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physiotherapy

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May 2013

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the Asia
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IN BRIEF

A NEW CHALLENGE



Having only recently returned from a six-month volunteering stint in Vietnam, Alison Francis-Cracknall, APAM, talks about her work treating the disadvantaged and those living with a disability, and how like-minded APA members can share a similar experience.

What has your role with the Lifestart Foundation (LSF) entailed?

My assignment objectives included helping the LSF to establish a free disability clinic for local, underprivileged people in the Quang Nam province of Vietnam. A large part of my time here was spent establishing two outreach therapy presences—one at a state-run homeless and disabled people's shelter in Hoi An; and the other at a vocational training centre for young people with disabilities in Da Nang.

The Lifestart Foundation Free Disability Community Centre provides people living with disabilities in central Vietnam with new and improved opportunities. The centre works directly with adults whose complex disabilities

are a result of issues such as polio, war injuries, cerebral palsy and accidents.

LSF is always looking for interested health professionals to volunteer their time to continuing this work. For me, I found it to be an incredible opportunity to try some new challenges and to make a contribution to the disability development work that is going on around the world.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of your time volunteering?

The best part of this work was meeting the people along the way and experiencing their amazing resilience. In particular, I found working with the residents of the homeless and disabled centre very humbling. Their appreciation of having someone there was enormous.

For me, I had to work through a process of deconstructing a lot of the usual ways that I would work—basically scaling everything right back to the basic essentials. Most people I worked with had limited or no education and a very different set of priorities to mine. It was

really important to be able to see life through their eyes, and understand their goals and priorities rather than imposing my own.

How much experience would be necessary for an individual to apply for this position?

At the moment, this work involves working solo—so you definitely need to be able to cope with that. I think it's suited to people who have had plenty of life experience and at least a few years work experience.

How can interested APA member go about applying for a similar role?

My assignment was an AVID (Australian Volunteers for International Development) position and I applied for this via Austraining. They have all sorts of interesting opportunities all over the world and you can find out more at volunteering.austraining.com.au.

Alison is the clinical education coordinator for the undergraduate physiotherapy program at Monash University, which was a partner organisation for the volunteering assignment.