

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 kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Chris Williams- Treak Community Centre: 25/10/2018 – 07/12/2018

pre departure preparation –

I attended one of your sessions in Reading just before I left, talking to previous volunteers which I found useful (*people and places holds a couple of volunteer socials a year – where volunteers are able to talk with us and,more importantly eachother*).

I tried to learn Kmer for the 5-6 months before I left, which I found very difficult and made very little progress with. This was a disappointment to me, but did not really impact my time at the project, only outside in my leisure time. In hindsight it was an unrealistic expectation on my part. I had been in Cambodia 3 years prior to this ,so I was aware of some of the cultural aspects. I researched the resources that were being used for teaching English.

• **orientation and preparation at the start of the placement** – I visited TREAK on the Friday before I was due to start on the Monday with Michael, which was very good. The orientation around Seam Reap was also useful, but may have been more beneficial a few days later, when I would have had a lot more questions (but I realise that this may not be best for many people). I attended the staff meeting and was given a plan of my involvement for the first week. Michael also spent a lot of time with me explaining what he would like me to achieve during my time.

• **what did we do well?** – pretty much everything. What I think stands out for me is the very positive, can-do, attitude that came across in correspondence.

• **what could we do better?** - I know how difficult it is to stay on top of email correspondence, so this is only a point that affected me and I do understand the limitations of time, etc. I was trying to visit my daughter in East Timor during the same trip and I needed to get flights booked as early as possible as it was a complicated itinerary. There was quite a delay in getting assurance that I was accepted on the project, for which I could not see any reason at the time. It would also have been very useful for me to have had a laptop with me, but this was not

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made clear to me (you may not have known this).

• **your experience and work –**

I assisted with teaching English classes during the daytime and in the evenings for the older pupils. I developed some PowerPoint resources for the evening classes (as requested by the teachers themselves) on the subjects of (1) Engineering – what is it? (2) Plastic – where does it come from? (3) How can we reduce plastic use?. I do not have copies of these but they were added to the IT library. I also ran an evening class using some prisms to show how light is made up of different colours. I was trying to get the teachers interested in understanding some of the basic concepts of Physics (Michael had asked me to try to do this if possible). It was hard to establish this more positively in the time I was there.

I was also asked to work with one of the teachers to show him how to build a wooden scale model of TREAK. We worked on this during lunch and some weekend days. The idea was that they wanted to use this to start teaching the idea of geography and mapping, so the next stage was to construct a map of the village and identify where the students lived. The students showed great interest in this while we were constructing it and sometimes mimicked what we were doing trying to make models of things themselves.

I carried out some experiments with the shredder that had been acquired to help with the 'plastic bricks' making. Unfortunately, this ultimately demonstrated conclusively that it was not feasible. I guess that was a positive, even though a negative, as it did show what could not be done. Alongside this I produced some written reports to Michael researching options for this process and trying to understand better what was actually happening in the process of degrading the waste plastic prior to incorporating into the bricks.

• **in your opinion, are there any significant changes needed in the information we sent to you during your preparation for this placement?** – nothing significant, but may be good to say a laptop would be useful. The long days were very tiring, but then I had opted to do the evening classes as well, so that was down to me.

• **your recommendations for the input of future volunteers – a particular area of your work which could be continued by others and how would you suggest this could be done?** – there was a great interest amongst the more senior students in subjects such as plastics (they are all very aware of the problems of waste plastic in Cambodia) and about science and engineering, although they have very little knowledge of these subjects. The teachers are also not very knowledgeable on these subjects, and their main focus is of course on teaching English. However, if future volunteers have the knowledge and could pass this on to the local teachers, then I feel certain that once the teachers got on-board with this then they would be very enthusiastic. The classes tend to be very noisy by UK standards, but when the subject was interesting to the students (such as engineering and the environment) then the students were much more engaged, and quickly learnt English in this context in a much quieter environment. The teachers were very pro-active and inventive in taking further the ideas/subjects that I had tried to introduce.

• **successes and disappointments of your placement –**

successes – the positive reactions I got to the subjects I tried to introduce to the evening classes; seeing the younger students taking interest in the scale model, with them recognising their classroom etc and trying to build models themselves; influencing the teachers on a personal basis to encourage and, hopefully, to inspire them ; meeting some amazing people including the staff at TREAK, the staff at Concert, and the other volunteers; helping the students in class on a one-to-one basis and seeing their improvements and understanding grow.

Disappointments – not being able to help develop the production of bricks using waste plastics; limited progress in helping the teachers to introduce other science and engineering subjects into the teaching of English; I was disappointed in how the city of Siam Reap has been taken over by tourists, mostly Chinese. I did not expect this and it compared to my previous volunteer experience in Cambodia in the remote Mondulkiri district.

• **what was the highlight of your volunteer experience?** The following week after I had led a class on plastics, when I was not able to be at the next class, but the teacher was enthusiastically telling me what he had done in that lesson taking forward the ideas from the previous lesson in a constructive and inventive way, with a good understanding of the subject.

• **would you recommend volunteering to other people or not? please tell us why.** – yes I would. You discover a lot about yourself, such as skills you did not know you had, and resilience you were not aware of. Meeting very interesting people and getting to understand a little of an alternative culture to your own.

• **how did you spend your leisure time?** I spent quite a lot of time with other volunteers, some of whom were about my age, which was great. The younger ones were very friendly, but not really wishing to spend much time with the 'oldies'. I spent many hours cycling around the local area in the cool early mornings. I visited the Angkor Wat temples, and Bantambang town one weekend (by boat). I read many books and spent some time practising my clarinet. I was lucky to be there during the Water Festival which I really enjoyed. I didn't feel that I had much leisure time other than the national holidays, but this suited me fine.

• **how was your accommodation?** - it was good. The staff were very friendly and helpful. The room was very clean and the AC was a welcome relief at times! The location was good with plenty of restaurants nearby.

I hope that this comes across as positive, because that is how I felt about my placement. I am still considering my future (before I get too old!) and a recent meet-up with 3 other volunteers I met out there led to some very interesting discussions between us on this very subject.

Thanks for all you have done and once again apologies for this report being so late.
Chris Williams

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