

Painting Smiles

4th Edition

NEWSLETTER

Mission Statement:

Painting Smiles is a small organisation aiming to provide long-term, quality, free English schooling and outreach services for the children and families living in Otres, Sihanouk Ville, Cambodia and beyond; who would not otherwise access English education.

PROGRESS REPORT:

It has been an interesting few months. We have had enforced changes of our school timings; we have made changes to our curriculum accordingly and have had some wonderful volunteers come and go, giving the students all sorts of opportunities.

There continues to be many failings in the Cambodian State schooling system and this year this directly affected us. Our feeder school, failing to meet required standards, along with 75% of the country's students, was ordered to: increase their teaching time, ensure each grade has their own dedicated teacher and all of the teaching time has to be Cambodian subjects – excluding their time at Painting Smiles.

This meant that, where previously, students came and visited both schools in one part of the day (mornings) it was no longer allowed. Grades were divided between mornings and afternoons.

The impact on Painting Smiles has been that we no longer see students who have to work half of the day. Those whose parents understand the value of their English lessons; those who can afford the time away from home and those who desperately want their lessons, walk the long journey twice a day – once to Cambodian school and once to Painting Smiles.

This has also meant raising the salary of our Cambodian teacher (to cover gas) as he has to travel to work for one class in the morning and return for another late afternoon.



PISETH TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH ART

Nichola's amazing donation:

Nichola, from Leeds UK, found out about us whilst on holiday in Cambodia last year. Once back in the UK she organised, with her family and friends, to participate in Roundhay Park's 5km fun run to raise funds for us. Tilly Gallacher and Harley Schofield, along with Ms Schofield and the Gallacher family managed to raise a whopping \$600. Nichola returned to Cambodia to personally present the money. It was a pleasure to meet Nichola and we send a huge thank you to all involved.



Julian returns:

Julian, a volunteer from two years ago, came back to join us after teaching in South Korea. We benefited from his great energy: the students loving his teaching style and Piseth (our Cambodian teacher) enjoying the support and diversity.

"I volunteered at Painting Smiles for two and half months. I was introduced to it in the summer of 2013, just after Suzanne had arrived. I loved it so much that I came back and worked again.

It has been an amazing experience.

The students were wonderful and I found myself constantly marveling at their dedication and enthusiasm. I had taught for 3 years before Painting Smiles and I've never seen that level of dedication anywhere else. These kids actually WANTED to learn, and they walked, sometimes miles in the hot sun, to do so. I'll never forget their excited cries of, "Hello Teacher Julian," as I rolled up on my motorbike and was surrounded by a sea of hands, waiting for a high-five. Being a teacher is usually hard, thankless work, where you're frequently made out to be the bad guy.



Not with these kids.

The return of Steve:

Steve volunteered for many months last year and, lucky for us, returned to us this year. We were over the moon to have him back, the students' faces were a picture. He repainted the outside of the building as a start, before supporting the students in class.



Steve treated the students to special and memorable days: organising days at the beach (some had never been in the sea, even though they live 3km from it) where they could play with inflatables, splash the staff and eat lunch; and a trip to the cinema to watch Wall-E and have pizza and ice-cream.

It was humbling watching the students saving pieces of pizza for their families and the look of confusion when trying to get into a Cornetto and the surprise when they realised it was an ice-cream.

We hope that Steve returns in the future.



THANKS TO TOP CAT CINEMA, SIHANOUKVILLE

The water tower is replaced:

The water tower supplying the water for the toilet block and for irrigating the garden had become dangerous, as the wooden legs had been eaten by termites. We arranged, with the Cambodian school's funders that we would split the cost with them. We paid for the concrete structure to heighten and support the tank; the supporters of the state school paid for the tank.



Julien The Second: I Believe We Can Fly

A second Julien arrived to conduct a project: I Believe We Can Fly. This amazing one man travelling show, is working with disadvantaged children in organisations, showing them how to make kites from discarded plastic. It raises awareness of the waste issue and how to utilise such materials for fun.



The students thoroughly enjoyed this and were lucky enough to be invited to show their kites at the local yearly children's carnival, raising awareness for children's charities.



For further information on the project, please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/ibelievewecanflyicietlabas>
OR <http://www.bluesky-travel.fr/>

Out with the old, in with the new!

After being with Painting Smiles two years, Suzanne's time in Cambodia came to an end. She has decided to move to Australia to continue her career in full-time education.

Luckily, Dana, a volunteer who has been involved for a couple of months has taken on the role of coordinator, to oversee the running of the project.

Painting Smiles changed my life. I fell in love with the students and the potential of the project on day one. I spent the next two years in Otres, the best years of my life to date. I usually have many words but they are difficult to find to sum up how much I have loved working with the staff and students. If anyone comes across an opportunity like this, to make a difference...do it. Giving time and energy has given so much back to me. I will look back fondly forever and will continue supporting the project from a distance.

Suzanne



A huge thank you to our volunteers who led and/or helped support lessons and days out: Steve, Kira, Julian and Julien, Hilary, Denise, Chloe, Naomi, Charly, Rona and Emma.

Thank you to Bberlaine & friends for the donation of laptops & art supplies. Thank you to the continued support of those who send us monthly donations for our Cambodian teacher's wages. This is vital in keeping us going.