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Report on placement at Treak community Centre January 13th – April 3rd 2020 (actual leaving date 20th March) Sue Williams

Pre-trip

Information and support from both People and Places and Concert was clear and timely. From my point of view I can't think of anything you could have done differently.

On arrival

Orientation – Sophea arrived on time and her walk around town was informative and useful. There are tourist maps available at Victory; perhaps Sophea could take one with her or make sure the volunteer has one before setting out on the walk so the volunteer can see where they are.

At this point I would like to add how well I thought Sophea and Sary handled the deteriorating situation when the virus panic began particularly in Michael's absence. They both did really well keeping volunteers informed and supported and are a testament to the time, effort and skill that Michael has put into training them to deal with volunteers.

Working at Treak

The staff are all enthusiastic and welcoming, one of them, Mr. Chuer, has a second job as a tuc-tuc driver so he became my driver for my entire time at Treak. This worked out well for both of us. I knew he was never going to be late or a no-show and, because I had paid for my transport in advance, he could be paid via his school wages. On days when he couldn't come he

arranged for his friend to do the trip. I would recommend this method for those volunteers who choose not to take the bicycle option.

During the first week I spent time in all the classes. The way the school day is organised can be quite hard to get your brain around to begin with. The 'full time' students attend either mornings or afternoons to fit in around their government school classes. There are also 'part time' students who only attend classes that run for an hour, three classes in the morning and two in the afternoon. Every month this all changes as some students swap from mornings to afternoons and vice versa. I was going to suggest that this information could be included pre-trip but on reflection I think that actually you just have to be there and get used to it. It would be handy for volunteers who may be involved in more than one class if students could make their own name cards to put on the desks in front of them so vols can start to learn their names more quickly.

Jolly Phonics

During the first week I identified students whose reading skills were such that they couldn't read anything teachers were writing on the board. I suggested that the teachers could make their own lists of students they thought could do with extra help and then I could take small groups out of class for 30 minutes intensive Jolly Phonics teaching. This worked quite well, unfortunately some of the scheduled sessions coincided with playtime so those groups had a lot of absentees. I tried to take attendance; however a lot of students couldn't recognise or write their names in English so sorting out who was present or not was cutting into precious teaching time so I gave up and just taught whoever turned up. The groups made very good progress during the seven full weeks I had them; although we had only covered groups 1-4 and touched upon group 5 this is something that future volunteers with the right skill-set could



definitely continue. To this end while Michael was in England I did an Amazon order for the Jolly Phonics Handbook and the reading scheme books, had them sent to his UK address and he kindly brought them back with him. While we were without students Teacher Dara and I went

through the handbook so he now has a good idea how the scheme works. The readers will not be kept in the library but in a teachers only phonics resource area which will also contain the flashcards and pictures I made to illustrate phonically regular words from groups 1-7. Dara and I also discussed how phonics could be taught in progression throughout the school. I made suggestions as to where in the programme students should have reached by the end of each school year eg. By the end of K1 students should be able to ... etc.

Teacher Training

I did four presentations to teachers outlining what the Jolly Phonics programme is and why using it is an effective way to teach students to read. I also showed them some techniques and practise activities.

All the staff attended every session and I was very pleased to get really positive feedback from them and to see them using the activities in their classes.



Unfortunately the trainings could not be completed but Dara has the presentations and we are already in discussions about doing trainings remotely.

Dara encouraged the staff to come up with a list of topics which they felt would benefit from volunteer training and input. There were two Dutch student teachers on project who did a really good training session on classroom management. I prepared the following training sessions but never got a chance to present them.

1. Teaching the 4 basic skills.
2. How to make your lessons more interesting
3. How to teach general knowledge to students

Again Dara has the presentations.

General observations – English teaching

From the start I observed that students are being taught a lot of vocabulary but not how to use it. Basically they learn lists of words – show them a picture of a leg and they all shout 'leg' show them a picture of an arm and they all shout 'arm'. However they can't put the word into a sentence, they just don't know that it is *a leg/an arm*. I discussed this with Dara; I said how impressed I was with the amount of vocab the students were learning and suggested that the next step would be teaching students how to use the language. He agreed. At present the school doesn't teach grammar but I had begun to show teachers some techniques for teaching some basic structures without having to plough their way through a grammar text book. Again Unfinished Business. I gave Dara more than 50 Powerpoints which practise basic grammar in a way that I have found engages students. He has them on a USB and will upload them onto google drive for the other teachers.

General studies

Dara asked for my input into the general studies classes which are a 'teachers choice' of content. I suggested some basic Geography and did a trial run in one



class. We did a week of learning about deserts. What are they? Where are they? What animals live there? Storytime *How the Camel got its Hump* songtime *Alice the camel*. All on Powerpoint. The teacher found

the plans easy to follow and the students were engaged for the whole week. So I have got to work and left Dara with lessons on several more geographical topics. I am now working on some more topics for him currently Ancient Egypt. Future volunteers could also come with topic ideas and resources – they would be very welcome. Also anyone who has a background in primary science will find several boxes of resources donated some time ago but not used. The Dutch girls were going to go through them and put some lessons together but I don't know how far they got.

Art and craft

The students usually have at least one lesson a week which is art and craft.



