

# UNV

## HK Universities Volunteer 2017



### Profile

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### Assignment

Project Support and  
Visibility in the  
International Organization  
of Migration (IOM)

### Duty Station

Hanoi, Vietnam

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## Volunteering is about connecting people and sharing love.

What we do is not to help the people, but to understand them and integrate into the community.

Some people may think that volunteering in foreign countries is something very exciting. It is true that overseas volunteering has plenty benefits, but it is also important that we do not romanticize it.

The frustrations some people have are really worth thinking - Why do we have to go so far to volunteer when we still have so many social problems unsolved in our own countries? Isn't it a waste of resources and energy to send people who do not understand the local context well and may not be able to adapt to the foreign environment to intervene the local issues?

These are also questions that I have been asking myself repeatedly before. Maybe they are somehow correct. We should let local people be able to make their own country a better place their own, as they are their own governor and they are supposed to be the one who understand their place the best.

I do agree with the above viewpoint. However, I also believe that all human beings are inter-connected. We are not just citizens of our own country, but also global citizens. We all have the responsibility to share our knowledge and skills, as well as care and love. We, as foreign volunteers, may not know the

place the most, but by exchanging our experience, ideas and thoughts that are incited by different contexts, it is believed that more inspirations could be brought to one place.

Contributing to overseas volunteering work and tackling social problems in your own country are not mutually exclusive. During volunteering, the chance of meeting different people and the exchange of culture and thinking are essential to broaden one's mindset, and one can always bring back the lessons learnt and the inspirations got in volunteering to build their own place. In the end, all we do is just to share.





## Working in IOM Vietnam

Being a UNV specializing in communications, I am able to take part in different projects. After having figured out the various fields that IOM Vietnam was working on, I chose to focus on projects related to counter human trafficking.

The journey then began.

In IOM Vietnam, I have gained incredible opportunities to get involved in a number of projects, which have greatly enhanced my knowledge about various migration issues, from labour migration, marriage migration, climate migration and so on. As I am particularly interested in the topic of human trafficking, I have been taking part in a number of projects in countering human trafficking in Vietnam.

With the guidance from my experienced supervisor and other colleagues, in the first few weeks, I have drafted the mapping report of the current countering trafficking (CT) work done by different stakeholders. This report helps raise understanding of the coverage of the present CT work and pinpoint the existing gap in current activities to guide closer cooperation among organizations to reduce overlapping working areas to maximize concerted effort.

By completing that report in the first month, I have gained a more holistic view about the CT work in Vietnam in a short period of time, which has been really useful to my work in the following months. It has also been a great accomplishment to me as my writing is up to a professional standard that

can be circulated to enhance people's understanding on how different organizations work on countering human trafficking.

Having received the extraordinary chance to take part in a field visit in Lao Cai province, I had the chance to interview victims of trafficking, field workers and government officials.

It was a really unforgettable journey. As one of the victims we were going to interview was living in a very remote area in Sa Pa, we had to ride on motorbikes and passed through very bumpy and slopy road to get there (See the photo in the middle above).

Apart from those adventurous scenes, I can still remember well the timid smile of the little girl when she saw us. She was really tough and strong. When she shared with us her trafficking experience, she neither cried nor escaped from answering our questions. Instead, she was patiently sitting there and trying her best to tell us her story despite her shyness.

In that single interview, we not only have one Vietnamese to English translation for me and other

international staff to understand, we also hired one of the local people in that village to help us interpret the local dialect to Vietnamese before our Vietnamese staff can understand and translate it to English.

Language is a huge barrier not just to international volunteers, but also to people in different parts of Vietnam. Everyone has to face it and overcome it with patience. There is no short cut.

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Other than working in the office, I also have had precious memories with my colleagues, we watched U23 football match final together and cheered for Vietnam, and hung out after work for dinner and movies.



Learning how to strike a work-life balance is essential for us to stay motivated and keep going. To do this we need friendship.





## Being UN Volunteers in Vietnam, *we are inspiration in action.*

I have found the warmest group of people in the UN in UNV Vietnam. Without them, my six-month volunteering experience would not be as wonderful. UNVs are my best friends and my family in Vietnam.

The work in our host agency is only a part of our assignment mission, another important part is to engage in the volunteering work of UNV Vietnam. During November 2017 to January 2018, we have organized 2 workshops in Danang and Hoa Binh provinces respectively on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and promoting volunteerism at the same time.

We, together with the participants from the Youth Union and other organizations in Danang, cleaned a field by removing all the weed after the workshop. This was a simple volunteering activity but also a very meaningful one as volunteers can have a chance to work something out together after 2.5 days workshop to have more interaction and concrete contribution to the community.

What was the most impressive is the enthusiasm and hospitality of the Danang youth. In the training, we tried to share our professional knowledge and skills with the local community to empower them to take the lead in their local projects to improve their society on the whole. In return, all the volunteers were so motivated by the energy the youth and the

community leaders had and gained a deeper understanding about how great volunteerism can be.

The “we” in the slogan “we are inspiration in action” is not limited to the volunteers, but all the people involved. We are each other’s inspiration, bringing together with hope and love.

Apart from the 2 training workshops, UNV has held a certain times of Inspirational Talks. I was one of the organizers for the talks. We invited guest speakers from different UN agencies, including UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP for the one held in January 2018.

We believe that everyone has a great mind inside. It is such a waste if we just limit ourselves focusing only on work but hiding our great thoughts from the others. Therefore, on behalf of UNV Vietnam, some volunteers and I decided to bring colleagues together to exchange and share their inspiration.

The genuine sharing of personal experience and thoughts about their extraordinary explorations and life journeys, as well as passions about things and people they love, are all nutrients to our working routine. Through listening to all these stories, I believe more in the power of sharing. We do not lack creativity or ideas, but what we lack is the channel to express ourselves and exchange our thoughts. Thank you UNV for teaching me such an important lesson.



## People I have met are more than like friends, they have become my family in Vietnam in the end.

By volunteering in another country, we get to understand each other more. Connections are built not by nationalities or races, but by love and trust. We respect each other's culture and values, and we learn to appreciate the differences and embrace them all.

Maybe we are so different in many ways, but I have also found how similar we are in many ways too. We are just human beings longing for connection and love. By opening up ourselves we see a bigger world, a united one, which all our differences are only what make us special but not what divide us.

*I will never cease volunteering, since this is undoubtedly the best way I have found to connect people and freely share our love.*

### **Goodbye Vietnam**

We'll meet someday again, my dear mates.