



November 2013

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Once upon a time there was a little girl...



Just like in every fairytale the main character has to go through a lot before everything ends well, and I feel that my two and a half months here in Hanoi has been some of the hardest, but also best months of my life – nothing will end as I planned and expected before I left Denmark, but for a control freak like me, I guess this was the perfect training!

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Once upon a time there was a little girl...

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It's hard and almost impossible to imagine how your time in Vietnam will be before you leave home, and my best advice is to just relax, and take one day at a time – in some way everything will fall into place, and suddenly you will be on your plane home or on your leisure travel. It sounds like a cliché, but time really flies by, and it's therefore so important to enjoy every day, every laugh and every little moment – they really do become gold. It's impossible to explain all the things you gain volunteering in Vietnam. People (including me) can tell a lot of things about how amazing this journey was for us, but I think this is one of the things in life, just like falling in love, where you really have to try/feel it on your own body, before you can truly understand and relate to how amazing it is. Five months ago when I was in the middle of my finals for high school and tried to imagine how my gap year would turn out, this isn't turning out as good as I expected... It's turning out much better!



However, volunteering in Vietnam has certainly not been a bed of roses for me. Before I left Denmark, when I first arrived in Hanoi, and latest when my friend, I was supposed to travel with after the first month went home, I was honestly scared - what if I would miss those at home too much, what if I couldn't make new friends, and what if I was too young and inexperienced? I soon found out, that you can never be too young to help others, just you being there, smiling and playing with the kids, can make a big difference to them.

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Once upon a time there was a little girl...

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Linh and other volunteers in Calligraphy social event organized by Projects Abroad

Everyone in the houses are furthermore there to support you because they all know how it is to be far away from home and alone in a new country, and if you don't have anything in common when you meet the first time, you will sure have in the end. It also helped me a lot when I found out that my reaction, when I first arrived to Hanoi, was all natural, and that most people go through the same – the culture shock will for some people last only a couple of days, for others weeks, but trust me it's just a little bump on the road, and if you manage to get over it and hold on a bit longer, everything will turn out amazingly, and the only thing you will regret is the fact that you didn't choose to stay here longer.

I spent my first month at an elementary school, but decided after my friend left to reconsider why I chose to do volunteer work. I took a chance, and decided to just do what I felt like doing, right in the very moment, which meant that I ended up changing placement. I chose to spend my last one and a half months as a teaching assistant at Vietnam Friendship Village in Hanoi - a center for victims of Agent Orange. I have never known or worked with kids with disabilities before, so it was a quite scary and a spontaneous decision, but it all makes sense when looking back, and I'm so happy about my choice.



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Once upon a time there was a little girl...

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Even though being at my new placement has been very hard, frustrating and tiring, it just feels fantastic to see how happy the kids are to see you, and you are literally surrounded by love from when you arrive in the morning until you go home in the afternoon. That great feeling you get when the children run into your arms, without any special reasons just give you a big huge warm hug, hold your hand, or sit on your lap for ages, is just priceless. The communication between the kids and me was the hardest challenge, both because of the language barrier and because of their disabilities. Luckily for all of us, not all communication is verbal, so if the kids like what you do they will show it, and if they are unhappy about anything they will differently find a way to show it. So don't worry.



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Once upon a time there was a little girl...

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Travelling to Vietnam is a big step, but certainly all worth it. Through this journey I have been through the whole feelings spectra. I have cried a lot of tears, been disappointed, felt like resigning. I have been sneezed in my face, got the kids snot and paint on my clothes, and dried a lot of tears away from their cheeks while retaining my own. But most of the time has been full of laughter, excitement and amazing people, with whom I have created unique experiences with. All this – the good and the bad have all made the ride even more memorable and fantastic for me, and I couldn't imagine a better way for me to use my gap year, before I begin studying next summer. I don't think I have given half as much as I have gained, and I will miss all the lovely people from Projects Abroad and Friendship Village so much. I have met people who have taught me a lot, and just like some of my own teachers, I hope that the kids will remember me after I leave Friendship Village. I'm 100% sure that I'm going back to Friendship Village someday, and I can't wait to show and tell my family, friends and future kids about how happy, grateful and amazing you can be, even though you have very little, and have had too much adversity in your life. Last but not least, being here has thought me that being different, love and volunteering is the new black.

Thank you to all the special people, who made my time here in Hanoi unforgettable and fantastic! I hope you will all live happily ever after.



