

AMT Position Statement

Orphanage Volunteering

AMT does not support, endorse or promote the practice of orphanage volunteering, otherwise known as orphanage tourism.

AMT's position is consistent with major international child welfare groups such as the Better Care Network, UNICEF, Save the Children and the ChildSafe network.

Decades of global research has highlighted many adverse impacts of residential care (orphanages) on the development of children, including personality disorders, growth and speech delays, and an impaired ability to re-enter society later in life.¹ For the last half century, child development specialists have recognised that residential institutions consistently fail to meet children's developmental needs for attachment, acculturation and social integration.²

Orphanages often turn to international donors and volunteers to raise money. Short-term volunteers who have not undergone background checks are frequently given access to children, exposing children to potential abuse. There have been cases in Cambodia of orphanage leadership sexually exploiting children in their care.³

The high turnover of caregivers leads children to form emotional connections with different adults. When volunteers leave, these bonds are broken and children experience abandonment once again.⁴

Well-intentioned tourists are directly contributing to the increasing institutionalisation of children. Data from developing nations such as Cambodia shows that the number of orphans and orphanages has risen in line with increases in Western tourism/voluntourism. Since 2005, Cambodia has seen a 75 per cent increase in the number of residential care facilities, with 269 residential care facilities housing 11,945 children in 2010. Government statistics demonstrate that over the past five years, 44 per cent of children who were placed in residential care were brought by their parents or extended family, and 61 per cent of children who left residential care were reunited with their parents or extended family.⁵

AMT recommends that massage therapists focus their volunteer efforts on initiatives that support communities and aim at keeping children within their families and kinship groups.



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1. Government of Cambodia, *With the best intentions ... A study of attitudes towards residential care in Cambodia*, page 8, http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/Study_Attitudes_towards_RC-English.pdf, accessed 17 July 2015.

2. Williamson, J. *A Family Is for a Lifetime: Part I. A discussion of the need for family care for children impacted by HIV/AIDS, Part II: An annotated bibliography*, submitted to the U.S. Agency for International Development Office of HIV/AIDS by The Synergy Project of TvT Global Health and Development Strategies, March 2004, available at http://www.crin.org/docs/AFamilyForALifetimeVersion_1March04.pdf, accessed 17 July 2015.

3. Carmichael, R. "UNICEF Concern Prompts Cambodian Investigation of Orphanages", *Voice of America*, March 22, 2011.

4. Williamson, A. and Greenberg, A. *Families, Not Orphanages* (Better Care Network, 2010).

5. Cambodian Government Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, *Alternative Care Database, 2005-2009*.