

Andong Volunteer Association

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Hello, my name is Cassie Stratton, I am the English Coordinator of AVA or Andong Volunteers Association. This group started almost two years ago as a group of friends who shared a common compassionate heart and an idea. We have grown so much over these years thanks to the dedication and hard work of each and every one of the 'Core Group' members and volunteers with in the community.

WHO ARE WE?

We are a group of foreign and Korean teachers who love Andong and the community we live in. Our 'Core Group' is made up of highly dedicated individuals. It is together, with each other's support, that we are able to organize and hold various volunteer events and fund raisers. Our goal is to make meaningful contributions to the community through volunteering.

WHAT DO WE DO?

Our core group meets biweekly to brainstorm and oversee the organizing process. Last year we held various fundraisers such as The Downtown Fun Booth. There we had many different things to do: we did face painting, sold handmade jewelry (which we made ourselves), did hair wrapping, and there was also 'busking' performances (live music). It was an amazing experience, the likes of which had never been seen before in Andong. Before long we had many people interested in what we were doing and wanting to know why. It was with this event that we were able to begin to raise an awareness of volunteering in our town.

Last year we also did a basket raffle. All proceeds were donated to Joseph's House, an organization that provides meals for the elderly who don't have a family to care for them. Lastly, AVA held a Christmas caroling event downtown. At this event we sang Christmas carols to raise money. This money was donated to the local orphanage to assist in buying toys for Christmas.

This year, we have done similar events. We also had an Open Mic Night at a local coffee shop where local artist performed from the Korean and Native English Teachers community. Also, various activities such as a 50/50 raffle and an arts and crafts table were organized to raise money. We are currently organizing an Art Exhibition to benefit the Andong Dog Shelter.

All of our hard work of making crafts to sell, of organizing, getting permission from local councils, meetings, and marketing was to raise the much need money for many causes.

Some of these events/causes were:

Andong Volunteer Teachers:

Twice a week Korean and Native English Teachers teach together at Andong Gyeong Ah

Orphanage. Books and materials are supplied with money raised at our fund raising events.

Riverside Earth Day Clean Up:

Korean and Native English teachers, together with a handful of their students, worked hard together on Earth Day to clean up a portion of the Andong riverside.

Yeongsang Community Center Youth Community Service Project:

We are currently working with the youth of the Yeongsang area, located in Andong. AVA members realize that the future of Andong depends on its youth. Thus, it was decided that through education, inspiration and motivation of the youth we would be able to leave a more positive impact. This project aims to teach the youth how to design their own community service project. We are going through the process of facilitating a volunteer project from start to finish.

Waryong and Andong Animal Shelters:

These shelters care for many of Andong's unwanted or homeless dogs. This has also been an annual project. While there we clean cages, feed, and wash the dogs. It is a group effort and in the end we are all tired, dirty and smelling of wet dog. Though, I must admit, the hard work is also fun! We are hoping to have enough participation to make this a monthly event.

Fall Festival Gyeong An Orphanage (안동 경안신육원):

AVA hosts an annual carnival for the elementary aged students at the local orphanage. This is a fun, school carnival type event where the children can be creative and enjoy themselves. AVA members and volunteers organize various booths with many different games, activities and crafts. This allows for the children to interact with and converse with Native English Teachers outside of the classroom environment. Afterwards, we all enjoy eating pizza together with the children.

WHY WE DO IT?

There are 3 main reasons AVA carries out these events.

1. To give something back to the place where we live
Even though this may not be where we were born or where our family is, we live here. Korea, more specifically, Andong is our home, and we love it. By showing our local community we truly care about the future of Andong, we can all experience mutually positive benefits.
2. To facilitate community involvement
Many of us came to Korea to experience the wonderful culture it has to offer, but you will only touch the tip of the iceberg if you stay in your own English speaking community and go on guided tours. By immersing yourself within the culture and interacting with its members we are able to take away so much more from this experience. It is possible to facilitate a family atmosphere with the community we live in by being involved in it.
3. To change negative stereotypes some hold of the foreign community
Teachers are traditionally held in very high regard in Korean culture. It is, in fact, a culture that revolves almost entirely around education. However, sometimes deservedly and sometimes undeservedly, Koreans have come to hold mixed views of native English teachers.

We hope to negate some of these negative stereotypes by actively taking a visibly positive role within the community.

Volunteering in Korea through the creation of AVA has had a very positive impact on my life. I am very involved in the community as are all the members of AVA. This has allowed me to have learning experiences I would not have been able to otherwise have. It has also influenced my professional life. Through working closely with the community I have been able to come to a better understanding of Korean life and culture. I have been able to apply this understanding to various classroom situations. To be honest, it hasn't always been easy managing time for AVA events and my school schedule. However, I have found that the end result of my efforts more than compensate for whatever hard work I do. It's such a heartwarming feeling when I am walking on the street and some children come running up to me to give me a hug because they remember me from one of the AVA events. Or one of the community members gives me a genuine smile and wave. The members of AVA also think this to be one of the most rewarding achievements of volunteering in Andong.

HOW DOES ONE GET INVOLVED?

Last year was our first year. We had a lot of fun interacting with the community and we also learned many things. This year we changed our approach. We wanted to involve as many people from the foreign and Korean community as possible. Therefore, various committees have been formed for each event that AVA does. These committees are headed by one of the AVA Core Group members. A sign up for these committees is posted on the AVA Facebook page. Anyone interested in organizing the specified event can simply comment on the post. This has allowed for many more individuals to be involved in volunteer projects. It has also helped us to grow and added many projects and ideas of what we can contribute to Andong.

This year, we have also focused on raising the involvement of the Korean community. Meredith Stein, AVA treasurer, designed a website in English and Korean (www.andongava.com). Lee Namsoon, our Korean Coordinator, designed business cards in both languages. These changes have helped to bridge the communication gap for those of us who do not speak Korean. We have also integrated some traditional Korean games such as Tu Ho to our Downtown Fun Booth events.

In closing I would like to say that I am not writing this essay or entering this contest to gain recognition. Without the hard work and dedication of each member in our 'Core Group' AVA would not be possible. I am especially indebted to my 'other half', the Korean Coordinator, Lee Namsoon. Without her willingness and dedication, none of what we do would be possible. I therefore ask, if my essay is chosen, the consideration of the award goes to ALL of the members of AVA. The prize would go to fund future AVA volunteer events.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

May you always have enough,
Cassie S. Stratton
AVA English Coordinator

