in and see the musicians and religious offerings; witnessing a huge, noisy, colourful procession one morning on my way into work to mark the start of becoming a monk for 5 young men.

### **Recommendations for volunteering**

If you have a skill that you could share and would like to immerse yourself in another culture then volunteering abroad is a fabulous experience. In particular in Cambodia, the variety of skills that they can make use of is huge and there are a lot of established NGO's doing excellent work who could benefit so you would really be making a difference. The time taken by People and Places and the project partner to identify volunteering opportunities matched to people's skills and experience is vital to the success of the experience for both sides and I can say that they do it very, very well. Because I was there to do a job that I really enjoyed it kept me going when sometimes other aspects were hard such as getting used to the heat or feeling under the weather!

I think it's important to contribute as much as you can whilst you are there. I never felt I had all the answers but the willingness to get alongside your Cambodian colleagues and share with them what you know is really helpful.

### **Leisure time**

At the weekends I did 2 tours of the temples, one of which was the Sunrise Angkor Wat – this was a fantastic thing to do – and the other was the outer ring, called the Grand Circuit. These were the highlights of my trip. I explored Siem Reap on my bike visiting pagodas, the market and places that sell authentic Cambodian handicrafts such as Artisans D'Angkor and Made in Cambodia market. I had lovely 'treat' experiences at Spa Khmer and Devatara Spa and did a couple of yoga classes down by the river with Rolok Fitness. I visited Tonle Sap lake with one of the teachers who was our tuk tuk driver for the day. Michael and his family kindly invited me to join them on a couple of occasions at social events which was really nice and I went along to the regular Friday tapas night with the other volunteers and office staff. In my final week I got the bus to Phnom Penh to visit the Prison S21 and the Killing Fields which was a really important part of understanding Cambodian history.

### **Accommodation**

Staying at Victory was a good way of meeting other volunteers which was why I chose it. It was basic accommodation but was fine. The bathroom needed some maintenance but everything worked. They do nice drinks and meals in the evenings if you don't want to go out, all amazing value. The extended family that run it are all so nice and the large open lounge/dining area was a great place to relax at the end of a busy day. All the rooms have fans but air conditioning was an extra \$4, it did make a huge difference though. The swimming pool at Mother Hen was ok but there are lots of swimming pools you can use in the city if you pay for a bit of food and drink so would suggest looking online.

## Improvements

There was a lot of information provided about the project, background to the country, child protection policy and language sheet but no travel tips. Having not travelled to a tropical, developing country before I had to get up to speed with what I would need to take which was almost part of the fun, chatting to friends who had been to that part of the world who could advise me, but I have put together a hints and tips sheet which might help others from reinventing the wheel. It also covers how to avoid mosquito bits – it may be over the top but it made me feel safe!

The other thing was telecoms and cyber security. I was a bit clueless about telecoms as I never do long haul or use local SIM's so have always stayed on my own network. A few notes about this for volunteers would be really useful eg the fact that your phone number will change, what numbers you need to use to ring another country or for them to ring you, how to do this cheaply by putting a code in front of the number and to buy yourself a data bundle for \$1 for a week so you don't have to use public wifi. Unfortunately my email and Facebook were hacked whilst I was away which is not a pleasant experience and quite a lot of hassle to sort out. It can only have been from using public wifi too often. I subsequently read online that it's best to avoid public wifi unless absolutely necessary.

Note from people and places - This is valuable advice and we will certainly look at including more information about cyber security in our orientation

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Thank you.