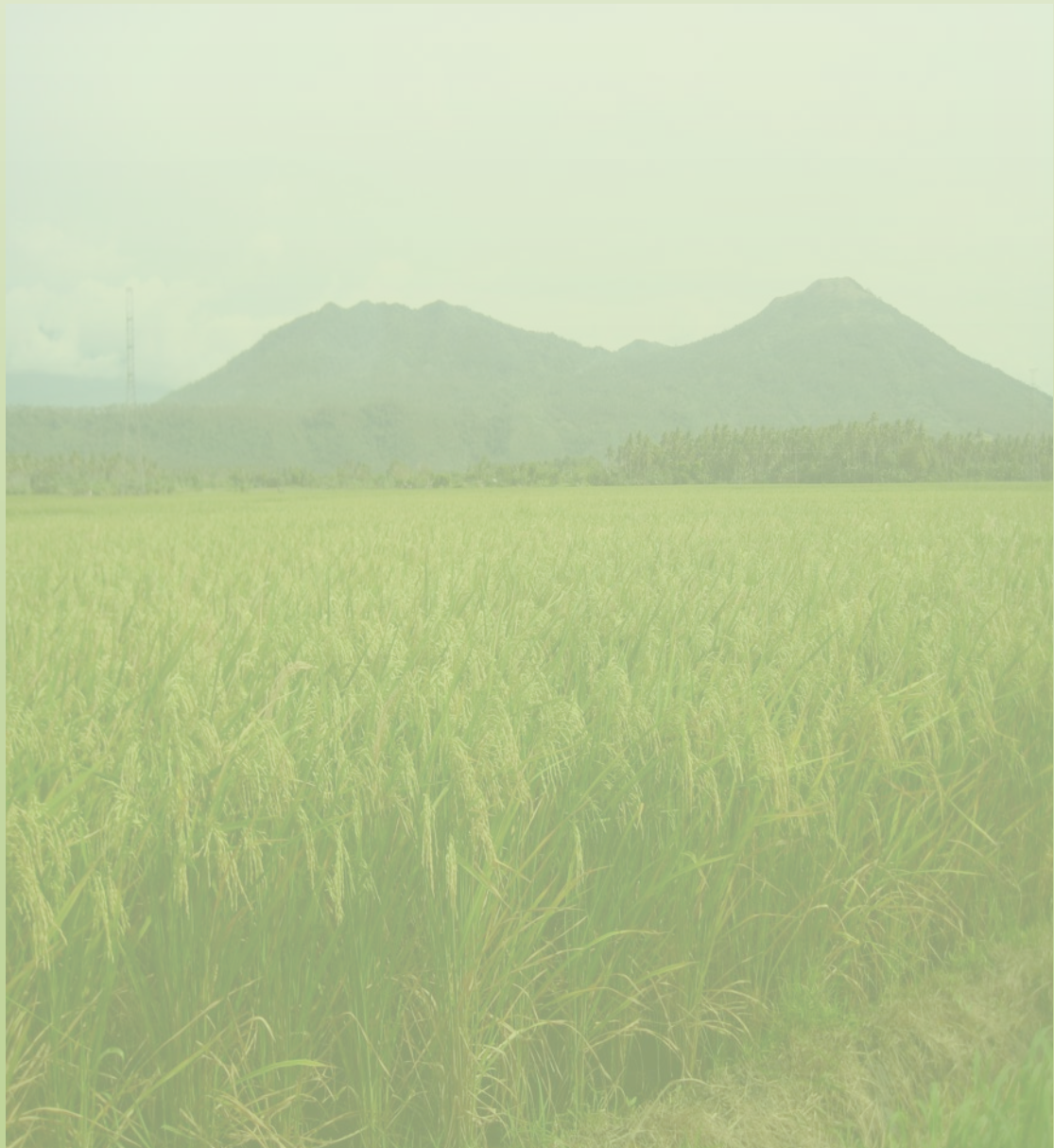


BAHAY TULUYAN

My Volunteer Experience

By: Kylie Pearce



~VOLUNTEERING WITH BAHAY TULUYAN~

By: Kylie Pearce

Bahay Tuluyan's development manager, Catherine Scerri, has been living and working in the Philippines for the past 9 years. Catherine is an inspiration to work with and she is committed to developing a sustainable organization to improve the lives and futures of children in need of special protection in the Philippines.



After an initial orientation about working with children and the organisation, Catherine and I worked out a plan for my visit: I would spend a week at the Laguna girls' centre, a week at the Quezon boys' centre and a week in Manila to participate in the Mobile Unit and a home-stay.

I can't believe how fast the time past. I would definitely recommend that volunteers plan their trip for a minimum of two to three months as this would allow time to adjust, understand the culture, pick up some of the basic language as well as the potential to create, develop or even to run a project or event.

