

Expedition Funds Bursary

Volunteering in Thailand for four weeks at the Wildflower Home Foundation in Chiang Mai will always be an experience I will remember forever. During my volunteering period, I met so many new, amazing, wonderful people and learned so much about their cultures and traditions. I am extremely grateful to Queen Mary for giving me an overseas project scholarship, which allowed me to embark on this journey.

Upon arriving in Thailand, we were under the care of a volunteering enterprise called 'Friends for Asia' who took care of organising our volunteering programme, whilst also providing us accommodation, which was filled with other volunteers doing different programmes. This gave us an opportunity to meet other volunteers from different parts of the world. Meeting other motivated individuals and doing activities together allowed us to make lifelong friendships, that I will cherish forever. Friends for Asia also included a cultural lesson during our induction weekend, showing us the key places near our housing, and teaching us basic Thai, which was very useful as it helped us communicate with the ladies at the Home, negotiate prices at markets and talk to locals too.



[We partook in many activities during our stay in Thailand with the other volunteers and this included learning to cook Thai classics and learning the basics of Muay Thai]

The Wildflower Home, is a place that provides safety, education, healthcare, and other support to women in crisis, providing a haven for these women to stay without facing any unlawful and immoral discrimination. Upon arriving at the Wildflower Home, I was surprised by how many young women were staying at the home and how many of them had children very young due to child marriages. During my stay, I was extremely grateful for the environment I was brought up in and the great importance that was put on education and completing school. Many of the ladies I spoke to were telling me about how they would love to go back to school, to learn more and to educate themselves, to provide a better future for themselves and their children. I found myself feeling very grateful and very thankful for the various opportunities I was surrounded by and being able to stay single and focus on personal growth and career without having to be pressured into marriage so young.

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[Picture of the Wildflower Home, Sr. Anurak and Henrietta and I and another volunteer at the Wildflower Home]

Before arriving at Wildflower Home, I was very ignorant as I thought I would go in and start making radical differences and improve the foundation significantly. However, my thoughts quickly changed after being acquainted with the style of the Home and recognising how the Home functioned. The Wildflower Home is self-sufficient, so they have chickens to provide a regular source of eggs, where excess eggs will be sold to provide revenue for the foundation. They also had a big garden with many plants, which was often used for their meals too. I found it very interesting because previous volunteers had made a mushroom farm out of a shed, meaning there were plenty of mushrooms for meals and for selling too. One of the things we immediately identified was, that there were still places for more vegetable patches to be grown, which will further reduce the daily expenditure. Hence, my friend and I also donated some money to the foundation, to plant more vegetables and plant chilli, which can be used in their cooking and any leftovers can also be sold too. We also donated some money to help put footpaths, to prevent the ladies from slipping during rainy seasons.

[During my stay at the Wildflower Home, I managed to catch a tiny fish which we had for dinner and helped paint and redecorate the dining area]





and pictures of the ladies
Child’]



[Pictures with the children
enjoying the movie ‘Wild

The director of the Home Sr. Anurak quickly took us under her wing, making us feel comfortable, especially because of the language barrier. We soon realised upon arriving, that any changes that we would make would be self-led, as there was no schedule or guideline that we had to follow. After having a conversation with Sr. Anurak, we found that many volunteers would come to help at the Wildflower, however, the volunteers stay for a short period of time, meaning any tasks they start will not be completed. Hence, we started to digitalise their schedules and tasks, so that everyone knew the schedule, as opposed to Sr. Anurak only. We also made sure to write out the tasks, the previous volunteers had done, so that any future volunteers that come, can continue these tasks too. During our stay at the Home, we also made sure to try and connect with the mothers, hence we would do many activities with the ladies. We would teach them English lessons regularly, teaching them basic English phrases and building their confidence as well. We also found that as the ladies were very young, they found watching romantic English movies very entertaining and fun. One of the common problems we also found was that, during the stays of the volunteers, the ladies practice English a lot, however, when there are no volunteers, they don't practice as much.

Thus, we plan to continue giving English lessons online for both volunteering locations, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as administering admin tasks online. We also proposed setting up an online shop on their website, to further increase the money coming into the home. We plan on having a call with the website developer to help put this into action and it will be a great way for the ladies to continually utilise their skills when making these products, such as bags and candles.

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

To conclude, I am so grateful for the scholarship provided by Queen Mary, as this trip would have not been possible without the funding. I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to go to Thailand to volunteer at the Wildflower Home and meet so many new people, make such strong friendships and take home many memories too. During our time in Thailand, we also had the opportunity to volunteer at a children's school in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam. In both locations, I was in complete awe of how accepting both communities were. Despite having a language barrier, it was very heart-warming to see the effort everyone put into communicating with each other. This taught me that language is not necessarily a barrier if you are willing to look past it. I will forever remember this experience and will always cherish the time I spent with the ladies. These ladies taught me that we should never let a terrible event define the kind of life we are going to live if we have the strength and the willpower to keep pushing on. This volunteering trip taught me so much and I am extremely grateful for the sponsors who made this possible. After this trip, I am very keen and eager to get involved with other volunteering experiences, hoping to better the world one step at a time.



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



[Pictures during our stay in Vietnam, with the sisters and the girls]



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[Pictures of activities we did during our weekends off with the other volunteers]