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WELCOME TO OUR APRIL 2011 NEWLETTER

Read about our latest efforts and success and further information about voluntourism and what we think are the key requirements for a good volunteer placement.

Also check out the documentary ALJAZEERA did on this topic and see what Michael had to say regarding responsible volunteering.

We are always grateful for your feedback, questions and suggestions.

We wish you a happy Khmer New Year!

The *ConCERT* Team

LEARNING AT THE CONCERT OFFICE

Over the last months we've experienced an increase in interest by various research and study groups in ConCERT's work and the information we can provide.

Tourism students from the UNIVERSITY OF BATTAMBANG

We were very happy to introduce a group of around 20 tourism students from the University of Battambang to current tourism-related issues in Siem Reap and Cambodia. We discussed efforts that are currently being undertaken to make tourism more responsible and to distribute its benefits to the people that need it the most. We are looking forward to further co-operations with the University of Battambang.



Student group from the UNITED WORLD COLLEGE Hong Kong

Stella McCracken runs an anti-human trafficking group at the United World College in Hong Kong. Unfortunately trafficking is an issue in Cambodia due to

poverty, corruption, and weak enforcement, and she has brought several groups of students over the years to better understand the problems. The discussions at ConCERT looked at how tourists and volunteers can play their part in fighting this modern day slavery. Education and childcare expert Christian Larsson joined us and looked at children's rights and the problems institutions can create by taking in children without proper paperwork and insufficient agreements with the children's families.



The United World College Hong Kong is one of 12 international boarding schools at high school level located in different parts of the world. They aim to enhance cultural exchange and to inspire their students "to create a more peaceful and sustainable future" [www.uwc.org]



CONCERT ON ALJAZEERA

As some of you may already know, Michael recently joined a discussion panel that formed part of a television programme on the Aljazeera English Channel. The programme, “101 East”, explored some of the issues around the growing number of people who are volunteering to work in Cambodian schools and orphanages, and also looked at the wider subject of the place orphanages themselves play in Cambodian society.

It was aired between the 11th and 13th of February.

<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/101east/2011/02/2011210123057338995.html>

FAMILY FUN DAY AND THE WOMEN’S RESOURCE CENTER

On the 8th of March the International Women’s Day was celebrated at Wat Damnak with the “Family Fun Day”. The event was organised by the Women’s Resource Center, supported by many Khmer and Western volunteers and sponsored by local businesses.

Siem Reap NGOs that run programmes to help women were given the opportunity to present their work. Dancing performances were held and there were many activities and games for children.

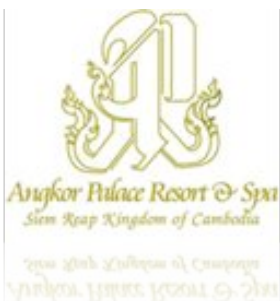
Mom and Meera were happy to volunteer at the event and monitored activities and spoke to the women to explain the Women’s Resource Center’s work.



BUSINESSES GETTING INVOLVED

For us at ConCERT it is not only nice but also important to observe that more and more businesses respond to their guests’ interest in charity activities and use ConCERT’s links and expertise in this field to do this in the most responsible way. It is an important development that benefits everyone involved: The guests and customers can easily travel more responsible and feel good, the businesses meet an increasing demand and our members are helped with funding and important business links.

We’ve also noticed an increase in “charity tours” and tour operators linking up with ConCERT to make sure their customers support well-run and trustworthy organisations and thus the local communities. **Read about the two latest examples of businesses getting involved:**



ANGKOR PALACE RESORT & SPA

After their success with our bicycle display last year the Resort under management of Mr. Weng Aow decided to raise funds this way a second time and set up a water filter

display (as reported in the November 2010 newsletter).

Placed in the hotels’ spacious lobby the display helped their guests to support the cause and they donated a fantastic \$375, enough for 8 for water filters.

VICTORIA ANGKOR HOTEL & SPA

In co-operation with the Victoria Hotel, its two former sustainability management trainees from France and the general manager Hanno Stamm we set up a bicycle display last November that up to now yielded \$365 in donations – enough to buy 11 bicycles.

Because the Victoria Hotels’ guests enjoyed to get involved this way and the display fits well into the lobby they decided to keep the display another three months to raise more money.





MOM MOVES ON...



Mrs Morn Savoun, known to everyone as Mom, had her final day at ConCERT on the 1st April. She has been trying to juggle two full time jobs for almost a year since she and her husband established a local NGO called Children and Development Organisation, (CDO), in July 2010.

