

Hi everyone,

I spent a total of 3 weeks at the orphanage. I arrived on a Saturday morning to a bunch of friendly kids who were out and about doing some cleaning. Straight away I was made to feel at home. The kids kept calling out 'Uncle', to which I would look behind me to see who they were talking to. I soon discovered they were talking to me and that adult males are referred to as 'Uncle'. A little later, I found myself playing the much loved cricket. The kids, adult workers and their friends were skilful players, so my competitive juices got flowing and I went at it 100%. I had fun during our play, but having not done any warm up/ down stretches, I paid for it the next morning by waking up with an all mighty aching right shoulder! Sunday though is another day for playing cricket, so we went at it again.

With her husband Fred in Australia, there was just Olivia and myself for the first 2 weeks. Olivia is a tireless worker. She seems to have the energy levels of 2 people. One minute she is doing admin work up until 1am, then she is taking kids to the doctors and dentists, then she's teaching English, then she's doing the grocery shopping, and the list goes on. Upon request, she also drives volunteers to and from the airport (well sometimes she does (personal joke I have with her))! She has a great sense of humour and we shared a number of laughs. It's just a shame she would take so long to see that I was always right...lol

All the kids seem to be happy. After a while, you slowly start to get a feel for the different personalities they each possess. With each child you could then discover the best way to have fun with them. They love their toys. I also discovered they loved playing car racing games and Mario Brothers on the laptop I had brought. The kids attend school on weekdays, so the first half of those days is spent without the little tackers buzzing around. I went about helping the 3 general labourers with all the odd jobs that are constantly needing to be done. Ramesh, Surish and Ram are great guys and were very patient. I explained to Olivia that I am the worst handy man on the planet, but I soon found out that any help that can be given is gladly taken, as there is always something to be done on 5 acres of land. Over the 3 weeks I was there, I helped the guys with tasks including painting, putting up fences, building cupboards, and lawn mowing – well until the brand new lawn mower fell apart on me and Olivia had to take it Colombo to get fixed! I've got a funny feeling I won't be asked to mow the lawn again!

Apart from the 3 labour workers, there are a number of other people involved in the running of the orphanage. There are the friendly and funny cooks, carers and gardener. Ramesh lives with his family in a house on the ground and they each have their own job at the orphanage. I got on well with everyone and thank them for their hospitality. All the locals were really friendly too, and I think I smiled and waved more in those 3 weeks than any other. Having learnt a few basic sentences, I was happy to try and engage in conversation. I don't know whether I was making much sense, but I was always greeted with the ever present smile and warm reaction.

And then there was my new best buddy Dusty. He's a lovely natured dog that unfortunately has been the victim of bullying by other dogs in the neighbourhood. He sleeps at the orphanage and is a mighty fine guard dog. He likes a pat and enjoys following people around. So give him a big hug next time you are there!

The orphanage is in a small community about 15 minutes drive from the nearest town. The area is full of picturesque coconut trees and rice fields. The orphanage is on land that is home to numerous coconut trees and other fruit trees. A couple of times Surish would grab a large knife and cut open a fallen coconut so I could have a refreshing drink of coconut water. There are also other fruits that the kids and I would eat. And the food that the cooks prepared was always nice. I enjoyed the rice, curries, spices, and roti. I was also introduced to String Hoppers, which became a favourite of mine. They are white stringy noodley thingys (see photos for better description) that you have with curry sauce or whatever else you please.

The last week I was there saw the return of Fred, as well as 4 other female volunteers. I only met Fred for a couple of days (he went to the other property and I went away for a couple of days visiting a girl I sponsor) but the kids clearly enjoyed having him back.

Each day there is a timetable that everyone follows. Aside from general maintenance work, you can also help teach both the kids and the adults English. The cooks also were grateful for help with preparing food for the bellies of 20 kids and all the workers. Apart from work at the orphanage, there is also the opportunity to help out at the pre-school, primary school and secondary school. They are just a short walk away and you will be greeted with more happy smiles.

So yeah there are plenty of things you can help out with. Running an orphanage is a full on 24/7 job, and so Olivia and Fred are always grateful for an extra pair of hands. It can be exhausting work. I lost 6 kg (13 pounds)! But there is great satisfaction in knowing that you are helping assist a place that is giving kids a chance for a bright future! Thanks to everyone at St Anthony's Boys Home.

John