I was welcomed with open arms by Bahay Tuluyan's highly motivated and friendly staff. Each and every person I met had a big smile and kindly took time to answer any of my questions.

The most exciting aspect about volunteering at BT is the knowledge that one's volunteer experience is really about what one makes of it. There are so many different activities and events happening over the three different sites, as well as research and social advocacy, that one can contribute in many different ways. For those who can think outside the square and are active, creative people there are vast opportunities and numerous ways to contribute.

Personally, I am passionate about children's rights and empowering children through education. I was inspired to see the difference that educating street children and youth was making in their personal confidence and sense of self worth. The children were who had become junior educators and were empowered leaders and actively educating other youth in their community.

Bahay Tuluyan is not only working within the Philippines, but runs an annual awareness program in Australia called "Kids View". I was met one of the youth facilitators, Jordan, who has been chosen to participate this year. His upcoming trip to Australia to raise awareness amongst Australian youth about children's rights and poverty is something towards which he is working very hard.

I would like to thank the dedicated staff of Bahay Tuluyan and the other long-term volunteers for all your support during my short time with you. The experience has been life changing and inspired me to continue to advocate for children's rights and for change.

Whilst the experience for each individual volunteer may be different I can guarantee that it will be an equally rewarding and valuable experience for all. I would encourage anyone who believes that they have skills or something to contribute to contact Catherine at Bahay Tuluyan. You will not look back. And like myself, you may find a renewed motivation and passion, not to mention, perspective on life.

COCONUT ECO-TOUR

The Coconut Eco-tour is a unique business initiative in partnership with Bahay Tuluyan, the boys in Quezon and their local community. I was lucky enough to participate in this tour along with 10 Japanese tourists, and we learnt about the many uses of the coconut and the coconut palm, otherwise known as the "Tree of Life".

This tour provides a chance to meet the locals, taste the fresh coconut produce and locally grown coffee, and is topped off with a buffet lunch of traditional Philippine food. Lunch is washed down with the local coconut liqueur, and accompanied by beautiful live music from the boys in exquisite natural surroundings. The Japanese guests and I felt like VIP guests at a tropical resort ☺



GIRL'S CENTRE, VICTORIA, LAGUNA



The girls gave me a warm welcome to the Laguna centre. In between their classes and chores we played games, sang songs and read books. The girls helped me to pick up some of their language (Tagalog) and did their best to use English also. The girls are very receptive learners and an inspiration to spend time with ☺

BOY'S CENTRE, SAN ANTONIO, QUEZON

The boys impressed me with their creativity. I was lucky to be there to see one of their dance and singing performances. The younger boys patiently and diligently tested me on my recently memorised Tagalog words and were eager to learn English also. The house mothers warmly included me in their daily activities. And in between school, chores, and other activities the boys enjoyed chilling out swimming in the river – each trying to impress the others and their visitor with dives and back flips ☺



HOMESTAY, MANILA



but not like here."

My first night with my host family in Manila and we went for a walk down Bayview road. There were people sleeping on every seat and bench by the water and under all the palm trees. My host mother asked *"Do many people sleep on the streets like this in Australia?"*. I thought about Port Melbourne where my friends and family and I often go to eat Fish and Chips or walk by the beach. And could not picture any scene like this – where every vacant space had become someone's bed for the night. I answered – *"There are some homeless people in Melbourne,*

"Did you build your own house in Melbourne?" and "Do you have squatters in Melbourne?". Again, the only answer that came to mind was *"No, we didn't build our house. And, no not anything like here"*. One of the children asked - *"Do you have street children in Australia?"*. Again, *"Maybe we have some children who are homeless or unemployed – but definitely not like here"*.

The poverty I experienced in Manila was unlike anything I had ever witnessed in Australia.

At the same time the friendship and the warmth of the community was beautiful. The children taught me many games. With amazing patience they repeated over and over again the complex rhymes and patterns so that their new Australian big sister could keep up with their lightening fast pace of play. We played and laughed for hours.

My host father taught me how to cook some of the delicious food and together with neighbours and friends we opened our hearts and expanded our lungs and sang karaoke until the early hours of the morning.

It was thanks to this home stay experience where I gained some insight into the Filipino culture and society. I feel very lucky to have met such kind, beautiful and fun people 😊



MOBILE UNIT MANILA



The mobile unit is run by local youth facilitators and coordinated by Sarah one of the social workers at Bahay Tuluyan. It is an outreach program which aims to educate Manila's street children about their rights. It achieves this through creative games and activities and is well received by the children and the community. It was unforgettable experience being involved in a week of the mobile units activities – thank-you to all the staff for your assistance 😊

I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND MY HEARTFELT THANKS TO ALL THE STAFF AND CHILDREN AT BAHAY TULUYAN – Kylie Pearce 😊