

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



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## January newsletter 2020

### Editorial



**Nigel Pegler**

Welcome to the January issue of the volunteer newsletter and a Happy New Year from all of the people and places team.

A packed issue this time with everything from bats to WTM!

There are two enlightening articles on orphanages, I know some work colleagues who try to support orphanages with the best intentions, as do most people, but as we have found out this is not the best way to support children.

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at [newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## Bats, Bikes and Building Futures in Cambodia

by Sallie Grayson Programme Director

**So many memories from my recent trip to Cambodia - here are a few highlights**



**Bats - millions of them - just how many millions no one can agree- some say 30 million - Michael our local partner says about 6 million**

Dusk just outside Battambang. A quiet murmuring, growing louder and louder as a couple of dark specks appeared from the mouth of the cave. There was a prolonged gasp from those of us that were experiencing this incredible spectacle for the first time, and then a mass, slowly mounting in size. The bats were flying in a perfect curved formation..... they continued to fly out at a steady pace for at least 45 minutes. One of my "WOW I am so lucky" moments to add to the likes of my donkey shower all alone on the escarpment above the Savannah in Swaziland (a tale to be told another time)



**Parking for bicycles and motorcycles at Treak - soon to become their brand new kitchen**

"Will you be scared if you ride out to Treak on the back of my motorcycle" asked Sophea (our local partner's programme support officer).

"Yes" - I said - "but not for myself" - picture this.... I am 5 ft 8 and will never see 13 stone again - Sophea is about 5ft tall and will never see 8 stone. With a beautiful, knowing, smile she handed me my helmet and we set off on the 4km trip to Treak - potholes, mud, dust, errant lorries, tuk tuks, cows, hawkers and funeral processions - all negotiated calmly, gently and with that beautiful smile - and this is how I travelled to Treak most mornings - laden with laptop and rucksack - and on my return journeys sometimes with 3 bags of shopping nestled at Sophea's feet. Thanks Sophea for all your help during my stay. Sophea is the person who guides and supports our volunteers during their stay in Siem Reap.

Just about everyone travels to Treak by bicycle or motorcycle - and therefore Treak needs a large parking area - to date that has been at the front of the centre but very soon the parking area will become Salin's (Treak Project Manager) dream kitchen area where they will be able to teach the children about nutrition and hygiene and science and numeracy through cooking - as well as creating skills for the community and an income stream for the centre.



**Treak Community Centre building futures through opportunity not dependency**

Where to start with the leaps and bounds that Treak has taken in recent years. Now they are supporting 500 children and their families - Treak now owns its land and buildings - has one of the best libraries where the children queue each day for the opportunity to read and play with educational toys - a computer room - a skills centre - a passionate and visionary young head master - and plans for a general studies curriculum - an expansion to their garden and the relocation and expansion of the kitchen. Salin and Dara want me to let you all know how much they value the work of people and places volunteers and they are looking forward to working with future volunteers - to share skills - to help them build the future they want - they have a clear vision of what that future is - opportunity not dependency - the opportunities we take for granted - I overheard Salin's response to the question "What do you want for the future?" - she replied..... "Just the same opportunity to succeed as you"

**[If you would like to know more about how you could help Salin and the team at Treak to create those opportunities take a look here.](#)**





**Our partners who look after you in Cambodia Michael, Sari and Sophea**



**Salin the project manager at Treak**

# International Teaching Volunteers Wanted – Open to All???

written by Dianne Ashman

This is an article I wrote recently for our blog. As an ex-teacher, I of course hope lots of people will volunteer to improve the educational opportunities for children around the world. However it is important that this is done responsibly and thoughtfully to make sure these volunteers don't do more harm than good. The article is designed to give some guidelines - it was included in discussions by the panel looking at alternatives to orphanage volunteering at the 2019 World Travel Market and is referenced in [\*\*Beyond Orphanage Visits: Resources for Travel and Volunteering Organisations on Responsible Alternatives to Orphanage Tourism and Volunteering\*\*](#)

