

Day 1: Dhaka Play Therapy Trip

Christopher:

Smooth arrival despite being at the back of a long visa queue and so.... into a very misty Bangladeshi morning we went....

From my room in the Jaago Foundation school I can hear the sounds of Bengali children singing, a few steps down the corridor and I'm in a reception class lesson, 25 beaming 5 year old smiles enthusiastically learning their numbers from 20 to 30! Up the stairs and there are children using algebra to work through linear equations. From the rooftop looking down 5 children are playing a version of 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' in the courtyard. The children here at Jaago are outgoing and at every turn there is a child offering their hand for a high five! They seem happy and secure and they show this through their play, they have a safe base here. The school works in a very carefully considered and well thought out way with the local Rayer Bazaar community, importantly the school operates morning and afternoon shifts with children completing either one or the other rather than enforcing full time school commitment. This trusting relationship with the local community will create a lasting change.

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I'm staying in the room with a young English volunteer, Josh who has completed a Masters in International Development and who has done research on 'street kids' in Rio. He stresses the importance of first building relationships and trust before embarking on rehabilitating 'programmes' and cites Brazil and Rio's governance as a very poor example of this. Before the world cup, laws were changed to allow police to take children away from the city centre, the city centre was where NGOs were based, had built relationships and were delivering change. Police took children away from this safe base and 'stuck' them straight into drug clinics and attempted to rehouse them. The result of this poorly planned, reactive strategy where time was not taken to build relationships, trust and a safe base caused children to run away, disappear and sadly lose any trust previously built up.

Menna:

So, our first day in crazy, chaotic, beautiful Dhaka city is coming to a close.

After a journey of 4965 miles, a brief stop in Istanbul, many movies watched, pages read, and the slowest visa queue known to man -we arrived!

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Wisdom has dictated that 'it's about the journey, and not the destination' however when we landed in Bangladesh I had to disagree. Arriving at this destination is the beginning of a whole new journey and adventure in it's own right.

Everything is bigger, louder and more overwhelming here. From the continuous sound of bells and horns, traffic chaos, glimpses of extreme poverty and suffering, and the friendliness and hospitality from everybody we have met so far - Bangladesh certainly packs a punch!

What stories we will be able to relay over the next 12 days ahead of us.... We look forward to sharing our adventure with you all.

Catriona

We're staying in Rayer Bazar - in the middle of a lively food market district. Which means stalls and stalls of beautiful brightly coloured fruit and veg, punctuated by the occasional stall of goats heads and bloody insides (slightly less appealing if you're a vegetarian like me...) It also means loads and loads of people and loads of rickshaws and loads of noise!

It felt like we had properly arrived in Dhaka once we'd all had a cup of hot, sweet chai and then piled in to some rickshaws. Me and Menna squeezed in to one with Theresa, the German volunteer we're sharing an apartment with. Amongst the many rickshaws that filled up the streets, we were the only white Western women riding in a rickshaw and needless to say we drew a lot of stares. Some of the younger men driving rickshaws looked quite wide eyed and envious of our rickshaw driver having us in the back. However I'm sure they were less envious when they saw what hard work it was getting us three up a slight hill! Even our driver had to give up and push the bike for a bit, which made us all feel really bad and really fat... We wanted to get out and help push but our driver wasn't having any of it.

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Our apartment is opposite a massive outdoor play area - which is perfectly placed for Menna and me as play therapists! It means we can very easily observe how some children play here. It's mostly boys playing cricket and the occasional game of football, it's all child led with very few adults around and there's very little conflict within or between the groups of children.

Talking of football I'm very pleased to report that the only football shirts I've spotted being worn here so far are Chelsea and Man City shirts. Some of you might believe this is a result of successful marketing campaigns in Asia by the two premierships clubs, however I think it's more to do with Dhaka residents having excellent taste in football teams...