Linh Le, Denmark, Teaching/Care volunteer

A memorable volunteer journey with orphaned children in Vietnam

Two sisters Shamain (25) and Eman (17) decided to register with Projects Abroad to participate in a Care Project in Vietnam to enjoy being in a country which they have long wanted to explore while working with kids abroad. Their placement was Bo De shelter for orphaned children, “This care placement seemed the ideal way of experiencing the culture, working in a new environment and having a holiday!”.



Bo De shelter is home to around 150 disabled and non-disabled children whose ages range from two- weeks-old to 20-years-old. One year ago, Projects Abroad opened a kindergarten class here to care and teach the pre-school children.

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A memorable volunteer journey with orphaned children in Vietnam

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As Care volunteers, Shamain and Eman spent most of their time working with the kids and a local supervisor (recruited by Projects Abroad) in the class, they also enjoyed caring for the babies in the baby rooms. “The first task at the shelter in the mornings is to set up the washing bowls to wash the kids faces, hands and feet, which is an excellent starting point for improving the health of the kids. After that, the kids usually have a lesson which involves us setting up tables and chairs. Volunteers help the kids with handwriting, maths and sometimes English during these sessions. The children would then have free play, where we got to play with the kids, which was so much fun. Sometimes we'd play "Musical Chairs" or "Musical Statues" which the kids enjoyed. We also introduced a "Pass the Parcel" idea in which the kids would sit in a circle and pass a ball whilst music was playing. When the music stopped, the child who had the ball would have to sing a song or answer a question of some sort. The children then do some art and crafts and as a volunteer, my role was to give the kids colouring pencils and ensure they all shared them.”, said the girls about the daily activities.



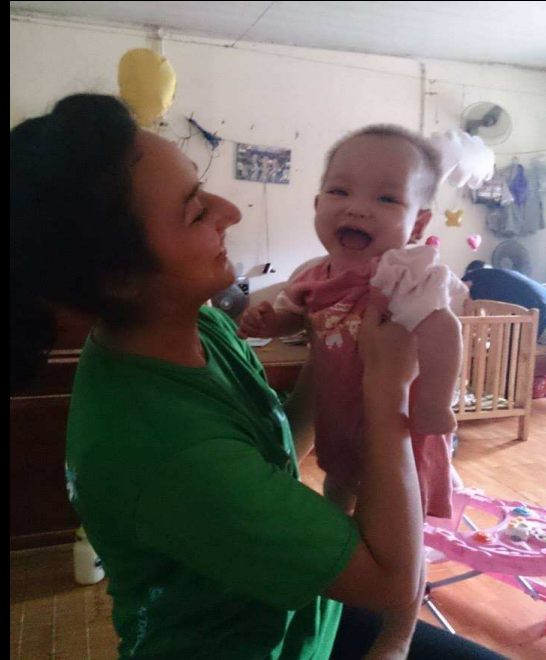
Spending so much time with the kids during their one month in Vietnam, Shamain and Eman became so emotionally attached to them: “The kids are what we love the most about the placement and the project. They were so loving and were the reason why this trip was so memorable.” They also recalled their greatest moment they had: “There was a six-month old baby who was continuously crying and after simply holding the baby for two minutes, he fell asleep on me. That’s when we realised just a little bit of attention, care and time from each volunteer goes a long way.”

The experience was not only eye-opening for Shamain and Eman, but also gave them “an insight into the lives of others and made us more aware of cultural differences”, it also brought them a great opportunity to improve their independence and communication skills as they had to explain things to the children in different ways due to the language barrier.

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A memorable volunteer journey with orphaned children in Vietnam

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The girls had this advice to share with others who are thinking of coming to Vietnam for a Care Project:” I suggest future volunteers to help the kids make masks, dress up, sing nursery rhymes and perform plays as this would be very enjoyable for the kids. Sometimes I would help in the Babies Room, which I feel needs a lot of help from volunteers. Here our tasks were to change the babies nappies, feed them and keep them happy.”

“There is a long way for Bo De to go, especially in the important sanitary field, but we believe that each step is worthwhile into making it a cleaner, happier and safer environment. Each step counts!”