Picture the scene – you are in school but your normal teacher isn't here today. Instead there are two people from a foreign country. You have had people like this in your classroom before – they are always friendly and quite good fun – it's a nice break from learning. They talk to you in a foreign language – you think it's English because you have started to learn English with your teacher and you recognise some of the words, although they sound different when these strangers say them. They start to chant something: 'A, B, C . . .' – you recognise this – the people who came last year did the same chant and you learnt it then so you join in enthusiastically – 'D, E, F . . .'. The strangers are pleased – they smile at you. What does it mean? – nothing as far as you know – it's probably just one of those nonsense rhymes. Now it's getting a bit scary – they seem to be talking to you one at a time and waiting for each of you to say something in return – don't they know how rude it is to speak to an older person? Now one of them gets out a big book and starts to read a story. She reads in English and you have no idea what she's talking about so you just look at the pictures. But all the children in the pictures have white skins – they live in houses that do not look like yours and the animals and trees in the pictures also look very strange – this is nothing to do with you.

This is a worse-case scenario but does highlight some of the pitfalls of volunteering as a teacher in a country very different to our own. It raises some important questions: Where is the teacher? It's possible that she has been told not to come to work while volunteers are there to take her class – and no work for a month means no pay for a month. Why are the volunteers teaching the alphabet when the children have already been taught this? Clearly these volunteers have been given no prior information about what the children already know or about their English syllabus. Why are the volunteers expecting individual children to answer questions when this is inappropriate in their society? This would be common practice for the volunteers at home - no-one has prepared them for cultural differences between the two countries. Why are they using a story book that is clearly written for children from another country? Presumably because the school has few books and the volunteers have brought this book with them – arguably any books are better than no books and if used sensitively a book such as this could be used to open the children's eyes to the lives of children in other parts of the world, but that is not how it is being used here. Does this school have a child protection policy? It doesn't look like it as volunteers have been left unsupervised with the children, and not all sending organisations insist that volunteers are police checked. Are these volunteers qualified teachers? Almost certainly not – an experienced teacher would surely have asked questions about prior learning and syllabus expectations before agreeing to take on a class.

So is it appropriate for anybody, qualified or not, to volunteer as a teacher? Like many of my colleagues who work in education, I have never understood the mind-set which says that, just because everyone went to school themselves, everyone can be a teacher. After all, most people have attended a doctor's surgery at some time in their lives but nobody thinks this qualifies them to practise medicine!

Gaining qualified teacher status in the UK takes a long time and is not easily achieved – teacher training courses cover many different aspects of how to teach but most importantly focus on the very complex issue of how children learn. So in my opinion an unqualified 'teacher' should never be put in sole charge of a class, whatever country they are in. Here in the UK that would not happen, and we would be horrified if we thought unqualified teachers were teaching our children unsupervised. So, as always, the bottom line should be that if we can't teach here we shouldn't expect to be allowed to teach on a volunteering placement abroad.

However that certainly doesn't mean that there are no worthwhile volunteer placements to be had for people who want to teach. On the contrary, I believe that people who volunteer on education placements can do immensely valuable work. The key lies in making sure local people remain in charge of their own classes, liaising with them to identify their needs and then creating a placement outline which matches the volunteers' skills and experience to those needs.

So here are some examples that I have seen work well in projects supported by 'people and places':

Teachers have identified that the reason they want a volunteer is so that the children can hear English spoken by a native English speaker. The local teacher takes the English class, but asks the volunteer to read passages in English from the book. The volunteer is asked to read the story one sentence at a time and get the children to repeat so they practise their pronunciation. The teacher repeats the words along with the children so he also learns the correct pronunciation and can use this himself in future lessons. (Cambodia)



volunteers use a story to teach English pronunciation while teacher and children listen and repeat



A school has asked for specialist Science teachers – this is because their Science teachers have no experience at all in conducting practical Science lessons but the new Science syllabus suggests that they should be doing this with their classes. Easier said than done when the school has no Science lab and little Science equipment, but with a little imagination some resourceful volunteers manage to concoct Science equipment from locally available materials – the teachers are fascinated and will easily be able to replicate this themselves in future. (South Africa)



volunteer shows children and teacher how to plant seeds, as part of Science syllabus