Mom and her husband have been trying to help the inhabitants of Leap Jass, an isolated settlement about 25 miles from Siem Reap, for many years. Though only 25 miles away, the journey takes at least 2 hours by 4 wheel drive vehicle in the dry season; it becomes virtually cut off when it rains. The people of Leap Jass are in reality internally displaced persons, refugees in their own country with no land or means of making a living. The settlement resembles a refugee camp. There is no farming land, clean water, health service, or school. People forage for what they can find in the surrounding forest; many of the men have left in search of work in Thailand, leaving their families to fend for themselves.

In desperation Mom and her husband established CDO to provide full time care for over 20 children who have been orphaned, abandoned, or abused by their families; most of them are from Leap Jass. They attend the local schools in Siem Reap and receive extra English lessons.

Whilst the CDO centre is providing emergency care for some of the most urgent cases in the settlement, the long-term vision is to buy land and develop a village, and then to build a community centre that will give access to education and life chances to all the villagers and their children. This is an enormous task and we wish Mom well in her endeavours.

THEY KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A GOOD VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

The tourism industry reports that voluntourism is their fastest growing sector, and much of ConCERT's work is involved with people who want to volunteer. This article is the second in a series and we welcome comments and feedback; please send them to info@concertcambodia.org

In the last newsletter we started by highlighting ways people with only a short time to spare can offer their support. We also said that in this issue we would look at how organisations and volunteers can work together to protect the children and young people of Cambodia. We will start by exploring the processes behind a good volunteer placement.

Countless millions of people the world over volunteer their time for the benefit of others, both in their home communities and abroad. Many people are moved by what they read about Cambodia or witness with their own eyes during a visit. To realise that so many of the basic things that are taken for granted, (clean water, education, healthcare, electricity, sanitation, state provision for families in crisis etc), simply don't exist for the average Cambodian often has a very profound impact. People are motivated to give up their time, and invariably their money, to come and help in some way.

Recognising that there are fellow human beings in great need and then actually trying to do something about it is without doubt a noble and selfless deed. So why is this basic act of human compassion increasingly attracting criticism from the media, academic research, development professionals working on the ground; indeed sometimes from the very communities themselves who should be benefiting from these actions? →



As Michael mentioned in the Aljazeera TV programme, the key to a successful volunteer placement is the overall structure and management surrounding it. Volunteers, especially if they are working in a foreign country, rely heavily on guidance and support from those in charge; they quite reasonably assume some pretty obvious and basic things about the organisation where they will be working:

1. that the project they are working with meets a real need and is the appropriate response to that need
2. that it operates on sound principles, is well managed, and financially transparent
3. that the programme is run by people who have extensive knowledge of the issues that their organisation is trying to address
4. that their volunteering isn't taking away jobs from local people
5. that their volunteer input is needed and will contribute to improving the situation
6. that they will have adequate supervision and guidance, and their tasks will be clearly explained
7. that if required, they will have general support to cope with life in a country where so many things are different, and that reasonable steps have been taken to ensure their safety
8. that, if they've paid to volunteer, they know very clearly how their money is being used

There are also a few key requirements in the planning and preparation stages before volunteers arrive:

- are the volunteers asked for sufficient information about their skills, interests, experiences, and reasons for volunteering?
- if the work is with vulnerable people, (such as children, young adults, people with learning or other disabilities, or people in



- extreme poverty), are there appropriate security measures in place during the application process to protect both the vulnerable, and the volunteers themselves?
- do effective screening and matching processes take place to ensure volunteers bring skills that match the needs of the communities where they will work?
- is the placement duration appropriate to the task, and long enough so the volunteers can make an effective contribution?

All of the above are the responsibility of the host organisations and/or volunteer placement companies, and if some of the procedures are not in place it's then easy for things to go wrong. Then, rather unfairly, because the volunteers are the most visible part of the process, any ensuing criticism is often aimed at them rather than the organisational management. (This is in no way meant to excuse the occasions when individual volunteers do irresponsible actions).

In the next newsletter we will look at some examples of problems that arise from shortcomings in the management of volunteers.

NEW VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

To help volunteers to become clearer about what they want to do and to contribute through their placement and to improve the placement process for ConCERT and its members we have now started to use an application form for potential volunteers to fill in.

This not only improves our records and can help to monitor our success but also contributes to the child protection efforts of our members.

Thank you for your attention.
Please feel free to direct any feedback to
meera@concertcambodia.org