Eman Hasan and Shamain Hasan, UK, Care volunteers

STAFF UPDATE

My journey till now

Hello friends,

I am Anuja Sabnis from Mumbai, India. By profession I am a video editor, photographer, designer and film maker. My journey from this field to social work started in 2009 because of a documentary I made. My cousin invited me to a city called Belgaum 12 hours from Mumbai to make a documentary on her NGO called "Samarpan Village". It's a day care center for special needs

children. Yes, we do not call them mentally challenged. So, I spent four days in Samarpan and made a documentary. I really liked being amongst those kids. I was forgetting all my sorrows. I decided to volunteer for them. For a few years I was going often to attend meetings, festivals and functions. I was working as video editor at that time in Mumbai. After 2 years I quit my job and started spending a month in Samarpan and back in Mumbai I started working



freelance. I taught an 11 year old Down's syndrome boy named "Yash", photography. He learnt it very well, we even had an exhibition. Some news channels interviewed me and many newspapers and magazines also covered this event. Based on this work I applied through Friends of Waldorf in Germany for a 1 year voluntary social service. I worked with 6 children who were in intensive care and were mentally and physically disabled. I also learnt German during this year. The most memorable experience was my relationship with one boy from my group, "Florian". He is autistic with physical disabilities. He cannot walk and he is a blind. He did not trust anybody but me. He used to let me do any and everything easily. He was very aggressive but I managed to make him patient. He loved me a lot. Unfortunately we had to say goodbye, I call sometimes and speak to him and he still recognizes my voice and laughs a lot. That's the life.

I wanted to do something for society. But because I have no education in this area, I could not. Then I got an opportunity to apply in Projects Abroad Vietnam. I did. Because I have experience working as a volunteer and working with volunteers, I was selected for the Volunteer Coordinator position.

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STAFF UPDATE

My journey till now

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I arrived in Hanoi on 15th October with missing luggage. But, they sent it on the same day in the evening. All the staff members of Projects Abroad welcomed me nicely. For the next 2 days I received training from staff members. Our lovely director Linh explained to me about the working pattern. After the training days some of them took me out to show placements, volunteers' houses and to show me where the bank is. They helped me to exchange currency etc. They also explained Vietnamese culture. Our Director took us for dinner to welcome me and to have a send-off for the previous Volunteer Coordinator. I could eat real and delicious Vietnamese food. I am very happy, as all my co-workers are very supportive and caring. I was a bit afraid before meeting them, if I will be able to do well in my role or not. But, after experiencing their support for two weeks I am sure my work will become easier.

This Monday I started with my work independently. One of the co-workers arranged a free entry to Cultural Performance in the theatre on the 28th October. I am fortunate enough to get this chance to see the performance live. I really liked it. So far I am enjoying the work. I am looking forward to meeting all the upcoming volunteers. I feel that I learn something from every human being. As these volunteers are coming from different countries and different backgrounds, there is a lot to learn from them. I am sure I am going to have a wonderful experience working with these lovely people. And I am sure that they will motivate me and support me to face the challenges coming across in my work. I love challenges and that makes me love my work more.

Anuja Sabnis, Volunteer Coordinator

OCTOBER ROUND-UP

In November we recollect what went on in October! :)

- October 20 is the Vietnam Women's Day. The day is a special occasion for Vietnamese people to acknowledge the contributions and efforts of Vietnamese women, who play an increasingly important role in families and society. In local offices and companies, celebrations with gifts and flowers given to the female staff are often much expected on the day.



Medical volunteer Gina Nguyen (USA) took picture with a local doctor at her placement. They were surrounded by beautiful flower bouquets.

- October was a quiet month at Bo De placement, regarding the number of volunteers working there. However we Projects Abroad office staff rotated to come to help Xuan (the placement supervisor and teacher) out with the kindergarten classroom daily run. There have been new abandoned babies arriving at the shelter; luckily, they are all in good and stable health condition. Another positive update is that Projects Abroad Vietnam has been carrying out the plan of getting the residents of Bo De shelter to be tested for HIV. We do hope that by mid-November by receiving the test results of all 175 residents of Bo De shelter, Projects Abroad in coordination with the shelter supervisory board can start off the next step of improving their wellbeing..



Lovely drawings of Bo De children

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OCTOBER ROUNDUP

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- October also sees the great volunteer performance of our volunteers working at Friendship Village, including two care volunteers Stine and Linh Le and physiotherapy volunteer Danielle Robson. Danielle took a lot of great initiatives in the rehab department where she worked every day with the Agent Orange victims and her efforts were highly appreciated by the placement people and patients. She introduced yoga, applicable physiotherapy exercises, English training, and physio techniques exchanges with the local physiotherapists. Linh and Stine worked with children in the classrooms; the work ranges from teaching maths, English, crafts, and drawing to physical education. Stine had a special case of a girl there who is autistic, deaf and blind. Everyday Stine spends a few hours being with her: walking, playing and communicating. This girl's wellbeing and future is of special concern to Stine, so she came to discuss with Projects Abroad Vietnam staff. A plan has been made to help out this underprivileged girl and to find a optimum solution for her future.



