

Complete IE3 Reporting Questions: Sovann Komar 2014

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Question Set 1:

1) What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

When I first arrived at Sovann Komar, I couldn't believe how beautiful and pristine the village was compared to many other parts of Phnom Penh. I was immediately greeted by all of the teachers and staff members, all of whom made me feel extremely welcomed. I honestly wasn't expecting such a wonderful facility, as I've done work at a previous orphanage that wasn't nearly as aesthetically pleasing. The quality of care among the children at Sovann Komar also largely exceeded my previous expectations. You can definitely tell that each child, whether they belong to Sovann Komar or are from outside the village, is deeply cared for by each teacher and staff member. In fact, many of the staff members at Sovann Komar have adopted the students into their houses; providing them with love and support after being tragically orphaned. Within the school, there's also an emphasis on play and making learning fun, which I feel to be very effective, as the students are incredibly intelligent and have great English speaking skills.

My work at Sovann Komar, so far, matches my expectations for the most part. I knew from reading past reports and talking to former interns that communication at the facility can be difficult at times (as is to be expected) and the pace of work can be slower than what we're used to in the U.S. I found this to be true my first couple of weeks here, but it has slowly gotten less difficult over time. My scope of work for the first three weeks included planning the Summer

program for all the students from morning until afternoon, then I taught two English classes from 2-5pm. Although English teaching isn't necessarily what I wanted to do before coming to Sovann Komar, I very much appreciate having the opportunity to bond with many of the teachers and students. While I felt at the beginning that I had too much free time, I've been able to quickly find my stride and keep busy. Also, I have to admit that I was a bit overwhelmed when they told me I would have to design a 13 day long program around a health care topic of my choice, completely alone and with minimal direction. This has been the most difficult part of my work, as I've had some struggles with communicating my chosen topics and/or activities. At first, I found it difficult to figure out how to effectively teach nutrition and personal hygiene to such a huge group of students; students who range from age 3-13 and have varying degrees of English proficiency. However, I've found that simpler is better and have chosen to primarily use power points with many pictures, video clips and different games/activities.

Overall, despite some minor difficulties, I've been having a great learning experience here at Sovann Komar so far. In particular, I've enjoyed learning about what is and isn't effective when teaching health topics to children. My goal as a Public Health student has always been to gain as much experience serving underserved and/or underprivileged communities; therefore, being at Sovann Komar has definitely allowed me to fulfill that goal. I've also been provided with the rare opportunity to witness firsthand how public health and primary care, education, and a loving family can greatly improve the lives of orphaned children. I can already tell that my experiences here will forever have a profound effect on my life and future career in public health and/or medicine.

2) What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

I would say the thing that stood out most to me upon my arrival was how easy it was to navigate the Phnom Penh airport, obtain my VISA and collect my luggage. The entire process only took my 20 minutes or so, which was very unexpected for me. The second thing that stood out to me was definitely the heat and humidity. Although I came to Cambodia during the rainy season, it still hasn't dropped below 90 degrees since I've been here. The third would be how chaotic it can be in the city. Although I've traveled to Delhi, which is much more densely populated and chaotic than Phnom Penh, I had forgotten what it felt like to be in a city where there are minimal traffic laws, tons of people everywhere and loud/interesting noises at all hours of the night. However, these are the elements that I've grown to appreciate about living in Phnom Penh. I can tell that I'll definitely be feeling under stimulated when it's time to go back home to Washington.

3) What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety prior to coming to Phnom Penh was the thought of being on my own for 10 weeks. I had already lived and volunteered with two of my friends in India for two months, so I wasn't particularly scared of being in a foreign environment. However, I was definitely anxious about braving the new city by myself. Coming from someone who has never lived or traveled alone, I was worried that it would be hard to fully integrate myself into the culture. Luckily, the previous intern (Jody) and her husband have been here for the first half of my stay. They've both been a great support for me, as they've taught me to navigate the city, where the essential places are (e.g. the bank, the grocery store, markets, restaurants, etc.) and have helped me to settle in well. Even without them, however, I still believe I would have been

able to adjust to living here, but maybe not as quickly. Since the people in Cambodia are incredibly friendly and accommodating, it's been easy for me to make other friends and navigate around the city. Of course I still have moments where I miss certain aspects of being home, but that's normal when living abroad. I've actually learned to embrace being alone, as it's allowed me to stay focused on my work here and has also allowed time for self-reflection.

