

The H.O.P.E. to Make a Difference

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I have resided in Gyeonggi, Guri City for nearly 4 years now. Several years ago I was anxious to find an organization to help out with my skills as a coach and mentor, but with the knowledge of only survival Korean I found it nearly impossible to communicate my interest and experience at the 3 or 4 Korean boxing gyms I had found. And just as I had begun to get frustrated, at the end of summer vacation 2010, I found an article online for a Summer English Camp Workshop.

The organization, HOPE – Helping Others Prosper through English, was taking applications for Native Speaking English teachers for a weekend English workshop. However, the date of departure overlapped with my first day back to school, a Friday. But, thanks to the strong support of my school, I was given half the day off, and off I went.

Before I was qualified, I had to pass the background check and have a phone interview with the Managing Director, Ryan (Jee-sang) Yoo. Once I finished that stage, I decided perhaps I should go online and learn about the organization which I had just committed a weekend to volunteer, 4 hours south in Jeollanam Province. However, I was already sold by the warm demeanor Ryan conveyed during the interview; which is the spirit of non-profit organizations: love and kindness.

For my first HOPE experience, all of the workshop volunteer teachers gathered for an introduction at Seoul subway station and we departed to a weekend activity that none of us could've imagined. We arrived at the school that Friday afternoon and were given the warmest introduction by curious teachers, the principal and 100 ogling elementary students, and a traditional Korean band during convocation. May I remind you, this school was in a rural district without a budget for a Native Speaking English teacher, so as the first foreigners some kids had ever seen, we were more than "welcomed" to teach there.



(Haeryong Students patiently waiting)

Our group consisted of teachers from age 19 (university student) to 40+. But, we had a synergy that worked well, meeting all the needs our workshop required. As most of us had some experience teaching English as a Second Language, we did what is natural: we took a level appropriate topic, created lesson plans, add some TPR, sprinkled the lessons with smiles and had plenty of fun! We skillfully created the lesson plans during our brainstorming session on Friday night. Our workshop was all-day on Saturday.



As with most volunteer events, there is a lot of simple confusion and plenty of inquiries in the beginning, no matter how prepared the director. Once our staff got acclimated with the order of events then it became magical. The kids did their best to use what “Yeong-eo” they already knew and absorbed the newly taught information and materials well. Our trip home to Seoul had many stories. Our team camaraderie during the volleyball tourney against Haeryong’s teachers and the mud-fight at the host hotel were the best.



(2011 HOPE Summer English Camp Staff)

Some of those relationships have continued into other projects such as my first project, the HOPE 2nd Annual Clothing Drive. We have also aligned with other NPO organizations through our volunteer associates. Also, most of the volunteer teachers returned the following year, 2011, for the 2nd Annual Summer English Workshop. This is where and why my commitment to HOPE began and persists; because relationships matters.

This is my second year as project director, beginning in spring 2011. My job description as project director is to: create fundraising projects in the Greater Seoul and Gyeonggi Province communities, facilitate meetings, recruit volunteers for non-teaching projects, organize and direct events. Being a social person, I took the time to network early on since my arrival in spring 2009, and it has paid off. However, without the generosity of the many foreign-owned businesses it would be a difficult challenge; they make my job easier.

Since my tenure began, I’ve organized and directed many community and fundraising events, bringing our current directors and members together, as well as a volunteer appreciation party. It’s important to show those who donate their time and energy the love you want them to share for the causes. Without the volunteers and their selfless deeds, we couldn’t exist.

I have been thoroughly impressed by the way in which HOPE started. It was established by three Canadian English teachers and an English-speaking Korean. In 2008, they were unable to find an organization to utilize their skills as English teachers so they created one, and HOPE was born. Their principle goal was and still is to give English lessons for free to those unable to afford a hagwon or academy. The founding members from Canada have been gone for several years now, but John (Juhwan) Baek is currently heading the organization as our president.



(2008, HOPE's original founding members. Current president, John Baek, 2nd from left)

Let me expand a little on what we do and then explain the benefits for volunteers and those who receive our teaching help. HOPE offers this unique opportunity, as many other volunteer teaching organizations do, to anyone who meets the criteria. Once an applicant qualifies then we arrange a place where they can hold classes. Then we help set-up the teacher and class with the proper level teaching materials: text book for worksheets, cd-roms, white board and markers and various other supplies. Once the class and material needs are arranged then we help with recruiting students for the class. There are many tasks within each class-building project.

It's important to know that when you take on the responsibility as a volunteer, you are bound to a commitment. It's also important to realize that "no pay" doesn't mean "no work." It can be highly rewarding, spiritually and personally, but none the less it requires dedication. Our volunteers must be prepared for class and ready to meet the needs of a diverse set of students. Whereas some arrangements may be different, the tasks are still the same: be prepared and teach with passion.



(Spring 2011, HOPE Clothing Drive – Itaewon)

Our organization has provided free teaching services at up to 20 locations in the past. However, we are now in the process of increasing the number of learning centers from less than 10. HOPE also has many opportunities for volunteers to help or support our non-teaching activities, such as: seasonal clothing drives, meal service to the homeless, weekend tutoring at orphanages and providing help to other organizations. There are always others in need of a helping hand.

There are exceptional benefits besides the unseen that come along with volunteer teaching, for example: 1) Development of leadership and organizational skills, 2) Greater hands-on experience as an ESL instructor, and 3) Humanitarian efforts which add levity to your resume. Once you add this information to your resume it demonstrates a selfless commitment to a goal, which is valuable to all organizations.

But let's not forget there are a few cons, such as: 1) It may not seem feasible for your bank, account, and 2) it will take some of their time. Not to worry, there are 24 hrs in each day.



(2012 HOPE "Feed the Homeless" Volunteers)

Nevertheless, volunteer teaching gives instructors the 'feel good' that we all need; reassuring that we are doing a worthwhile deed. This concept shows the kids that the world involves more than just themselves and their immediate family or community, and that we are all part of a global community. It also enlightens them to the fact that there are people or causes worth helping; sometimes they are the people and the cause.

In my closing, I encourage everyone to give volunteering a try. To find a volunteer organization looking for help, it's easy, contact an agency to be found online, in a local newsletter or magazine. Get your free 'feel good.'

<http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/People/view?articleId=100741#pagePrint>

<http://nwww.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110728000301>

<http://teslkoreanews.com/2011/04/01/music-for-your-soul-get-involved-with-a-good-cause/>