The head teacher of a school has read that children learn best through play but has no idea how to go about doing this, in a country where all teaching involves rote learning. He has asked for volunteers who could demonstrate more active, child-centred ways of learning. At first he is shocked to discover that this means classes are no longer silent but he is thrilled with the higher level of engagement and enjoyment of the pupils in his school. Not all teachers feel able to try out all the methods demonstrated to them, but they have been shown an alternative way of teaching they did not know about before, and this gives them a choice in how they conduct their own lessons in future. (India)



teachers and children learn an education game

Teachers are struggling with very large classes where children of all abilities are taught together. They are aware that some of their students are falling behind but have neither time nor space to give them individual help. They ask that volunteers take small groups of slower learners out of class to help them catch up – they know that the volunteers have undergone child protection checks so this doesn't contravene the school's child protection policy. The teacher provides the books and subject matter and identifies the children who need help, the volunteer uses their teaching skills to motivate and help support these children. (South Africa)



small group support in the library

Art is not a subject on the regular school curriculum, but the school identifies that a potential volunteer has these skills. They ask the volunteer to run some after school clubs to do craft work with the children. Staff from the school attend the after school club with the children, partly to supervise but also so they too can learn these skills. They are astonished to find how much freedom they have to use their imagination and try to become less restrictive in other areas of their teaching too. (Cambodia)

Local people identify the need for a structured curriculum to be designed for the pre-school age children they support, to give them a better chance when they start school. They ask if a volunteer can be found who has experience of curriculum design in schools. The curriculum is successfully designed by the volunteer and volunteer contributions are used to employ a local teacher to provide training to enable it to be successfully delivered. (Swaziland)

Primary school teachers have identified that they need more resources such as flashcards to help them deliver their curriculum in an interesting way. However many of them have two jobs as well as a family to support and a farm to manage and have no time to spend preparing resources. They ask volunteers to help with this – they provide a list of topics and types of resources they need and volunteers are able to create them and act as teaching assistants when the teachers use them in class. (Nepal)



volunteer uses flashcards he has made to assist teacher



Secondary schools frequently do not want volunteers as they are concentrating on preparing their students for exams and volunteers have been found to be disruptive to students' learning. However the boarding houses where the students live do accept volunteers who are able to provide support in out-of-school hours, in a social setting and in a safe environment supervised by a house-mother from their own culture, and the educational achievement of girls from the boarding houses is well above the average for their school. (Morocco)

I could go on . . . . There are so many ways of volunteering successfully in an education context, whatever the volunteers' level of experience, if it is managed carefully. Consulting local people about their needs keeps them in charge of the process. Linking a volunteer's specific skills and experience to the task they are given to do creates a meaningful placement which is directed specifically at local requirements. Insisting that volunteers undergo police checks as part of the application process helps to keep children safe. Ensuring that local teachers are always in charge of their lesson, even if they ask volunteers to teach some parts of it, means lessons remain focused on the needs of the local curriculum and are at an appropriate level for the children in their class. With the local teacher present children are more likely to understand that the volunteer is there to help their learning and not as a distraction, and the volunteer's help can be directed towards particular children if the teacher so wishes. By working alongside local staff the volunteers' work becomes sustainable – local teachers can copy it in future if they want to. Above all, teaching volunteers who respect local teachers' knowledge and experience – of their school, of their students and of cultural expectations in their country – can achieve really meaningful results.



volunteer and local teacher working alongside each other in class

*This article is written by Dianne Ashman, programme and placement coordinator at 'people and places'. In her former life Dianne was a teacher in the UK for 32 years. In 2011 she joined 'people and places' as education advisor, supporting and assessing responsible volunteer placements in schools and other learning environments. Her role at 'people and places' has now widened to include other responsibilities but education remains her main interest and concern.*

# my five steps towards being responsible and ethical

Written by 'Luci' Gardner-O'Brien

## 1. Be interested

I was ten years old when I read *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman - a dystopian love story which turns racial dynamics upside down. Whilst reading the first chapter, I realised that the main character was a dark skinned girl. I remember going red in the face, I had pictured her white like me - this is the first time I was aware of my white privilege.

This book was a pivotal moment in my middle class upbringing - following the characters' journeys through racism, prejudice and violence. It sparked an ever growing interest in me about the world I live in, to challenge the things I saw and lived through.