Question set 2:

1) How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

As of right now, I've completed my first week of the kids Summer program. Since the program has started, I've spent a lot less time teaching English and more time teaching topics that relate to my major (public health). While teaching 4-6 classes a day has been exhausting, I've thoroughly enjoyed being able to focus my time and energy on teaching the kids about personal hygiene and nutrition. The communication part has still been somewhat difficult for me at times and I've had to change my initial plan quite a bit. Since I wasn't fully aware of my teaching schedule and a lot of other details until after the program began, it's made the initial process a bit more difficult. However, I still feel like the program is going very well, even if it's evolved throughout the week. Professionally speaking, I also appreciate that I've been able to gain the experience of independently creating a program that helps kids to learn healthy habits. In an environment where emphasis isn't always placed on healthy eating, teeth brushing, etc., I feel like I'm making a positive impression on the kids. In addition, since teaching the Summer

program, I've gotten to work with almost every class and teacher. This has been great because it's allowed me to become familiar with more of the students and teachers at Sovann Komar.

During the next half of my internship I would like to continue getting to know everyone at Sovann Komar, particularly the students who live here. Since the classes I've been teaching (before Summer program) have been in the nursery and kindergarten classes, I haven't gotten a chance to become as acquainted with the village students. The initial 50-60 students who were adopted into Sovann Komar about 10 years ago are all in the older classes, so the kids I've been primarily working with live outside the village. Therefore, I hope to be teaching more of the older Sovann Komar students during the second half of my stay. Additionally, I'm also hoping that I'll be able to find another public health related project to work on after the Summer program is finished

2) How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

While traveling and working abroad anywhere, I've learned that it's important to be realistic when it comes to personal goals. Luckily, I came to Sovann Komar with very simple personal goals and expectations because I know they almost always evolve. Personally, my goals have been to work on my cross-cultural communication skills, build meaningful relationships with staff and students, and to be able to contribute most where I am needed. Overall, I feel like I've been able to achieve most of these goals. However, I think that, like many people traveling to a foreign country, I need to continue strengthening my cross-cultural communication skills. While being at Sovann Komar, I've noticed that I've sometimes had

difficulty communicating my plans and ideas. Although this has led to small frustrations on my part, I've realized that learning how to communicate in a foreign workplace takes time.

Therefore, I would like to continue working on my communication skills while I'm here.

3) How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

Cross-culturally, I've been continuing to work on my communication skills (as mentioned above). This was one of my major goals when coming to Sovann Komar because I plan to work abroad more once I'm finished with my schooling. Even if this has proven difficult at times, I'm incredibly grateful for the experiences here that have helped to strengthen those skills.

Additionally, both at work and outside of work, I've had a vast amount of great experiences. So far, my greatest experiences at Sovann Komar have included teaching and playing with the kids. I love coming to work and having all the students so happy to see me, as it truly makes every day here enjoyable. Last week, I was also able to organize a trip to the market with a group of students as part of the Summer program I've designed. There, the students were broken up into small groups, where we then advised them to pick out 2 or 3 healthy foods of their choice. It was SO interesting to see the variation of healthy foods that the children picked out, which included both foods that are popular in Cambodia, as well as in Western countries.

