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## Volunteer Report

**Alexander Stadelmann**

My first social community work experience was during high school. In grade 10, our school made arrangements with some partner organizations, including an elderly home and an orphanage, where the students could engage on a regular basis. It was a good experience, particularly at that age, but it was also my last volunteering experience – until I came across Child's Dream.

For the last five years since graduation, I have been fully absorbed by the life of a young professional: working, socializing, exercising, traveling, networking, and the list goes on. To say that there was no time for volunteering would be flat out wrong because you can always make time for the things that are important to you. After all, it's a matter of priorities and in my case work, sports, travel and social activities were the priority. When I received the admission letter for my MBA degree, I knew this was the right moment to take a break and make up for the last few years by giving back to society. I resigned from my employer three months ahead of my MBA start and began working with Child's Dream on the very first day of my break.

Let me start by saying that I'm blessed to have come across such a friendly, genuine, and equally professional NGO. My time with Child's Dream is filled with many positive memories, enlightening moments and meaningful tasks. If I had to pick, I would do it all over again. During my stint, I worked with the monitoring & evaluation (M&E) team, which tracks projects to ensure they meet the objectives set at the beginning of the project. The M&E team measures output, outcome and impact of projects after one, two or several years of completion. The rationale of doing this is that injecting money into a project and simply measuring the *input* is not sufficient. Instead, it is essential to ask what this money achieves several years down the road and how much positive change it brings to the community. A simple example: an NGO invests USD 50k for a new school building in a very remote area in Laos. After six months of planning and construction, the building stands proudly under blue skies and sunshine and young children can be seen running happily around the premise. The donors, who flew in all the way to Laos to attend the opening ceremony, are highly satisfied and believe their contribution will have an impact on the Laotian society for decades as these school children are now able to complete schooling, may even attend university and will finally find qualified jobs in the public sector or become successful entrepreneurs, where they can then help to shape the country towards a more equal and less corrupt society. Sadly, they were terribly wrong. Two years after the school was built, the government stopped paying the teachers and kids don't show up at school anymore. A visitor coming to see the school two months later would have been dismayed at the sight of an abandoned school. Worse even, the visitor is likely to find a school turned farmhouse, with livestock peacefully



# Child's Dream Foundation

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info@childsdream.org E  
www.childsdream.org W  
+66 (0) 53 201 811 P  
+66 (0) 53 201 812 F

munching on hay in rooms reminiscent of abandoned classrooms. Judging by the outcome, this project would be considered a terrible failure and the donors would have little reason to cheer.

Fortunately, this is a fictive scenario that I have not experienced during my time at Child's Dream, but it does happen. Many leading organizations, including Child's Dream, recognized this problem and consequently setup an M&E team whose task it is to track the success of projects along their lifetime so that preventive and corrective measures can be implemented in a timely manner.

My volunteering experience was enriching and rewarding in many ways. Working for no compensation may scare off some people and it goes without saying that one needs to be in a comfortable financial position to engage in a full-time volunteering position. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the emotional rewards of such work. Knowing that your work will indirectly impact thousands of children and young adults in the region is touching and can be a great source of motivation. Going on a school building evaluation field trip in Cambodia was eye-opening and I will forever remember the smiling faces and the laughter of these adorable Cambodian schoolchildren. No matter how often you have visited rural areas in poorer regions of this world, seeing the modest environment in which the children grow up once again relativizes many things in life. It shows how fortunate many of us are but also how little one needs to be happy. That feeling seems to carry on within the organization, where my colleagues never failed to impress me with their energy, passion, dedication and kindness in working on that collective mission to improve health and education of communities in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Coming from the corporate for-profit world, I was also very keen to understand structures, functions and processes in nonprofit organizations. Child's Dream fulfilled all of that and offered me a transparent, in-depth view into the workings of an NGO. One aspect that I particularly appreciate is that I was able to build trust in a charity. I often encounter people, that are reluctant to make donations for the lack of trust in charities. The skepticism is sometimes justified but what I learned is that there is simply no better way to build that trust by spending significant amount of time involved in a charity.

To conclude, I would like to encourage all would-be volunteers to start typing that application email or take up the phone to give Child's Dream a call right now as well as encourage all would-be donors to dig into their pockets and make the first transaction. The world needs charities like Child's Dream to solve problems that often feel very distant and that we easily lose sight of. Yet to solve these problems organizations need human capital and money. Child's Dream is always on the lookout for open, motivated and smart individuals who are willing to put their skills and their brains to work for a great cause. They are looking for people like you.



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