After reading this book, at ten years old, I decided that I wanted to become a lawyer, it felt like the only way I could "change the world". This is the first moment I remember actually wanting to change things, which sounds like a cliché so let's remember I was ten at the time. Although, as I have grown up I have kept that interest. Knowing that there is always something to learn, people to meet, situations to be aware of are all crucial. An interest in current affairs, in the treatment of others, will always make sure you strive to do the best you can. I still believe in changing the world, that individuals can make change happen by campaigning, supporting others and making sure we act responsibly.

## 2. Let your beliefs be challenged / let yourself be challenged (can't make my mind up, you choose!)

On a summer day in my second year in law school I had lunch with *Sallie Grayson*, co-founder of *people and places*. Under the summer sun, and the loud crickets singing, I was determined to talk to Sallie about volunteering. I was studying to become a child protection lawyer, I was strongly feminist and pretty on the ball, or was I? Sallie told me about just how harmful orphanage volunteering was - I went red in the face, just as I did while reading *Noughts and Crosses* when I was ten - I had never questioned the wellbeing of the child. I had never questioned the way in which volunteering is carried out, I had never questioned it because "if they are giving their time for free, then it must be positive". Sallie asked me if I thought it would be okay for me to go into a nursery in the UK and spend time with the children - I obviously said I didn't think it would be okay. That's the thing, if it's not okay to do at home, why should it be okay to do abroad?

The fact that Sallie challenged me allowed me to truly think about volunteering. It was a great lesson to learn that one's belief system is ever changing. I now make a point of always challenging myself, and never being too stubborn to listen to others, to take into account other points of view. It is okay to be wrong. It is okay to make mistakes. It is okay to change your mind. It is okay to be challenged, and to challenge others!

### **3. Discuss everything**

In the final year of my undergraduate degree, I went for a drink with a boy who was left wing, vegan and passionate about recycling. Whilst drinking our coffees at an independent and quirky coffee shop, he decided to tell me about the volunteering he did in Peru - he helped build an orphanage in Peru. We started talking about the ethics behind orphanage tourism - the financial exploitation of the children who were institutionalised, the fact that 80% of children could actually be in family based care, and the psychological effects that the coming and goings of volunteers has on children. He got very, very defensive of his actions - he had given his time for free, he hadn't hurt any children, he hadn't posted any selfies on instagram. So the coffee didn't go very well, but at least we talked. We didn't meet up for coffee again, but I have a feeling that our conversation made him think. It certainly made me think!

I have had countless discussions with fellow students, friends, family about volunteering. It has been a real privilege to be able to hear about their experiences, about their views - but also to share with them the negative effects. Today I am not advocating against volunteering - I am advocating for responsible and ethical volunteering. I have been running *people and places*' campaigns for the last year, and the reason I am able to do this is because I have been in constant communication with our *people and places*' team, with other professionals and with anyone who wants to talk about volunteering. Communication is the key to sustaining ideas - and I am all for it!

### **4. Educate yourself**

I chose to pursue a Masters of Law specialising in EU Law - I wrote my dissertation on the evolution of children's rights in the European Union. I focused on children's rights and more specifically child disability rights. I came to the conclusion that through the protection of human rights in general, the EU had inadvertently protected children's rights. I won't go into the details of my dissertation here, but it is my opinion that it is always important to look at history to understand the present. Through my extensive research I was able to have a well rounded view of the progress made in the last century - it also gave me the ability to give a more structured opinion on children's rights today.

There are many ways of educating ourselves - this comes through reading the press, attending talks, reading academic writings and literature. In today's world activism is an extremely positive word - the idea that campaigning can bring about political or social change. We have such amazing resources at our fingertips with social media - communities in which we can share ideas and rally together for change.

### **Put your words into actions**

Whilst at university in Cardiff I decided to take action against period poverty. I co-founded Periods In Poverty with my good friend Fiona Munnelly. A Cardiff based charity which put in place collection points through out Cardiff for sanitary products, that we would then relay to local charities. We were determined to truly support the people who were menstruating without access to sanitary products.