Outside of work, I've also had a lot of really great cultural experiences and plan on having many more. I recently traveled with a couple of my friends on one of our three day weekends here to Kampot- a charming city about 3 hours outside of Phnom Penh. It's a much more relaxed area with a lot of greenery, mountains and livestock, which is almost completely opposite of Phnom Penh. There, we rode bikes around the countryside and took a 4 hour tuk tuk

ride to a cave, the pepper fields (since Kampot is famous for its pepper), a “secret lake” and to the salt fields. We stayed in a bungalow located almost right on the water where we relaxed, ate delicious food, drank fresh smoothies, kayaked and watched the sun set every night. Since the staff at Sovann Komar encourage volunteers and interns to experience Cambodian culture and it’s national monuments, they’re more than willing to give you a Friday or Monday off every once in a while. Therefore, in a few weeks I plan on traveling to Siem Reap with a friend to experience Angkor Wat. I can’t wait!

Question Set 3:

1) Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

Monday through Friday, my day starts fairly early. I wake up at about 6:30am, shower, make breakfast and if I have time, run down to the street corner to get coffee. Between 7:30-7:45am, the driver (Mr. Long) picks me up from the guesthouse to take me to Sovann Komar. Depending on traffic, we usually arrive there anywhere between 8:00-8:30am. During the first three weeks, I spent the mornings planning for the kids Summer program (which I’ve based around nutrition and personal hygiene) and then taught English to the three nursery classes and kindergarten class from 2:30-4:45pm. However, now that the Summer program has started, my days have been much more hectic. On Mondays and Tuesdays, I immediately start teaching the older classes (grades 3-6) from 8:00-11:00am and then again from 2:00-4:45pm (note: in Cambodia, everyone eats lunch and rests from 12pm-2pm, but I usually end up doing work at this time). On Wednesdays and Thursdays, I teach the 2nd and 3rd grade classes from 9:00am-11:00am, then Kindergarten and grade 1 after lunch from 2:30pm-4:45pm. On Fridays I

teach one of the nursery classes from 8:30am-9:30am. When I'm done at 9:30am, we've also been taking a group of kids to the market at 9:30am to pick out "healthy" foods as a part of the Summer program. After lunch, I then finish off the week with teaching the last two nursery classes from 2:30pm-4:45pm. In total, I've ended up teaching 23 classes a week during the Summer program.

Once I arrive home from work around 5:30pm, I'm typically pretty exhausted. I usually come home and unwind a bit and then meet friends for dinner or happy hour if I'm feeling up to it. Luckily, the guesthouse has a plethora of amazing restaurants (Indian, Japanese, Western- you name it!) within a block or two, so I don't have to expend too much energy finding food. I then come home and do a bit of lesson planning and/or school work and go to bed. On the weekends, however, I try to relax a bit and also take time to work on additional school work. My weekend activities typically involve going shopping at one of the many markets, hanging out on the riverside or going to cafes/restaurants. I've even made it a routine to get a massage every weekend since they're only \$6! From what I've heard, Cambodia has a lot of holidays during the year, but not as many in the Summer. Therefore, it's been difficult for me to find time to travel much on the weekends. However, the staff at Sovann Komar are incredibly understanding and will be giving me two extra days off to go to Siem Reap for a weekend in August. Overall, it probably would have been beneficial to allow myself an extra week before or after my internship to explore Cambodia.

2) Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

The guesthouse I've been living in, overall, has been adequate. I feel very safe here, as there's always someone monitoring the entrance. The apartments are also fully furnished and have decent wifi, as well as laundry and light house cleaning services. Mr. Sna and the other staff members are also very friendly. Compared to my friend's apartment in the same guesthouse, however, my room is not as good. Since \$450 a month is quite expensive for Cambodia, I would expect to have a room as decent as the others. Since my room is so large, the air conditioning doesn't circulate as well, which makes it incredibly hot and humid inside my kitchen and bathroom. As a result, this makes my room more favorable to bugs, mold, etc. Because of this, I've had a major bug problem and often wake up with bites all over my legs. Also, around the guesthouse can be very noisy since it's near a lot of bars and clubs. I came at a rather unfortunate time since there's both construction going on outside my apartment window, as well as World Cup games. This made it difficult to sleep for the first month because many people would gather at the sports bar outside of my apartment anywhere between 12am-3am to watch the game, then the construction would start at 5:30am. In addition, there's live music and karaoke at the bars, which sometimes plays all days of the week. While the area itself has a lot of perks (e.g. is at a convenient location, safe and close to restaurants), I feel like it might be more suitable for travelers who don't have to be up early for work.

3) Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc.? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

As far as my finances go, I've been spending a bit less money than expected. While flying to Cambodia can be expensive, buying in Cambodia is incredibly cheap! A typical meal

for me ranges anywhere between \$3-\$8 and I get an iced coffee every day for only 50 cents. Of course there are fancier restaurants and shopping malls, but I choose to buy most of my food and goods from the local markets and less expensive restaurants. However, it's important to note that Western type foods such as cereal, peanut butter, etc., are very expensive here. Since foreigners are typically the only people that eat breakfast foods, the prices range anywhere between \$6-\$12 for a package of oatmeal, a box of cereal or granola. Therefore, I advise packing some of these foods if possible. Otherwise, it's much cheaper to eat a Khmer style breakfast such as fried rice, noodles, soup and eggs in the morning. The local markets (such as the Russian, Kandal or Central markets) compared to other places are also great for buying gifts and produce. I tend to spend only around \$5-\$10 a week on produce from the markets, but if I go to the Lucky's grocery store I usually spend \$15-\$20 on food a week.

Recreation and travel can also be rather cheap in Cambodia. In the city, there are \$5 boat rides, tours by tuk tuk (ranging from \$10-\$20 for the entire day), \$6 massages and lots of nice restaurants that play free live music and have a great happy hour. If you want to get away for a day or weekend, bus rides are also inexpensive- ranging from \$8-\$20 depending on where you want to go and if you want a nicer bus. When going to Kampot, which is about 3 hours away from Phnom Penh, the ticket for a nicer bus (e.g. air conditioned, movie options and less of a bumpy ride) only cost \$16 roundtrip. There are also many comfortable and affordable bungalows and hostels around Cambodia, which typically range from \$4-\$10 a night. On a weekend excursion, I usually spend roughly \$40-\$60 total on transportation, two nights in a bungalow, food and going on tours. You can basically make recreation and travel as cheap or as expensive as you want it, which is great.

4) Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

During the week, a driver at Sovann Komar takes me to and from work, which has seemed to work perfectly. On my free time, however, I usually travel around the city by tuk tuk. While some tuk tuk drivers can be overpriced, I've found a regular driver named Mr. Koy who is very reliable and affordable. Using this method of transportation can be tricky at times because some tuk tuk drivers can't always understand English or will charge extra to foreigners. This is why it's always important to negotiate a price before getting in a tuk tuk and to make sure that they understand where you want to go. Otherwise, you could be stuck getting lost or overcharged. I have friends here who also travel regularly using a moto driver, which is typically cheaper than a tuk tuk. I've only used a moto a couple times, but prefer a tuk tuk because they feel a bit safer and don't go as fast. There's also the option of renting motos and bicycles to ride, but the traffic can be a bit crazy.

As far as traveling outside of city, the best option is definitely by bus. There are many different places around Phnom Penh to purchase affordable bus tickets. I used a company called Giant Ibis to get to Kampot, which was very enjoyable! In my opinion, it's better not to use the cheapest option (which is usually about \$6-\$9) because they're often not air conditioned, smaller and the ride can be much bumpier. Since many of the roads to destination places are unpaved, it's a lot more comfortable to take a larger, more expensive bus. There are bus options all over Cambodia (e.g. to places like Siem Reap, Kampot, Kep, Battambang, etc.), many of which only

take only 3-7 hours to get to. If you every feel like traveling to neighboring Vietnam or Thailand, there are many bus companies that will take you there as well. I would definitely recommend traveling as much within Cambodia as possible. In particular, Kep and Kampot are only three hours away, and are much more relaxing than Phnom Penh. Angkor Watt in Siem Reap is also a must-see while staying in Cambodia. Within the city, there are many temples to visit, the national museum and Toul Sleng (the genocide museum).