- Our International Development placement SCDI (Supporting Community Development Initiatives) bid farewell to Australian volunteer Samuel Carroll. He started his work at the end of August and was in charge of data management, interviewing community organisation workers and report writing and analysis. Having worked alongside a local co-worker, after more than two months, Samuel was able to reach a satisfactory result: a clear and thorough template to keep track of the data files collected from the community-based organizations. This template is of significant importance for the improvement of data management, which clearly benefits the researching work of the organisation. Samuel also interviewed NGO managers, drug users and sex workers for research on HIV - to him, this is the most interesting part of his work. He suggested the volunteers to be proactive and willing to take their own initiative to search for other tasks to do. "If you take this approach then you will be more satisfied and happy at the end of your placement."

OCTOBER ROUNDUP

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- Kathryn Ponomareva, another volunteer who has just started her volunteer project at SCDI in mid-October, has already found joy and motivation at work. She admires the professionalism and dedication of her local co-workers at the organization and has been very excited to contribute more and more in her next five months at this placement with the three projects she has been assigned.
- One of the newest projects - Thuan Hoa Community Project (Thuan Hoa protection center and HoaBan+), which is located quite far from Hanoi (about 4 hours driving by bus) - has received positive contributions in terms of language training and cultural exchange from German volunteer Katharina Heinrich. During one month, Katharina managed to improve the English skill of the disabled ethnic minority women (employed by Thuan Hoa social protection center) and contributed her skills to help promote the hand-made craft products. One amazing promoting idea was realized with the work of Katharina: she was the model for the craft products. Now you can see Katharina's pictures on the website of HoaBanplus (<http://www.hoabanplus.com/products-catalog-p16.html>).



We will definitely keep you posted with our next newsletter. Stay tuned!

Duong pham, Information Manager

What's On: December 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 Hanoi Story Slam 7.30PM	5 Gardening Day at Bo De 2PM	6 Manoj arrives	7
8	9 Fleur arrives	10	11	12 Traditional music show 8.00PM	13	14 Sarah arrives
15	16	17 Sandra and Selin arrive	18 Victoria arrives	19 Special Christmas event	20 Luke and Laura ar- rive	21
22	23	24 Merry Christmas	25	26	27 Lori arrives	28
29 Caitlin, Alain, Katie and Taylah arrive	30	31 Aman's birthday				

Dec 4— Hanoi Story Slam on the theme 'Love Gone Wrong'. Tell your own story on the theme to get a prize from the organizer. Also, support a good children-related cause by joining in.

Venue: Puku Bar & Restaurant 16-18 Tong Duy Tan St.

Time: 7:15PM

Entrance fee: 100,000VND/person

Dec 5 - Gardening Day. We are going to celebrate the International Volunteer Day (Dec 5) by cleaning up the garden at Bo De shelter and making it a cleaner and greener place.

Meet at: Bo De pagoda

Time: 2:00 PM

Dec 12 - Traditional Music show: Ca Tru. An intense cultural and art performance performed at Hanoi Old House.

Venue: 87 Ma May St.

Time: 7:45PM

Entrance ticket: \$10/person

Dec 19 - The most special Christmas event ever organized for you volunteers! Let's expect 2 hours full of excitement, fun and lots of surprise!

Meet at: Projects Abroad office

Time: 6:00PM

Photos of the Month

Hello from Vietnam



Care volunteers Fabienne and Jerome took picture with Xuan - Bo De kindergarten teacher in front of the placement



Sport volunteer Lennart guided his students to do some warm-up activity before playing football

Medical volunteer Gina Nguyen during an Acupuncture treatment



Medical volunteer Robert on the work induction day—the starting of his 4-week volunteer mission



Volunteers focused on learning to cook Vietnamese springroll in a November social event

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Projects Abroad is the leading global organizer of overseas voluntary work placements. Our wide range of projects, including Teaching, Care, Conservation & Environment, Medicine & Healthcare, Sports, Culture & Community projects and Journalism, are designed specifically for the needs of the communities in which we work, whilst giving our volunteers the very best experience of volunteering abroad.

Based in Hanoi, Vietnam, volunteers can work on a variety of projects, including care work with disabled and orphaned children, physical therapy at local hospitals, and teaching either English or French in both primary and secondary schools. The latest projects to be opened is Community, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Nursing projects. If you are interested in volunteering in Vietnam with Projects Abroad then please log on to www.projects-abroad.net for more information.

Follow us on [Instagram](#) for the inspiring and thought-provoking photos and stories: [Projectsabroad_Vietnam](#) :)



Volunteers attended a meaningful event supporting for underprivileged Children - Run For Children 2013