Teacher Dara and I had the students find a story they liked in the library (either Khmer or English), summarise it, make puppets of the characters, build a puppet theatre and perform.

Leisure

Things to do

National museum – walkable from Victory – probably best to go before your obligatory visit to Angkor Wat so you have a better idea of what you're looking at when you get there. Has a restaurant *Jones the Grocer* next door.

Phare Circus – tuc-tuc from Victory – small scale circe du soleil – brilliant. Go for the cheap seats at \$18 – get there early and you will get a seat with a good view.

Sacred dancers of Angkor – tuc-tuc from Victory -there are many imitations but this is the real deal – mesmerising.

Ton le Sap lake – about 45mins out of city. Worth going to see the houses 40ft up on stilts in dry season or with water up to their front doors in wet season.

Angkor Silk Farm – about 30mins out of city – see the process from mulberry tree to finished article. Guided tours with very good English speaking guide. Shop is a bit pricey!

Backstreet Academy – if you want to DO something rather than just look at something google them and you have a lot of choice. I did a day in the

countryside – went fishing in a pond, digging for land crabs, rattan basket weaving, lunch with the family and more. I also went to learn how to make a box out of woven strips of palm leaf. I have the box but I'm not about to give up the day job!

Eureka Hotel – opposite Victory – lovely pool \$2 to just swim.

If you eat there pay for food and spend all day in the pool. Australian run (Trevor) he does a full English cooked breakfast all day and every fortnight a full roast lunch for \$4.50. Good place to meet ex-pat residents.

Apopo Visitor Centre – Go and see the giant rats that are trained to detect landmines. Yes Really!!!

Accommodation

Myroom was of a good size and clean. The bathroom was also fine, the shower worked, always a bonus!

The only drawback was that the room got very little natural light as the window was only about 4ft from the building next door. Unfortunately the window was directly opposite the air conditioning unit on the building next door, when they turned it on the noise was deafening. A suggestion to Victory that would be simple to implement once volunteers return would be to have containers of drinking water in both buildings. Most of the volunteers were in the second building opposite reception, the drinking water containers are all in the restaurant. It was a nuisance to get ready for bed, then discover I needed some more water and have to go over the road to get it. The only other thing that is lacking at Victory is somewhere shady to sit outside. There is a roof terrace in the main building and there are balconies but they are in full sun a lot of the day. The family use the seats/hammocks alongside the road so other than inside the restaurant there is nowhere else for volunteers to get together.

Eateries

Browns Coffee – opposite petrol station – less than 5mins from Victory. Air-con, very nice staff, good coffee and food 2 hours free and fast wifi.

The Haven – tuc-tuc from Victory about 5mins to the other side of the river.

Excellent food

Golden Pumpkin – 5mins walk from victory – turn right at petrol station and keep going.

Lucky Shabu House – 5mins walk from Victory top floor of Lucky Mall. All you can eat buffet – cook your own soup with ingredients going past on a conveyor belt. Also cooked food section. Excellent value for money.

Italeat – Italian restaurant – tuc-tuc or walk from Victory on the other side of the river. Absolutely superb Italian cooking.

New Leaf – 10mins walk from Victory – good food, cheap books, donates some of its profits to educational projects.

Khmer Kitchen – 10 mins walk from victory opposite old market – good reasonable priced Khmer food.

Shopping

Angkor Market – five minutes walk from Victory just past Lucky Mall - supermarket with a really good selection of day to day necessities specially if you are taking your own lunch to Treak. You don't need to pack stuff like shower gel, shampoo etc you can get it here.

Heritage Mall – 10 minute walk from Victory – nothing special but there is a really good bookshop and a clothes shop upstairs that sells shirts etc suitable for work – they had some of last year's Primark stuff in there! Beware if you are larger than a slim size 12 you won't find anything to fit. Also if you're out and about and get caught short the loos here are spotless.

Made in Cambodia Market – 15 mins walk from Victory other side of the river – lots of small stalls selling interesting locally made things open 12noon onwards.

Highlights

Lots of highlights of my experience –among the best was seeing the confidence of some of the students in my small groups grow, not just with me but back in

the main class. Dara showed a picture flashcard of an elephant – the whole class shouted *elephant* and then one of my boys at the back said *it is an elephant*. I could have hugged him.

To anyone else unsure about whether or not to volunteer –and it is a big decision to do it for the first time, I would say take the plunge. If you have something to give, give it. If you contribute towards other people's happiness you will feel happy yourself. That's it really. Maybe I've been around Buddhist monks for too long but I can't think of any other way to express why I get so much out of volunteering.

My only disappointment was that I had to leave early. My advice to future volunteers would be: In a crisis don't count on the British Embassy – they are not fit for purpose.

The nightmare of getting home amid the chaos of cancelled flights and connections that could not be made is now beginning to be surpassed by the task of attempting to get back the £3000 I spent on flights that I couldn't take. I understand some airlines are offering vouchers which will be worthless if said airlines go bust which may well happen. Travel agents like Trip.com, Mytrip, Kiwi.com and Expedia have gone to ground, don't answer their phones or reply to emails.....

A note from people and places Sue was our last volunteer out in the field as the Corona Virus Crisis built – she is safely home.

However I have unfinished business at Treak and I will go back to finish what I started as soon as possible.

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