

*The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad
Cambodia November 2013 Issue Nº-61*



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➤ **Ms. Briar Mathieson's Donation**



Ms. Briar Mathieson, a volunteer, has donated money to her placement. We decided to use that donation to buy stationery for the kids living in the slum area on the outskirts of Phnom Penh City, with the help of CCASVA (Cambodia Children Against Starvation and Violent Association). On 24th of October, under supervision of Ms. Nary, CCASVA Supervisor, we went to visit the slum to donate the educational material to the children. We also brought our volunteers to walk around the slum to see how the people there live. Volunteers also worked hard to make sure that the event went smoothly and successfully.

The people and children were really grateful for the donation that the children received. Finally, we, Projects-Abroad staff, are really thankful to Ms. Briar Mathieson for the donation.

➤ **Visiting Slum**

Mr. Sophan, volunteer manager, arranged for volunteers to visit a slum in order to know how the people there live. On arrival at 2pm, the people living there gave the staff and volunteers a warm welcome. After that, volunteers visited around the area to look at the houses of their students because most of the kids here are taught by our volunteers at Khemara Organization. Looking at them, they were surprised to see so many people fit into a small hut and the kids are very friendly; they kept saying hello to our

volunteers, even though some of them didn't know what 'hello' meant. Our volunteers saw a group of women who were making "ORN SORM" (Khmer Sticky Rice Cake) for the upcoming holiday, Phchum Ben day. Mr. Sophan described a long process of making ORN SORM and our volunteers were very interested. Some of them wondered why Cambodian people spend so many days cooking just for a few days of holiday. After that, we moved to a new area 500 meters away. The weather was not very friendly for visiting but we did not mind, and we still continued visiting around the area. We visited a woman who has many grand children living in a house which consists of only one bed. We believe that, from this experience, our volunteers now understand how other people live and why they appreciate and need help from volunteers. Finally, we are really thankful to the supervisor of Khemara Organization who arranged this meaningful event for our volunteers.





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» **Volunteers' Story- Lara Vinson**



"I wanted to do something meaningful and help people, so I decided to sign up with Projects Abroad to volunteer in Cambodia for the 2 Week Special Programme," said Lara Vinson (18).

Lara was a 2 Week Special volunteer in Phnom Penh. Her placement was at Home of Hope Orphanage Centre, where she worked with the disabled children and the children from the local community. "Our daily tasks were repetitive, but always different in a way. We had to play with, entertain and feed the disabled kids every day. Most of the kids were really loving, and I myself was happy when I could make them smile. I also enjoyed spending time with the children from the local community whom I taught English to; they were eager and happy to study and learn."

Through participating in this programme, Lara was able to meet other volunteers from all over the world, and after her time in

Cambodia, is off to China with Projects Abroad. "I am planning to spend six months in China with Projects Abroad to volunteer with children. After all this, I plan on studying psychology at University, and I believe that what I have gained from this experience will be a great asset to the subject I am studying," said Lara.

Aside from learning how to care for disabled children, Lara has also learned about the Cambodia's culture and tradition; she has learned that the Cambodian people are very open-minded in comparison with Europeans.

Even though she only spent a short time in Cambodia, Lara believes that she has gained a meaningful and unforgettable experience. "My most memorable experience was each time we left the orphanage; the community kids would run after us, saying goodbye and telling us to come back. The fact that I was able to emotionally attach myself to them in such a short period of time is very memorable," added Lara.

Her advice to people who wish to have a similar experience is to help the community children with English, as they are so eager to learn, and to give the disabled children some individual attention by playing with, caring for and feeding them. "Even though two weeks is a short period of time, the time spent here can really change you. You, as a volunteer, should spend your valuable time gaining memorable experiences with the kids."



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Volunteer's Story- Catherine Dillon

"I am currently working in a stressful job in the private sector,

and I therefore wanted to take some time off work and hoped to touch some lives for the better; so I decided to sign up with Projects to volunteer in Cambodia," said Catherine Dillon (31).

Catherine participated in the Teaching Project at the Kindergarten School at Khemara Organisation. Having been working with the kids for six weeks, she has found that all the children there need help from volunteers to take care of them and to teach them English. "The local teachers speak only basic English; it is really important for the children to learn English with a native speaker."

