

Volunteer Report Claudia Dietschi & Oskar Valles

Our motivation

We left our jobs over a year ago with two goals: travel in Asia and get involved in a volunteer project on the way. As you can imagine travelling was easy! After 9 months of visiting amazing places in Asia we realized that we had completed our first goal, but had not gotten any closer to working for a charity. While we really enjoyed travelling, we felt as tourists we were only scratching the surface, we had the urge to get to know a culture more in depth and give something back.

But what did we really want to do as volunteers? We spent a couple of weeks brainstorming, discussed the political, social and economic issues that afflict the area and how we could potentially make a difference. We toyed with ideas in the area of social entrepreneurship and education and soon realized that there were plenty of NGOs working very effectively in these fields already.

We talked to different organizations in Cambodia, pitching them our ideas, but never quite felt that we had found the right match. We decided to move on. In Chiang Mai we arranged a meeting with Daniel and exchanged ideas about motivation, experience and areas of collaboration. We finally felt we had found a place where we could make a difference.



Our work

Project management for the new Child's Dream contacts/projects online application

The scope of this task was to manage the migration of an existing desktop database to an online application to manage the organization's core processes, including donations, projects and HR

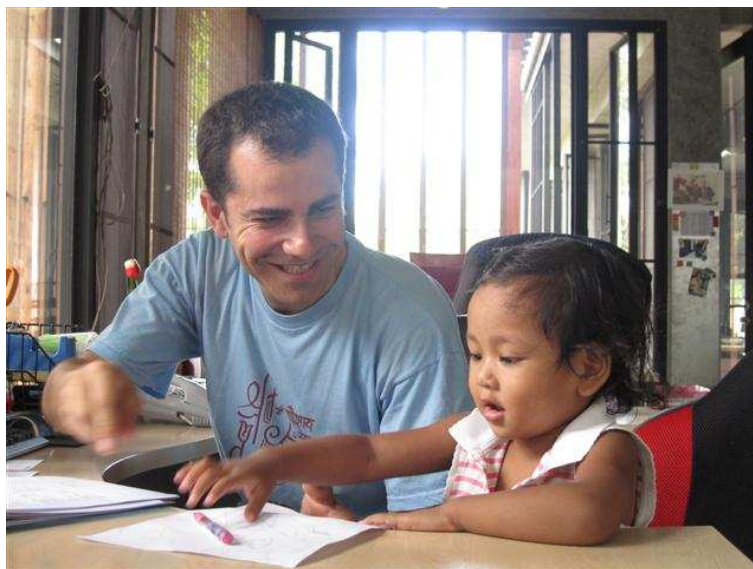
management. The final goal was to produce a set of documents to deliver to an external vendor company for its development.

We gathered the requirements for the application, including the design of how the final product would look like. This process helped us to learn more about the organization, finding along the way new areas where we could add value. We completed the needs analysis and created a product requirements document, identifying use cases and selected a vendor company through an RFP process.

Child's Dream store

Child's Dream had been meaning to establish a store for a while, lots of ideas were floating around. Here we were to consolidate it all and make it happen.

After many working sessions with Icy, U and Daniel, calculations and research on feasibility and concept, surveys sent to get feedback, bicycle tours around Chiang Mai to look for suitable products, research into technical details, coding, ordering stock, taking pictures and testing, we were ready to launch. We are proud of making this happen with zero budget. It's amazing how many things are possible as long as there is excitement about an idea and willingness to help from everyone involved. You can check out the result at www.childsdream.org/shop



Online strategy

While Child's Dream's webpage gets updated very frequently we felt the information was not displayed in the most efficient manner. We installed Google Analytics to back this assumption up with some numbers and did a thorough analysis of the website incorporating feedback from staff and donors. We created a blueprint for the redesign of the website including the use of social media. For Child's Dream the word of mouth has been key to getting new donors on board, why not use the social channels to spread the word about all the good work they do? We set up a Facebook and LinkedIn profile to give the

Child's Dream friends an opportunity to "Like" us. We also worked on optimizing the search engine marketing (SEM) using the grant Child's Dream had received from Google for free online advertising. We managed to create more relevant keywords and ad texts to increase the traffic to the website.

With the help of Rafi in Switzerland all these changes were swiftly implemented, the new website is up and running, the social profiles have many followers and stats are looking promising!

Our field experience

While we felt that it was at the office where we could add more value, we were also keen to learn more about the communities the organization is helping.

Oskar spent some time in the border town of Mae Sot, and had the opportunity to work for the Minmahaw school, creating an IT curriculum for the Burmese students and even teaching one of the modules for one week! It was hard to say no when such bright and nice students tell you "teacher, will you come to teach us more?".

Claudia had the chance to accompany the Northern Thailand team to a visit to schools in the Chom Thong and Omkoi district. We organized a drawing competition and asked the students to draw their dream for their future, resulting in lots of drawings picturing cute teachers, farmers, crazy scientists and even some boy band singer. The willingness of the communities to contribute to the projects and the hospitality of our hosts were overwhelming, so overwhelming that we had to eat and drink and exchange stories until late at night.

We were lucky to participate in the annual Child's Dream workshop, where we got to know everyone (including the staff from the Siem Reap office) for a weekend in the idyllic environment of the Northern Thai mountains, while we helped to document everything that happened there.



Our learnings

From the beginning everyone at Child's Dream was incredibly friendly. The staff is hard-working, yet they always find some time to have fun. It was refreshing to experience this collaborative and friendly environment, so different to the sometimes very competitive corporate world that we are used to.

The days feel less crowded in Thailand. People take things easy, they don't rush from one appointment to the next. This attitude invites to a more satisfactory work day and a lot of spontaneous after work activities such as having a laugh playing badminton, playing cards or the famous dog game (also for sale in the online shop 😊).

We have also enjoyed living in Thailand, riding our bikes by shiny temples every morning, smelling the food from the stalls, enjoying mango season with a fruit smoothie every day, experiencing rainy season, and a long etcetera.

Having worked at Child's Dream we realized that the recipe for running an NGO contains the same ingredients as any other successful business requires: stick to your mission and principles, and be transparent and efficient in everything you do.

At Child's Dream they manage to do that, they have fun doing it, and are also able to pass on their passion for what they do to everyone working with them.

We would like to thank all Child's Dream staff for giving us the opportunity to achieve our second goal of collaborating as volunteers for a non-profit organization, for being always genuinely nice to us, for sharing their experience and smiles and for letting us become members of their small big family.

Kopkun ka! Kopkun krap! (20th August 2010)