

Peter Patterson – Chiang Mai Office Volunteer – July to September 2011

When I decided in early 2011 to undertake a volunteering role, I was initially put off by a number of negative press reports about the wave of so-called “voluntourism” and whether western volunteers were doing more harm than good. This caused me to reflect on my motives for volunteering, and, having decided that it was still something where I thought I could make a contribution, I was determined to find an NGO that was not only accomplishing meaningful projects, but also valued volunteers as well. This search led me to Childs Dream who offered me the opportunity to work in their Chiang Mai head office on various administrative projects.

I worked in the “green zone” on the ground floor sitting next to Tha Wah, near the effervescent Manuela and her team of Um and Tuu. Also near me were other volunteers Gene, David and Larry. Mostly my work was assisting the super organized Angie on writing reports for donors, preparing factsheets, researching different matters and general administrative tasks. Unfortunately Angie thought my IT skills were a lot more advanced than they actually are, so there were lots of questions from me (and trial and error!!). One of the great things about this role is you quickly learn about a lot of the different projects which Childs Dream is involved with in Health, Basic Education and Higher Education.

During my three months at Child’s Dream I was fortunate to be able to inspect first hand two of their projects. The first was a visit to Maharaj Nakom Hospital in Chiang Mai to see the amazing work that Ta and her team do in the Childrens’ Medical Fund. Here Childs Dream organizes surgery and treatment for migrant and refugee children from Myanmar with serious medical conditions. Ta arranges for the children and some family members to be transported to Chiang Mai, accommodated, appointments made with doctors, follow ups and then taken back home following treatment, all the time with a ready smile! Managing up to 25 seriously ill children and their families in a strange city with language difficulties seemed to me like a logistical nightmare, but Ta had it running like clockwork.



Some of the children with their mum’s waiting for surgery

The second was to go with Thomas and Jollys to Mae Sot to visit KRCEE, LMTC and PTMJC (there are a lot of acronyms in the Higher Education space as I discovered, and they all just roll off Thomas’

tongue with no trouble...). To say that I was impressed at the efforts put in by Childs Dream and the teachers to give the kids living in this refugee camp a chance at getting an education is, well, a huge understatement.



On the road to Mae Sot with Jolly, Thomas, Gene and Meow.



Playground at PTMJC

Two things stand out for me from my time at Childs Dream. The first is that Marc, Daniel and Manuela have assembled a great team of employees who are not only dedicated to their work, but are also very friendly and like to have fun. There is often laughter heard throughout the office which makes for an enjoyable environment to work in. The second is the professional, tangible results that they achieve in all three of their chosen work streams truly do make a difference to the lives of children in this region and is quite outstanding.

Looking back on my time I now know that it was the right decision for me to volunteer, and that Childs Dream was the right NGO for me to have volunteered with. It was a real privilege to have worked for such a great organization.