

## Cambridge Careers Case Study: Naomi, Internship, Connected Development.

By the end of Michaelmas term in second year, I had become increasingly convinced that a career in international development was not just a fleeting interest, but a pathway that I was committed to pursuing. I had started to explore the field through my studies and involvement with CUID, but was acutely aware that I lacked the experience needed to successfully apply for jobs in a highly competitive sector. I came across Equal and Opposite online and emailed the Director to ask whether there were any incoming internship opportunities. I could never have guessed that, six months later, I would be on a plane to Thailand!



Connected Development is a social enterprise that aims to make international development cooperation more effective by sharing resources and knowledge between NGOs, introducing NGOs and grantmakers to each other, and sharing the NGOs' work with the public. Connected Development offers three-month voluntary internships, in which students are partnered with an NGO and work to provide them with advice and support. Following two interviews, I was paired with Minmahaw School in Mae Sot, Thailand. Minmahaw School provides education to 17-23 year old migrants and refugees from Myanmar, aiming to prepare them to access GED programs and decent employment.

*A view from my morning commute through Mae Sot market*

Through my internship, I worked for around 20 hours a week. My work was mostly independent, with a typical week including two Zoom meetings: one with staff at Minmahaw School, and another with the Connected Development Director. In both, we discussed progress towards goals identified at the beginning of the internship: identifying potential donors, writing fundraising proposals, developing a social media strategy and improving case study material. I also received training on key skills such as writing effective fundraising proposals. This training helped me to make an effective contribution during the internship whilst developing transferrable skills. Alongside Zoom calls, I completed a written weekly report which encouraged me to reflect on my performance in the previous week and identify areas to work on or learn about. The reporting process was useful in guiding the internship so that both myself and Minmahaw were able to benefit as much as possible from my working time.

Whilst I had agreed to work remotely, the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions enabled me to travel to Minmahaw School. Supported by university and community bursaries, I spent almost three weeks in Mae Sot. This visit which was a brilliant opportunity to work with school staff in person, which was hugely refreshing after several weeks meeting over Zoom! During my time in-country, I also interviewed students and staff to gain a greater understanding of their backgrounds and aspirations.

I used the gathered material to create social media posts and case study graphics for the school. Conducting interviews also improved my understanding of Myanmar's conflict, which I knew little about prior to the internship, whilst helping me develop essential skills such as overcoming a

language barrier and considering issues such as informed consent. As I was in the school every weekday, I had many opportunities to spend time with students, from supporting them to create presentations about their cultural identity to playing volleyball!

Beyond school hours, I visited other organisations in Mae Sot including the Borderline Collective, the Mae Tao Clinic and Kickstart Art. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of staff in sharing their work and stories, opening my eyes to the challenges faced by communities from Myanmar and the variety of organisations seeking to make a difference in the area. The time in Mae Sot challenged me to adapt to the culture and quickly build relationships in a town where I knew just a handful of people and nothing of the local languages! I have grown both professionally and personally through the internship, and loved immersing myself in day-to-day life at the school. As a result, I am exploring working abroad next year, which I had not previously considered. Aside from travel, a particular highlight hearing was that the school has received a grant for £9455 following the submission of a proposal that I wrote. This will fund ten student places at the school for the duration of an academic year.



The internship has consolidated my desire to work in international development and increased my awareness of the breadth of roles within the field. The training and careers advice provided by Connected Development has better prepared me to take the next steps towards finding further opportunities after graduation, and built the confidence to jump head-first into the sector. Reflecting on my experience, my biggest piece of advice for students looking for an internship is to be proactive and send speculative emails to organisations that interest you. You never know – there may be an incredible opportunity waiting for you!

*Stood on the border between Thailand and Myanmar, coincidentally wearing my St Catharine's College Boat Club t-shirt!*

*Minmahaw School accepts volunteers across areas including teaching (2-3 month or one-year placements) and photography. Expenses are not covered, but no direct payment to the organisation is required. Interested volunteers are welcome to get in touch.*

Connected Development: [www.connectdevelop.org.uk](http://www.connectdevelop.org.uk)

Minmahaw School: <https://minmahawschool.org/>

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