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Report from Gill Hurley and Mandy Smail on Voluntary Placement at Treak Community Project, Siem Reap, Cambodia 15.03.19- 5.04.19



We had regular emails as we prepared for our trip from Kate (People and Places). Nearer the time it was good to hear from Michael (concert) and Dara (Head teacher) who gave us a lot of information so we could prepare ahead for our trip. Blogs were useful to give us an idea of how other volunteers had got on. We were met at Siem Reap airport by a Tuk Tuk driver and Rhonda and Sarin were at our hotel waiting for us to welcome us. Michael was away but came to the hotel later that evening as well. On the following day (Sunday) Sophea gave us our bikes and took us round Siem Reap to orientate us to where the local supermarket was, concert office, the Ivy where we went on Friday nights to meet other volunteers and also gave us lots of information and advise.

On Monday the first day of our placement she met us at 7.30am ready to cycle with us to Treak and came with us for a few days until we were confident of the route and traffic flow which is so unlike the uk , and could go on our own.

People and Places guided us through the process of finding a placement and prepared us. Once we arrived we were given a weekly programme from Dara Head teacher of Treak who asked us what we could offer and what we would like to achieve during our

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placement. He then incorporated this into our schedule.

We were known as Teacher Mandy and Teacher Gill (although we are both nurses) and we led teaching Yoga to most classes in the library. We did this to a story – We are going on a bear hunt and Yoga actions complemented this story and encouraged active learning of English. Both children and staff enjoyed the experience as did we and we were often asked to lead a short Yoga session at morning and afternoon assembly.



The second week we taught about planting, what plants need to grow and parts of a plant which was spread over two 1 hour lessons for all groups so was repeated a lot. We used a poem and the children decorated pots and sticks and we took them out into the garden to plant sunflowers and cress seeds. We also prepared worksheets and word searches. We incorporated hand hygiene into this as the children needed to wash their hands after handling soil. This involved a lot of preparation and we recycled plastic water bottles as pots (needed over 300! So we got from hotel) and used plastic water bottles as watering cans and spades! Lots of cutting out shapes and paper to decorate pots. Be prepared to think on your feet and adapt with the limited resources available.

We also with K1 regularly encouraged and helped with teeth cleaning and hand hygiene and we took over home made playdough which the children loved. We also took over other resources such as books ,crayons and pre planned potential lessons. We are not teachers but felt confident to lead the class in some lessons and at other times assisted the teachers with English in the classroom. At all times we had a Cambodian teacher with us to support and translate if we led a session or if we were helping them.

Some evenings we also helped with the older children mainly with reading and English.

I feel our successes were the Yoga and encouraging active learning through story telling to yoga actions and planting again an active lesson.

We would have liked to do more lessons on hand hygiene and healthy eating but were limited with time constraint and also Khmer New year preparations and celebrations overtook the last week of our placement which was fun.

It was a great experience working at Treak. Everyone was really welcoming and friendly and supportive and they were pleased to have our help. They are a great enthusiastic team. The children benefit from having English speakers and the staff as well.

One of the highlights was being involved in the preparation for the end of term Khmer New year celebrations (which happens in April) Making decorations, singing songs- each class did a song or performance on the last day and playing traditional games . We also judged the english reading competition .

The accommodation at Mother Home Inn was very good. Staff were very friendly and caring. It was great to have air conditioning and a swimming pool when we came home hot and sweaty after work. It is next door to the Victory guest house where a lot of volunteers stay so there is opportunity to meet with others.

It was great to meet at the Ivy every Friday night with other volunteers and Michael ,Salin and team from Concert. We were taken by Michael and Salin and introduced to the Haven which is well worth a visit for a meal – delicious food and a training restaurant supporting local Cambodians .

Nearer the hotel we ate at Try me and the Golden pumpkin \$3-4 a meal and food very good.(out of hotel turn right onto main road then immediately right at garage and lots of places to eat on this road)

In our leisure time we visited Angkor Wat, the floating villages, silk farm and land mine museum and did a workshop at rehash trash(making bracelets and key rings out of recycled plastic bags) and also a cooking lesson at Lilys kitchen which I would highly recommend. The last weekend we visited Battambang.

Overall this was a fantastic experience, we gained as much (if not more)than we gave. The team at Concert were extremely supportive,caring and looked after us (especially when we were ill for a few days) or if we had a flat tyre and we never felt on our own. The Treak teaching staff are also extremely supportive and welcoming and we also learned some Khmer . Arkun(Thank you) to everyone!

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Thank you.**