Question set # 4:

1) Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

As a public health major, we learn an immense amount about the social determinants of health, as well as health issues within developing countries. Therefore, when I arrived in Cambodia and started working at Sovann Komar, I felt prepared for the types of things I would be seeing and experiencing. As far as teaching the students, my coursework didn't exactly provide much preparation, as I've only been teaching basic health and nutrition practices and English classes. Since my lessons included things like teaching students how to properly brush their teeth, wash their hands and unhealthy vs. healthy foods, I don't feel like I actually had to use much of my more advanced public health knowledge. However, it's still been an incredible learning experience because I've now learned how to effectively create health curricula for children, despite there being a language barrier and some cultural differences. For my last few weeks here, I've only been teaching English to the kids who live at Sovann Komar since the students outside the village are on Summer break. While this isn't related to my major, it's still been great getting to know the kids better and learning more about how the organization works.

2) Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

I would say that a majority of my misunderstandings have been related more to the language barrier rather than cultural differences, but it could also be a combination of both. At work when I was preparing for my Summer program, I found it really difficult to get any sort of direction or help. When it came time for the program to begin, I still hadn't been able to get an answer as to what my teaching schedule was going to be like or how many students I would have to prepare materials for. By the time I did get my schedule on the day the program was supposed to start, I realized that the curriculum and schedule I had created were no longer fully applicable. Based on past experiences from volunteers and interns, as well as what I had discussed with the principal, I previously thought I would be giving my curriculum and materials to all of the teachers for them to teach and then I would travel around to the classrooms to help facilitate. Because of this, I had created a detailed day-by-day schedule and divided the activities up among the different age groups. However, the schedule I was provided with had me teaching some classes only twice a week and others only once a week. Therefore, I ended up having to omit a lot of my activities and some of my power points due to having minimal time with certain classes. In the end, everything worked out, but I ended up having to go more with "the flow" rather than what I had originally planned.

3) Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

I've learned many things about myself through my experiences here in Cambodia. As

mentioned in a previous question, I was terrified to travel and live in a foreign country by myself, as I thought it would be difficult to make friends or navigate. After being here for almost 10 weeks, however, I've been completely surprised as to how much I've been able to accomplish by myself. Not only have I been able to flourish at my internship site, but I've also made many great friends and have been able to travel around a bit. Being here and working at Sovann Komar, most of all, has taught me how to be flexible and to understand that not everything in life goes as planned. Because of my experience here, I've been able to independently develop health curricula and teach over 200 students healthy habits, as well as teach five English classes a day without a translator or outside help. Also, I've been able to create friendships with some of the greatest people. Overall, I've learned that I indeed can brave a foreign country by myself and can actually flourish.

Question Set # 5:

2) Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you are gaining for the job search when you graduate. Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below.

Accomplishments:

- 1) Figuring out what is and isn't effective when developing and delivering health curricula to children
- 2) Learning how to balance work with extracurricular activities such as sight seeing, shopping, visiting friends, etc.
- 3) Being able to live and thrive on my own in a foreign country

4) Being able to communicate more effectively in a cross-cultural setting

2) After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:

1) Figuring out what is and isn't effective when developing and delivering health curricula to children:

- **Outline the context of the situation:**

My responsibility at Sovann Komar was to teach English and to also develop a Summer program for the 200+ students around the topics of personal hygiene and nutrition. I then had to deliver my topics to each class via powerpoint, videos, worksheets and other various activities with the help of the teachers.

- **Describe any challenges you faced**

As described in previous questions, the challenges I faced were mostly within the development of the program curriculum, as I often had no sense of direction. I didn't know how many kids total I would be teaching, the age groups and didn't have any sort of schedule. Therefore, this made the process of creating the Summer program a bit overwhelming for the first few weeks. However, although the program didn't completely go as planned, I was still able to make it work.