I have volunteered with *people and places* for over a year. I feel passionately about child protection, children's rights and the implementation of responsible and ethical volunteering. I gladly use my time creating campaigns on these topics.

There are so many ways of turning the best of intentions into actions - volunteering, supporting others, sharing opinions. You can make a difference. You need to be responsible.



## volunteer stories from Morocco

'We want to give girls the chance of a college education in Morocco because we believe that if you educate a girl you educate the next generation as well'. This is the motivation for Education for All who, by building boarding houses for girls from the High Atlas Mountains, have enabled more than 300 girls to access education beyond primary school level.



In October two 'people and places' volunteers, Tina and Linda, went to Morocco to volunteer alongside the house-mothers and girls at two of the boarding houses in Asni. Read what they had to tell us .....

### Tina

'When I arrived at Marrakech, I was met promptly by a member of staff from the Kasbah Toubkal who was very welcoming – he even stopped to buy bananas as I was hungry and tired! At the Riad Vallee Verte, the owner, Driss was waiting to meet me and a meal had been prepared even though it was 10.30 in the evening.

I met Latifa, the senior housemother the next day, and she showed me around Asni.

I chose to wear scarves, outdoors, to cover my hair in the style of the hijab. I did this to be respectful in a traditional Muslim society. The housemothers (and their friends) loved this. I found that it helped me to blend in more. Whenever the local people discovered that I was volunteering with EfA, they expressed huge gratitude. Everyone was very welcoming.

I worked in Dar Asni 2 with the girls who were attending the lycee. The house mother Aicha and the cook, Fatima and the cleaning lady, Khadija were all very welcoming. The girls were delightful and very keen to learn. In the first couple of days, I worked with whoever was available. I wanted to gauge the level of English and how much we would need to use French. I decided to make a large chart of when the girls were not in school and establish smaller groups to be more effective. I eventually created a programme to see each girl 3 times in the week for 30 minutes or so in a group of around 4. This worked well and also helped with the integration of some new girls.

Looking at the English textbooks, the first years were learning family words so we started each book with a copy of the girl's family tree. I did this with the older girls as a useful introduction for their book. All the work I did generated conversations between the girls and with me. We also covered the visit of Prince Harry and Meghan to EfA in February 2019. Many of the girls had been involved with that and had met them. My teaching resource was a treasured copy of Hello magazine that the girls had in the library.

I took games to play such as Yahtzee which I left behind. I always take a set of Rory's Story Cubes (you can find them online) with me to generate imaginative story telling and some of the older girls had the vocabulary to be able to create some wonderful stories.

Over the years, the house had received donations of books for the library. Aicha knew that many of these were too difficult for the girls to read and enjoy so she asked me to sort them. Together with the girls, I did this. The house library had useful reference books and dictionaries that I encouraged the girls to use. We often needed a 3 way translation – Arabic to French to English.

The school timetables are very fractured. There were times when there no girls in the house. Then, I worked with the house mother or the other staff. The cook and the cleaner did not speak French or English so at times mime skills were required! I chose to eat lunch in the kitchen with the staff in order to get to know them more. The food was simple but delicious and totally prepared from scratch for every meal. The girls were involved in serving and clearing and some preparation. On Wednesday, after the fish man had been, everybody available went up to the roof to clean fish.

I feel that my whole placement was a success. I had no disappointments. The highlight with the girls was their leaving party for me with speeches and Berber dancing accompanied by washing up bowl drumming. Other highlights with EfA staff were my housemother taking me to the local hammam and washing my back and my hair for me. One Saturday, I went with her to the market to buy the vegetables and fruit for the week. We also had a wonderful day in Marrakech.'



Tina working with some of the girls

Linda

'I worked with small groups of girls in Dar Asni 1, taking between 4 and 6 classes each day. I always spoke French with the girls; only the oldest had just started learning English in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the *collège* and they told me wanted to practise their French with me, not their English. I went through various topics, asking the girls to write a little in their exercise books, or complete a French worksheet (which they folded and stuck in their exercise books) most days, followed by playing games, again using French.

