

Expeditions Fund Award Report

For a period of four weeks during the month of August this year, I carried out a volunteering role in the Wildflower Home Foundation located in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. Alongside a peer, we communicated with and were under the care of a volunteering enterprise called Friends for Asia who housed, gave introductory cultural lessons (including basic Thai), and supported us hugely throughout our journey during the month. During the trip, an opportunity to volunteer in a children's school in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam also arose which we took. For the both of us, we were keen to get involved somewhere where it was needed and where we felt we could elicit a positive impact, as well as to expand our own outlook on life and our knowledge of other cultural traditions and customs.



[Thai food served at a temple; our volunteering group joining in with traditional Thai dancing; one of the temples we saw during our induction weekend]

Upon arrival at the Wildflower Home, we were eager to get started on 'making a difference.' But as we got acquainted with the style of the Home, we realised changes would be made using self-led tuition as opposed to defined, concrete tasks to work on. Our day to day consisted of giving lessons in the afternoon to the mothers, taking care of the young children, carrying out admin tasks alongside the director of the Home, Sr. Anurak, and packaging their handmade items ready to sell.



[Wildflower Home; Sr. Anurak (on her birthday with her cake!)]

Whilst we were there, we also felt it would be our small part to donate 5000 Thai Baht (roughly £110) between the two of us for the Home to use as they saw fit. In the end, this went toward providing ground material to prevent slippages, which had become a recurring incident when collecting their self grown vegetables with the flash floods that had been taking place.

Not only did we want to provide the Home with a small donation, but we wanted to make sure that we keep our connection to the mothers and the Home too. We plan to continue to give English lessons online with both volunteering locations, as well as continue admin tasks where we can and help with the development of the Home's website to help gain recognition of their good work. We also proposed that they set up an online shop on their Home website- we will hold a call with the website developer to help get this into motion as we think it will be really valuable for the mothers to better support their self-sufficiency and business skills.



[Some of the products we took images of to highlight on their social media and for their website]

Whilst talking to Sr. Anurak and a long-time volunteer, one problem we uncovered is that many volunteers come and go but few will complete the tasks they set out to do by the time they leave. With this in mind, we decided to begin digitalising their schedules and tasks- small things like putting planned visits (volunteer groups, meetings with sponsors) into a Google Calendar accessible by the staff and new volunteers, creating a task list and lesson plan folder showing what's been covered already/ is currently being tackled/ is still to do etc. so that everyone is on the same page- especially the volunteers who are not so lucky to have a handover like we did with a volunteer who had settled in prior to our arrival. With this in place, hopefully things will be a lot more cohesive and less intimidating to those who are newcomers!

I have to say that if it had not been for the generous contribution made via the OSP scholarship, undoubtedly this trip would not have been able to go ahead and the opportunity to volunteer with the Wildflower Home would have been lost. I am truly grateful for the financial help I received from the scholarship which allowed me to take away a truly eye-opening summer, as well as a bundle of cherished friendships and memories home. I would also like to say I've felt super inspired throughout my time volunteering- not just by the people we were working with onsite at the Wildflower Home, but even by the other volunteers who we were housed by. I can't believe my luck with all the variables that I was put with such insightful and broad-minded beings. As always, I feel as though I took away

more from this month of volunteering than the mothers in the Home did in the end- I feel as though we formed such precious relationships with all of them there, and we felt uplifted and inspired to be better knowing that there exists genuine kindness and sincerity having spent time with many Sisters over the course of the month. Most importantly, we learnt that terrible events do not define who you are as a person nor your outlook on life after. It makes me feel incredibly grateful that I was one of the lucky few that managed to secure a grant, and I intend to let others in the future know about this opportunity so that they also have a chance to experience what I did this last month.



[Pictures taken from our weekends away from volunteering, in which we visited insane heritage sites and natural spots; a class on how to make a 3 course Thai menu; final dinner with the other volunteers who we formed such precious friendships with]

Again, I'd like to offer my most sincere thanks to the sponsor(s) who made this possible at all for their generosity and kindness. I only hope that the same opportunity is cast to future grantees who wish to take on the volunteering with the same intent and well meaning.



[Our last day at the Home; the school children in Vietnam!]