- **Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges**

To overcome these challenges, I would often out to many different people for help such as Sinoun, Susan and past interns. I then created a detailed schedule and curriculum, which ended up evolving immensely once the Summer program actually began. Once I was able to take a step back and realize that not

everything was going to go according to plan, I was able to successfully run the program. In my opinion, my ability to improvise and be creative was what helped me overcome a lot of my challenges.

2) Being able to live and thrive on my own in a foreign country

- **Outline the context of the situation:**

As also mentioned in a few previous questions, I had a lot of anxiety about traveling to a foreign country by myself. I was worried about living alone, not being able to navigate the city by myself and not being able to make friends easily. I had never lived or traveled alone before, therefore, I was rather nervous before leaving.

- **Describe any challenges you faced**

Back home, I'm constantly surrounded by people and don't spend much time alone. Because of this, I initially struggled quite a bit with feeling homesick and missing my friends/family.

- **Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges**

Since there was a previous intern still living in Phnom Penh (Jody), she helped to alleviate some of these feelings. Also, once I was able to get used to the city and culture, I felt less anxious about being alone. What helped me the most was figuring out a routine such as becoming a regular at restaurants and coffee shops, finding my favorite markets and even a regular tuk tuk driver. Over the span of ten weeks, I've actually begun cherishing my alone time. I've even made a lot of friends along the way.

3) Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

Working at Sovann Komar has made me realize how much differently Westerners operate in the work space. Often times in the U.S., we're pressured to work diligently and to always be concise. However, it's much more relaxed in Cambodia. There's a two hour "rest" period from 12pm-2pm, you rarely ever hear people raise their voice or engage in confrontation, and directions aren't always as clear. This made it a bit difficult at first, as I've been conditioned to constantly follow directions and to get things done as fast as possible. While I had some idea of the workplace culture prior to coming to Cambodia, I still couldn't help but feel stressed when I was unable to obtain concrete directions and answers to my questions. Despite these challenges, however, I was able to find my stride successfully complete the internship. After a month of being here, I was even able to learn how to relax during the two hour rest period rather than do additional work.

4) What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

Living in Cambodia, specifically in Phnom Penh, can be overwhelming at times, but is nonetheless a great place. While the city is incredibly busy and crowded, it also provides a lot of perks for foreigners. Since there are many expats and foreigners that travel/live in the city, many places are catered towards them. For example, a lot of the restaurants/coffee shops in Phnom Penh are safe to eat at and even use clean, filtered water, have free wifi, etc. There's also many grocery stores, shopping centers, bars and places to see live performances. Because of this, I

haven't truly felt like there's anything I've been lacking while living in this area. If I would have known these things ahead of time, I probably would have packed a lot less.

When traveling outside the city, however, it provides a much different experience, as 80% of the Cambodian population lives rurally. In those areas, you see much more farming, crops, greenery and livestock. Unfortunately, it's also in the rural areas that you typically see more poverty and illness. Seeing both sides of Cambodia is important, but can feel conflicting at times. I've often found it difficult to grasp how there can be so much glitz and glamor in one area and then an immense amount of poverty within the same vicinity. For people who haven't previously experienced these types of places, I would advise talking to recent expats and other people who have traveled here beforehand. From what I've heard, Cambodia has been changing rather quickly.

My advice before interning at Sovann Komar would be to omit any concrete expectations or plans regarding your work at the organization. Cambodians take a much more relaxed approach to work, which definitely takes time to adjust to. It's important to understand that while it may sometimes seem negative from a Westerners point of view, there's actually a great deal of positivity in taking a step back to breathe and reflect. By dropping some of the expectations beforehand, it helps to avoid any excess stress that comes along with working in a foreign environment. Also, another important thing to note is that while it's typical for Westerners to operate at a fast pace and to expect concrete directions regarding projects/work, it's not always commonplace in Cambodia. There will be many times when you become frustrated because there's absolutely no direction or sense of organization, which is completely

normal. However, learning to overcome these situations teaches you how to work independently and in a foreign setting.

Also- be prepared to also spend time with some of the most special, spectacular children EVER.