We looked at basic topics, such as numbers, use of capital letters, colours, telling the time, the family, describing people, the weather, a bit of geography etc. This was all revision for them, but I felt this was needed. The girls varied in their ability to communicate in French and all had some problems with writing accurately in French. The girls enjoyed making folded paper 'fortune tellers' with me, also using cardboard and stickers, which I supplied, to write out and decorate a proverb in French, or a phrase such '*J'aime ma famille.*'

At Latifa's request, two full days were spent helping all the girls to write / decorate letters in French to send to an English primary school. Letters were then received back, written in French by the pupils of the English school, which I went through with the girls. The UK children all asked about pets and where the girls had been during the long summer holidays, listing the foreign countries they had visited, which made very clear the differences in life experiences and culture between these UK pupils and the Dar Asni girls. The girls had little or no understanding of where different countries were and I frequently used the atlases available in the boarding house to help them locate the UK, France and other places on a world map.

The girls were mostly really keen to come to the classes; I felt they liked having someone new to talk to and to play games with and often wanted to stay on beyond their allotted 45 minutes, having noted from the timetable that there was a 15 minute break before the next group arrived.

Latifa, her deputy and the two cooking / cleaning staff all made me feel very welcome and I much enjoyed the month I spent in Asni. The food at Dar Asni 1 was very good; I had a delicious vegetarian lunch each day and the food served to the girls was also excellent.

Perhaps the highlight was the little farewell party the girls arranged for me at the end of my last day of work. They decorated my hand with henna, dressed me in three different borrowed djellabas, sang and chanted for me, and persuaded me to join them in a bit of Berber dancing on the roof terrace of Dar Asni 1.'



Linda learning Berber dancing

To find out more about volunteering in Morocco follow this link [https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/257/Education-Support-for-Girls-in-Morocco-\(ED\)](https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/257/Education-Support-for-Girls-in-Morocco-(ED))



# people and places at WTM London 2019

Written by Luci Gardner-O'Brien

On 18th December 2019, for the first time ever, all 193 member states of the United Nations have formally recognised that orphanages do not protect children, that they are in fact harmful and have called for them to be eliminated. This comes weeks after the WTM Responsible Tourism panel - "*Child Protection - What Is Better Than Orphanages?*" - that we were so proud to be a part of. The panel was hosted by Martin Punaks - International Development and Child Protection Consultant.



At *people and places* we have been campaigning for years about the catastrophic effects that orphanages, and the support given to orphanage volunteering, has on children. We do not support orphanage volunteering and have been vocal about this for a long time. If you think about it, why would anyone let someone who is potentially unchecked, unqualified and with no expertise walk into an orphanage and think that they could work with children? An essential question that you have to ask yourself is: if I'm not allowed to do it at home, why should I be allowed to do it abroad? We would not walk into a nursery in the UK, cuddle a baby and post a selfie on social media. In fact, we wouldn't even get through the door!

Being able to hold this stance at WTM London was extremely important for *people and places*. The issue of the exploitation of children in orphanages to create lucrative attractions for tourists was first raised at WTM London in 2011. For those of you who don't know, WTM is the annual event that we all wait for in the travel and volunteering industry. It is one of the rare places where you can see people from, quite literally, all over the globe sharing about their countries and their cultures. While the people-watching is absolutely amazing, it has a serious undertone : WTM is a place where ideas, projects and campaigns are shared. After a day at WTM, your mind will be alive with all the interesting people you have met, the thought provoking talks you attended and the amazing sights you have seen - this was definitely true for me, a first time WTM speaker who is still in awe of everything I saw.

*people and places* were invited to speak at this year's responsible tourism session on child protection: "*Child Protection - What Is Better Than Orphanages?*" hosted by established International Development and Child Protection Consultant Martin Punaks. We were also joined by fellow speakers Mehalah Beckett, Regional Manager for Sub Saharan Africa, Intrepid; and Damien Brosnan, The Code.

Badly handled volunteering and voluntourism have been widely recognised as harmful – the white saviour complex has been rightly called out – in which a privileged person “helps” a less privileged without taking into account their dignity, thus with a self-serving attitude. Recognition of this problem is not enough – we need positive solutions! One of the positive solutions is *people and places*’ latest campaign “Let’s Make The White Saviour Complex Yesterday’s News” - that we presented at WTM.

