

Volunteering for Child's Dream

So you mean you would be "working for nothing" over there?

Before I explain, how on earth did I find myself volunteering at Child's Dream where the month before I was working in the investment industry in Melbourne? A little strange for someone who had lived in the same city and had years of service with the same employer for nearly 20 years. On taking a 4-month sabbatical from work in early 2014 travelling to many different countries and continents, the final destination was Chiang Mai, Thailand. After those months living out of a suitcase I quickly came to the conclusion all my possessions back home were unnecessary and I wanted to start living based on what I was passionate about, and even if it was to earn "nothing" for a while, well so be it. That meant firstly going through a "minimalist" phase of suddenly getting rid of all my furniture, many possessions that had collected cobwebs over the years, and clothing fashions that were only fit for the 80s & 90s. (although I still probably dress like I kept some). Then after saying a sad good bye to colleagues I had worked with I was suddenly someone going around with only a suitcase and plenty of time on my hands. For Seinfeld fans, it was a bit like "The Summer of George". Like George, building a fridge in the side of the couch to relax and watch TV for 3 months was one tempting idea of a way to spend my new found extra time! However, I eventually felt I needed to challenge myself a bit more. So I would embark on the challenge of trying to manage my own investments for a living whilst travelling more and perhaps also learning some completely different new things.

Around the corner from my guesthouse during this time in Chiang Mai I passed a bar seeing someone I recognized from the investment industry in Marc Faber, who I briefly met and later learnt was a supporter of Child's Dream. I never quite imagined my interests in investing or drinking beer at a bar would lead to me volunteering but I then became curious as to what Marc saw about this organisation and I began to do some research. I was quite impressed by what I initially read. I could personally relate to the founders leaving the investment industry for another chapter in their life. In fact, the story how the founders Daniel Siegfried and Marc Jenni began this organisation is fascinating in itself. Also everything seemed very professional and the low expense ratio to me seemed a sign of genuine commitment, particularly in light of stories you hear about other charities not passing on as much as they should to the beneficiaries. Yes, I have a boring finance analytical mind so these are the things I notice!

I had already decided to base myself in Chiang Mai for 4 months over the next year as I had spent a couple of holidays there and really enjoyed it. So I paid attention to the volunteer job openings on the website and we were able to work out some areas where I could assist over that time. My first day in the office I was made to feel very welcome with some of the team enjoying their breakfast and asking me if I would like to join. I am never good with names so all of the short Thai nick names was a bit daunting to learn at first, but I think I got there in the end. The majority of my time I spent writing reports for donors. Either writing proposals to source funding for new projects, or updated reports to inform donors how the project went. I had been warned the tasks may not necessarily be extremely fascinating so I was prepared potentially for some fairly mundane tasks which was ok, as I was there to help. To my surprise though I found writing the reports a good way to learn about the projects Child's Dream undertake and found the work quite interesting. Aside from the underlying work it was a great environment in the office to be a part of. Thanks for the lifts on the motorbike from Gene & Thomas to lunches at airport plaza when it was so hot! Maybe the next time in Chiang Mai my motorbike riding can graduate from the quiet countryside in Vietnam to Chiang Mai traffic without much damage. Although for your own safety I probably better not return the favor by giving you a lift!

Perhaps I can also learn to speak more than my extremely limited vocabulary in Thai, even if it is just to work out what Por and Tuk are always laughing and smiling about when I arrive in the morning. As you can see I am already thinking about the next time in Chiang Mai, so I can obviously recommend working at Child's Dream to others.

So I walked out of my last day at Child's Dream with no pay in hand but a smile on my face. I learnt about an organisation that is having a positive impact on so many lives. Most days I would personally view the photos taken during project visits. These would capture the smiles of children that could now look forward to completing their education thanks to the work of Child's Dream. I met great people in the office who I admire for having the lives of those less fortunate at the forefront of their minds. Whilst it was only a relatively short period in Chiang Mai, the way in which a lot of the people here can offer a smile, laugh and rarely seem to get flustered by minor problems is something I hope to have picked up and learnt just a little bit myself to apply to my own life.

So back to the original question, why would you be working for "nothing"? I guess the answer is I never felt like I was working for "nothing". I am not going to say here I am sacrificing a lot in order to help the world. What I would say is I actually got a lot out of the experience, so volunteering does not have to be a purely unselfish thing to do, there can also be something in it for you. Yet at the same time I am sure that my work assisted Child's Dream in their cause also. So I see it is a win-win situation.



Wat Phra That Doi Kham was one of my favourite weekend trips only 20 minutes away on motorbike. As you can see I struggled going up the stairs but at least was some forced exercise and a good place to relax.



A few Chang beers at an unlikely bar led me to dig a bit deeper into what Child's Dream was about and I was very impressed with what I found. For beer connoisseurs, Chang is 5.5% and more than the 4.6% you often drink in Australia.



Ok maybe this was my favourite place to relax, just google the name on the sign here for details.



Plenty of restaurants down by the water to choose from. Many seafood options and your normal favourite Thai dishes.



Joining up with Child's Dream colleagues later on one night and discussing where the next venue should be. Unfortunately, I was late and missed their karaoke skills at this bar, but fortunately they missed seeing me sing!



This funny looking face is possibly after half a dozen or so Changs, and then joining up with colleagues later on in the night. My mind was thinking "Has Pieter (rider) already had as much to drink as I have, and where is my helmet?".



I have always liked cats, just as well as there are quite a few around the office. I believe they are also volunteers, but have a vote in management committee decisions.



One of my months, during May when the weather was very hot, I stayed at the XYM apartments almost next door to the office. It is a good option particularly in the hot months with a very nice pool area.