



## Volunteer experience report : Amy

volunteer in February 2013

In February 2013 I made my second trip back to Cambodia but it felt like the very first time all over again. Weeks before my departure endless questions rummaged through my mind: has the place changed much? would they remember me, would I remember them? would this time be as rewarding as the last? and what is my purpose for this trip?

On my way to orphanage my heart pounded so fast and I was sure that my motor driver heard it too. As I entered nervously through the rusty gate I felt I was back in time but with the additional new faces and smiles. In no time the familiar faces on the slightly taller bodies appeared, I heard my name, followed by numerous hugs and I knew all my questions were answered. Yes, the place has changed, for the better. Yes, they remembered me and I remembered them and yes, it was okay to come back after 2 years. Just like the first day 2 years back it took no longer than 5 minutes before I acquainted myself with the place, and not long before the day ended out came the words 'chop chop' and 'atey' like it was only yesterday.

The first time volunteering at the orphanage was extremely rewarding and unforgettable. I received so much joy just from simple tasks like washing the babies, teaching the children to brush their teeth, playing games and making crafts. Most importantly, I learnt to appreciate the simple things in life. So how does it compare to the second time? It is everything I just mentioned and more! little did I know that the already established relationships from two years back had blossomed into trust and understanding, there was no need to break any ice anymore and all I had to do was to pick it up where I left it.

For me education is crucial but I also believed that it is the key to the future of these children. So straightaway we set up a 'classroom-like' routine from Monday to Saturday and I divided the children up into small groups according to their levels. I told them I was not going to remind them to come to class, they had to remember themselves or remind one another. I decided to hand the responsibilities back to the children because I wanted them to know that they are doing this for their own future. At first I was unsure of how this would turn out but everyday the children came on the dot in their designated small groups, prepared with their books and stationaries ready to learn. Throughout the three weeks I could see that the motivation on their eager faces came from within, and for this I have found the purpose of my return.

My one month of teaching here went extremely fast and no doubt once again that it was one of the best experiences of my life. I had only the previous volunteers to thank, for it is because of their perseverance and dedication that today many of the children have a better concept and attitude for learning and studying. I am also glad to be a part of the Sreyka Smile Association. It was their generous support, guidance, encouragement and accountability that made my work here so successful and rewarding.

Amy.