The social media based campaign has focused on the plethora of images shared on online platforms every day – and turned photos of real life volunteering situations into illustrations. Why? Firstly we realised that a lot of photos being shared on social media were not repeating privacy guidelines, not to mention people’s dignity. So with our illustrations we can show images of real volunteering situations, good or bad, whilst protecting vulnerable individual’s identities. Also we are not interested in naming and shaming volunteers or companies, but we are committed to getting the message across. Check out our campaign on Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/peopleandplaces.volunteering/>

There are better ways of volunteering. You can be a responsible and ethical volunteer. As part of our campaign we offer advice and guidelines about how volunteers and organisations can contribute positively. For example, support community based projects, support the families of the children who in the past might have ended up in orphanages to enable them to stay together.

For example, do not replace local labour, do work with local people. Support the future that they want, not that you think they should have.

We, the travel industry and the child protection specialists need to change people’s attitudes, and negative campaigning is not enough! We’re not just commenting, we want to improve things! We have a responsibility to provide sustainable programs and guide people towards responsible volunteering.

Will you join us?

For a detailed summary of the panel please click on this link <https://rtnotesfromthefield.wordpress.com/2019/12/21/575/>

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## **working alongside Lisong - in the Gambia this time**

Dianne Ashman

In our last newsletter Lisong (from the Gambia) told us about her visit to a British nursery school run by Joanne. This is the second episode of that story – Joanne tells us about her time volunteering at Lisong’s nursery school in the Gambia. A great example of a real two-way partnership.....



Joanne, Lisong, teachers and children at Mary's Little Lambs

'I was fortunate enough to meet Lisong (Owner of Mary's Little Lambs) in August whilst she was visiting the UK and this really helped me in my preparation. We got along instantly and appeared to be very likeminded. It was a pleasure to be able to show her my children's nursery so she could see first hand my background and work and I think this gave her some idea of how I may be able to contribute to her setting as a volunteer. We were already working in partnership.

Once in Gambia I was met by the lovely Lisong and her husband Adama at the airport. This was not my first experience of Banjul airport and was no surprise to me when I arrived in the middle of a power cut and was met with airport officials carrying torches! Aside from the powercut to negotiate, the first thing that hit me was the heat. It was getting late (about 8.30pm) but the heat was still intense and very humid - I wasn't prepared for that and soon felt that my jeans and shirt were not the best items of clothing to arrive in!

Monday morning soon arrived and as planned Lisong came to meet me at 8.30am. The road is sandy and has a VERY uneven surface so good shoes are advisable! Random sheep and chickens wander around and there is a lovely local bar/restaurant along this road with a couple of small shops. The walk there and back was very pleasant and much more satisfying than walking along the busy roads where I live. In fact it was something to look forward to.

My placement plan was to really focus on promoting learning through play and I identified that the outdoor area really was a great place to start. Lisong had particularly liked my own setting's outdoor area so I really wanted to try and recreate some things for her. The outdoor area is lovely and had a trampoline, 2 seesaws and some swings but little that challenged the children's imaginative play. I had taken some resources with me such as playdough tools, paintbrushes, flashcards (suggested by Lisong) and some small wooden sticks and discs with letters and numbers on.

Working closely with Aunty Elsie (Lambs group) I was able to create several areas of play outside;

- a den out of material and a disused swing complete with an old suitcase filled with books, a floor mat and a couple of small logs to sit on
  - a car/bus from old crates and a steering wheel
  - sand and water play using large bowls available and resourcing with spoons, bottles, plates, shells and containers
  - a large log for children to sit on in front of the painted blackboard whilst they played at being teacher
  - a role play kitchen area with various plates, bowls, pots, plastic food and a traditional stove bought at the market set into rocks and stones
  - large boxes provide endless imaginative fun mainly used by the boys
- colour sticks hanging from the tree and letters and number wooden discs hanging in the den



playing at being teachers



In addition to these physical resources, I subtly introduced other small changes that would demonstrate teaching numbers and letters in particular, in a less formal manner than the morning routine. The teachers would bring out small plastic balls for the children to use at playtime so I used a marker pen to put numbers on these. We played games finding balls by number and also colour, rather than just throwing them around. Similarly they had some plastic container lids, so they got numbered too! The children themselves began to place these out in order creating their own number line and also finding the ball with corresponding numbers to match to the lids. What was lovely and heart-warming to see was Aunty Fina (Little Lambs) starting to adjust her teaching approach with the younger children by using a variety of numbered items for the children to sort and match, as opposed to standing in front of the group and holding up a number flashcard.