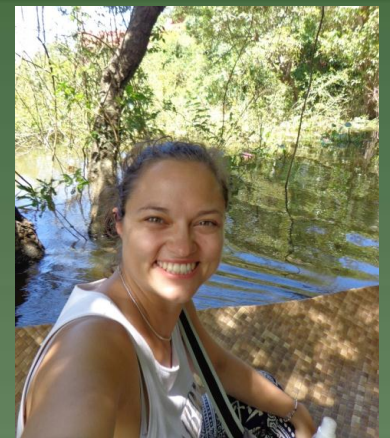
Catherine's main responsibilities at her placement during her six weeks were to teach, play with, total control over what I taught the children every morning and made my own lesson plans." When she first arrived at her placement, Catherine found it was difficult to express herself to the staff and the kids because of the language

barrier, however, she learned quickly and adapted.

After the initial shock of how different Cambodian life is compared to western life, she was surprising how quickly she became accustomed to Cambodian life and started to love it. "I work in quite a stressful job back home and this experience has reminded me to keep things in perspective and always approach things with smile," said Catherine.

She not only had the opportunity to teach and play with the children, Catherine also got involved in other areas, "Projects Abroad assisted me in setting up project work and brought me to do other charity work like painting and drawing at an orphanage," added Catherine.

The children learnt many songs from Catherine; she was so proud every time when the kids remembered the songs she had taught them. Every morning when she arrived at her placement, she received hugs from all the children, which made it very difficult for her to say good bye to them when her six weeks were finished.



Besides working at her project, Catherine was able to explore and experience

the beauty of Cambodia by visiting the Angkor Wat temple and went on an adventure in the jungle in Modulkiri Province.

Catherine had this advice for future volunteers: "You have to totally throw yourself into experience. Get involved with your placement, and you should prepare in advance for your placement. You also need to open yourself up to the culture in Cambodia."

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» *The most memorable experience in Cambodia*



Before starting with Projects Abroad, I worked as a tax adviser for a global finance company in Australia. I had just finished a two and a half year secondment in Australia and was due to relocate back to the UK. However, before I did I decided to take a career break to travel and work as a volunteer.

I found out about Projects Abroad online and loved how organized they were. I had already decided that I wanted to travel in Asia before returning to the UK, and I particularly wanted to visit Cambodia as such I looked into the various placements offered there. A part of my job involves explaining different tax rules to clients as well as training junior members of staff. I thoroughly enjoy this part of my job and therefore applied for a Teaching placement. When I first arrived in Cambodia, I certainly experienced a culture shock. I was taken aback by the lifestyle of the people and how busy it was even crossing a road seemed a daunting-

task! I remember being told during the orientation day that in order to enjoy Cambodia, you had to throw yourself completely into it. This I resolved to do and it certainly paid off.

Whilst in Cambodia I worked in a kindergarten school teaching English to the children. I loved working with the children, as soon as I arrived in the mornings I would be greeted by 20+ arms all reaching out to hug my legs or arms and say hello to me. A typical day would consist of teaching and playing in the mornings then helping lay out the children's lunch. In the afternoons, the children would sleep for a couple of hours after lunch, then be showered before being collected. I would help with

brushing the children's hair after they were showered and dressed and then played and sang songs with them. One of the highlights during my time with the children was whilst I was teaching them the alphabet. The children often had difficulties with the letter "F"; I therefore used to add hand actions when teaching them to help them remember to stress the end of the letter. After a couple of days of this process a child put up their hand and perfectly pronounced "F" as I had taught them, I was so happy. I initially found the language barrier quite hard to overcome as the children did not speak any English. As such a lot of the games and ways of teaching that I had initially planned for them would not work as I was unable to communicate with them. However you learn to adapt very quickly and the children would often have ways to express what things they liked doing through actions. The teachers were a big part of why I enjoyed my placement so much, there were three that I worked with. Two of them spoke basic English which was helpful for communicating. They were all so welcoming to me and caring that I soon felt at home at the school. On my last day at the placement there were a lot of tears shed between us and I will miss them a lot.

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» **The most memorable experience in Cambodia**



I was in Cambodia for a total of five and a half weeks and during that time I was also able to do a lot of travelling. I visited Angkor Wat and the main temples in Siem Reap, as well as taking a trip to the floating markets and land mine museum. The volunteers also went in a big group to Sihanoukville for a long weekend over one of the public holidays, there were about 10 of us that went and we had a brilliant time as a group. I also ventured across to Koh Rong Island for a night with another volunteer. For my last trip I went with two other volunteers to Mondulkiri province to do some trekking in the jungle and ride elephants. This was one of my favorite trips as we got to see a side of Cambodia that is less touristy. We were also able to visit smaller villages and drink rice wine with the locals as well as staying with them overnight. Another reason for me loving my time in Cambodia so much is as a result of the friendships I made there with the other volunteers from all over the world. Everyone gets together at meal times which I found was a great routine for people to socialise and-

