

## Cambodia Impact Story

### Volunteer Experience: Reflections On My First Mission



This beautiful photograph of a girl washing duck eggs (credit Anthony Clarke) holds much significance for me as it represents my personal journey during my mission to Cambodia.

I felt very excited when we arrived by tuk-tuk at The Harvest of Hope School on the first day of our mission in Phnom Penh. I was looking forward to meeting the staff, children and local community with great anticipation. The staff took us on a walking tour of the local village and we encountered this girl carefully and thoroughly washing the eggs, so that her mother could sell them in her shop. I immediately felt concern for the girl; “Why isn’t she in school?” “Why is she washing eggs when she should be continuing her education in school and furthering her career prospects?” Of course, I was bringing my values, norms, assumptions and expectations from the UK to this community in Cambodia and not understanding the situation or context.

I asked questions and I received answers: the girl is 15, she has been to school, but has recently left so that she could help her mother with the shop. Her mother is a widow and the girl is the eldest of four siblings. The mother’s small business was generating sufficient income for her to support her

family and keep the children fed and clothed. On reflection, I admired this mother's resourcefulness and her proactive approach to securing her family's finances and future. I understood that her daughter's assistance was needed and that in due course the girl would learn the skills needed to manage a small shop herself. She was learning skills for life and was helping to support her family. On further reflection, I realised that my initial reaction came from my ignorance of this family and community. I felt that I wanted to support the family in some small way, so bought snacks from the shop whenever I visited Harvest of Hope School. I enjoyed becoming a regular customer and my favourite peanuts were always ready and waiting for me whenever I called in!

This is just one example of how my understanding and empathy grew throughout the mission. I thoroughly enjoyed training teachers (some of them were just 18), teaching and supporting teachers in the classroom. I valued developing positive relationships with the school staff, students and wider community. This mission was a very fulfilling and rewarding experience that enabled me to develop some comprehension of the lives of these admirable people. I am very grateful to Mission Direct for this opportunity to travel whilst making a positive impact on the lives of others and furthering my self-development.