getting the numbers in the right order

The changes to the outdoor area were a huge success, the children loved the new additions and explored everything to the full. They pretended to be teacher at the blackboard, they looked at books and listened to the teachers read stories. They spent long periods of time pretending to cook and drive or ride on the bus to Serekunda. The water bowl and sand bowl were busy areas with some lovely pouring and measuring taking place. One child in particular spent a very long time filling every bottle (about 6) using a cup and then lining them up on the pavement. I took this to be their own experience of collecting water to take to their home. Water was mixed into the sand to make some really sloppy pies, the children thoroughly enjoyed this.



having fun pouring and measuring

Playdough day was exciting. I bought the ingredients needed and had taken a range of food colourings with me. I spent the morning moving from class to class demonstrating to the teachers and encouraging hands on interaction from the children how to make playdough. Children touched the raw ingredients, they named it and tasted it (I like children to fully appreciate and experience each element when making something like this), they mixed and poured and watched closely as physical changes took place to the ingredients. Once the playdough was made they spent so much time exploring what they could do with it. They used the tools or just their hands and both the teachers and children had a great deal of fun. In the older classes particularly Auntie Haddy's (Big Lambs) the playdough quickly became a fun teaching method, exactly as I had hoped. Children initially explored and did their own thing but from observing the teacher rolling small balls of playdough, they identified this as 'Bulet' a fish ball dish and the children began to make their own, which led to a lovely counting activity as they counted how much Bulet they each had.



creative play with playdough

At the end of my placement I met with Lisong and Abdourahman (Operations Manager) to discuss my placement and suggestions that could further develop and enhance practice in the nursery school. I found discussing things with them extremely easy as they are very open minded and eager for positive input but I too had gone with no intention of imposing a western approach as the best way forward. It is important to embrace their culture and understand the challenges faced by educators in The Gambia. Life is very different and opportunities are limited, any future volunteers need to appreciate it is not about imposing our methods on them but more about looking at ways they can take elements of our teaching methods and incorporate them into what they already do so well.'

Read more here to find out about volunteering opportunities at Mary's Little Lambs [https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/230/nursery-and-primary-school-support-in-The-Gambia-\(ED\)](https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/230/nursery-and-primary-school-support-in-The-Gambia-(ED))

## The "Education Oscars"

We work with the most inspiring partners who are real drivers for change - and we love it when their work is recognised.



Our partners in South Africa, Good Work Foundation have been shortlisted for the ["Education Oscars"](#)

Good Work Foundation focuses on digital learning opportunities for young adults and scholars living in rural communities. [Learn more about the volunteer programme here](#)

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## New Foreign Office advice - volunteering in orphanages

**Nobody doubts the good intention of the donors, travellers, and volunteers who give time or money to orphanages. It is natural and right to care about poor and vulnerable children, wherever they are in the world. But is this support part of the problem rather the solution?**

We have been advising volunteers about the risks and [dangers of volunteering in orphanages for some years now](#).

We are so pleased to see the [recent initiative from The Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) - advising volunteers to research and understand the risks and safeguarding considerations carefully when planning to volunteer in orphanages and childcare institutions.

We are also proud to have made contributions to this [very important resource from The Responsible Tourism Partnership](#) written by [Martin Punaks](#) a child protection expert. We highly recommend this paper to anyone who wants to learn more about responsible alternatives to orphanage volunteering.



Kate - volunteer placement director talks about the challenges and rewards of her work

**there are loads of new video interviews and stories from volunteers and projects**

If you haven't already spotted our [YouTube channel](#) it's worth a look.

If you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done – we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering – please send them to us so we can share them.



**meet the *people and places* team [here](#)**

[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

See our blog here <http://blog.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/>

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