plan trips. The benefit of the volunteers coming and leaving at different stages means that you can always get advice from someone who has done things that you want to do before. I will certainly be keeping in touch with people. If I had to say what impacted me most in Cambodia it would have to be the people. Sophan, one of the staff at Projects Abroad, had once mentioned how Cambodians love to smile and that you will always find a smile is returned to you. I could not agree with this more, I remember feeling quite intimidated by a group of army officials that I had to pass on the streets once and I thought of Sophan's words and smiled at them. They all smiled back and their seemingly harsh appearance vanished. The saying that, "Cambodia is the country of smiles" could not be more accurate. The people are amazing; they are so loving and warm despite often having very difficult living conditions. If you are considering a placement here I would say do it and throw yourself into it wholeheartedly. Prepare in advance for your placement, for example make lesson plans suitable for the age group of children you will be working with, if applicable and keep an open mind for the country and its amazing people.

By: **Catherine Dillon, Care & Teaching Volunteer**

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My impression of the Projects in Siem Reap



My name is Sara Pickworth and I am 23 from Perth, Western Australia. I arrived in Siem Reap on the 4th November after a rather enjoyable seven hour flight. Looking down from the window of my plane, I saw what I thought was the ocean but in reality it was the result of three weeks' worth of rain and flooding! With this realization, it gave me a sense that the month in Siem Reap was going to be challenging yet enjoyable.

I was welcomed into the Siem Reap Villa, with a very thorough orientation and induction session, giving me a better idea of the city and what was to be expected. Looking around I saw many homes built of wooden slats, tinned roof and cemented floors; these are examples of the luckier houses around. There is also an overabundance of shops with just about every item you would ever need (or not need), ranging from straw brooms, unhatched baby chicken eggs and fish swimming around in an inch of water in plastic bowls. With a population of 1million in such a small city, you are constantly surrounded by motorbikes, small children, scooters and hundreds of bicycles. The day after I arrived I was

welcomed into the orphanage that I was placed in, KSEDO which is run entirely by one woman Sapon and her husband who works away from the orphanage to provide for the 29 children. The children range from being under one years of age to 16 years. As much as I knew about poverty due to the increased resources of social media, news coverage and education back in Australia, nothing could have prepared me for the conditions these children had to live in. They were fed well with rice and fish, leafy vegetables and soy sauce and any cuts or illness was attended to efficiently. The orphanage has a main building for games, lessons

and sleeping quarters for the girls and the adults, it is the size of an average living room in Australia. The classroom is a tinned roof wooden hut, with a white board in the front and wooden benches for the desks. It has a hut for mushroom farming and a small wooden hut for the kitchen, the girls' bathroom is accessible by an unstable wooden plank bridge. The boys have to bathe outside in a cemented tub. Nevertheless the children are happy, sheltered, fed and educated; they are also so full of energy it is impossible not to get affected by their enthusiasm for life and learning.

Just today the children managed to get close to 90 percent in their English test that I marked. The expression on their faces was priceless! They are so thankful for the help they receive and with hands pressed together and bowing to you, calling you teacher shows the high level of respect they have for you. The younger children are forever excitable especially when balloons are on the cards, and colourful pencils are always warmly received. We have been so lucky this month as 36 high school children from the Singapore Shuqun Secondary School visited. We-



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My impression of the Projects in Siem Reap

worked together to build another mushroom hut and a bathroom block which is much needed for the children. We celebrated their achievements by hosting a bonfire with dances and music; the children were especially excited about listening to their favourite songs by Justin Bieber and Michael Jackson! They also received generous gifts from the students, consisting of 40KG of rice and a backpack for each child containing necessities such as shoes, clothes and notebooks.

KSEDO has no formal sponsor and is funded by Projects Abroad volunteers and by visitors such as the Shuqun School. We are very excited about the Projects Abroad dirty weekend that is going to happen on the 23rd of this month. We are going to build another classroom so that children in the community around KSEDO can come to get educated and be taught English. We also are planning for a new hut for the girls to sleep in too! As the girls room is too small and is also used as storage.

Coming to volunteer at KSEDO, it never crossed my mind that I would become the main teacher, cement mixer, plumber, painter, mother, sister, and friend, but in the end the smiles from the children make it all so worth it. Improving their English skills and building a rapport with Sapon and the community, is something that no words can explain. They are forever grateful and I too am appreciative of their respect and care they give me!
I hope you too can have as great of an experience that I have had!
Sara (KSEDO).



By: Sara Pickworth, Siem Reap Volunteer