

SEVEN YEARS ON AND STILL VOLUNTEERING



I set out from Mt Eliza in 2008 armed with a short TEFL course, intending to volunteer somewhere for one month and explore Asia for the next 11 months. While exploring the amazing Angkor Tom Temples in Siem Reap Cambodia, I met Mr Leng in the fascinating Ta Prom Temple where he was sketching and painting trying to sell his paintings to provide rice for the children in his and his wife's care. He told me about his Education NGO funded through his and the children's art works. This seemed like the opportunity I was looking for so agreed to volunteer teaching English for a month or so. Largely from traumatic backgrounds these now educated, shiny eyed, well fed, happy children from 2 -23 are so lucky to have found Leng and Sry On as surrogate 'Parents' to share and shape their lives.

Now 7 years later I'm still here and there are now 33 children enjoying a full education with over 650 children at the ODA Free English Schools in 7 outlying villages some 50kms out of Siem Reap. . Leng and I have conquered more than a few obstacles together over this time.



Recent arrivals are 3 siblings - A remote Commune and Village Chief who knew of Leng and Sry On's work - contacted them begging them to take 3 little kids who had been abandoned. They were living alone on the edge of the forest on the side of a remote road - eating leaves and dirt!! The 4 yr old girl was acting as mother to her 2

brothers and continues to be their 'Rock' now they are happily enjoying being part of the ODA family! Instinct is amazing! They eat huge bowl fulls of rice but Leng chuckles and says he still finds they eat dirt occasionally!! Must have developed a taste for it! Their shiny eyes and huge grins say it all for them now- such a big change for them, and all the other kids share in making sure they feel welcome.

Definitely a highlight of my life to have volunteered with such a selfless, wonderful couple and their magical children! The world is certainly richer for amazingly warm hearted people like Leng and his wife. They and the children have stolen a part of my heart forever.

Visit www.odaopportunitiescambodia.org to share some of my wonderful daily experiences in this wonderful Education NGO.