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Thread Together – Sydney, Australia

<https://australiainternshipblog.wordpress.com/>

Reporting Questions, Set #1

1. First Impressions:

- **What have been your initial impressions of your host organization/work site?**

My first impression of my internship site was basically what I had expected, an office space for office work and a warehouse for sorting and packing the clothing. I am very pleased with the relaxed way we get things done at my internship site. I feel welcomed and comfortable while talking to my boss, manager, and other interns. Overall, Thread Together made a very good first impression on me.

- **Provide a brief overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing.**

I am interning at a not for profit agency which provides clothing to disadvantaged communities. My first day, I spent most of my time taking photos of clothing items to be uploaded onto their website. My second day, I spent the morning organizing clothing in the warehouse and in the afternoon, I went with a few other interns to a shop that Thread Together runs where people from a variety of charities can bring in a voucher in exchange for brand new clothing. Being at the shop was very eye-opening and rewarding. I felt like I was able to help individuals chose clothing that fit their size and style. The third day, I spent the morning sorting clothing again but

in the afternoon went with one coworker to a private school in Sydney where the year 9 girls helped pick out and pack outfits for women in need. This was a great opportunity because I felt like I was able to teach these girls about people who are less fortunate than them and the importance in helping others. I think my work will vary a lot in the day to day, as it already does, but I think that makes it more interesting and more beneficial even. I feel like I can make a positive difference in people's lives with the work I'm doing, even if it's just a small impact.

- **How does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?**

The work matches my expectations pretty much exactly. I hope I will get the opportunity to work with younger children as time goes on. My boss did mention a program Thread Together puts together for children to volunteer while they are on holiday so I look forward to that. Otherwise, it matches my goals quite well overall. My main goal is to help children and families in need and by providing them with high quality clothing and kind, open-minded conversations, I think I am already taking the steps to reaching that goal.

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

Probably the cars driving on the opposite side of the road as well as peoples accents. Upon my arrival to my living accommodation, unfortunately, I was disappointed. I immediately figured I wouldn't end up making any friends as my bedroom is very isolated and there is no shared living area only a shared kitchen. However, a couple days in I met a group of very kind young women who took me in as a friend. I also quickly made friends at my internship site upon arrival there, Australians are very nice and laid back and I really appreciate that here.

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

My greatest anxiety before leaving was being alone and it seemed to come true the first two days as I did not meet anyone who seemed interested in becoming my friend. I ate alone, I explored the city alone, and I just felt alone. Until Sunday night when I cooked in the kitchen at my accommodation and made friends with a group of young women who were eating in there as well. So now, on Wednesday, I feel the opposite of alone. I actually am glad to be getting some alone time right now to work on this. In about an hour, I will be out at dinner with my new friends and tomorrow I will work and then go out with my coworkers for dinner and drinks. I feel very grateful now. I feel settled in, I feel welcomed, and it feels good.

Question Set #2

1. Professional Goals:

- How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit?

Things are going wonderful. I have begun to get involved in several programs at my internship site including kids giving back and OOSH (out of school holiday), which are programs where children and teens come into the warehouse to volunteer and learn about the organization. I now know how the non-profit organization runs and I know that it's impossible to be successful without volunteers so it's awesome to see young people stepping in to help out their community.

- How does this work align with your professional goals that you set for yourself?

My professional goals were to gain knowledge about human services and community resources in Australia. I think this work aligns with the goals that I set for myself, but not in the way that I had expected. In my previous internship, at an adoption agency in the U.S., I learned a lot about policy and that's what I was expecting here. However, I've been learning more about the importance of non-profits and helping people in need. I am learning that, similar to the states, Australian human service organizations rely on each other as referrals. Overall, I think my internship does align with my professional goals.

- What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

I want to help lead the activities in the programs I wrote about above. I would like to feel like I have made a difference in people's lives, even if it's a small difference. Basically, I want to help people feel like they matter.

2. Personal Goals:

- How are things going relative to your personal goals?

I think things are going well in relation to my personal goals. My main goal was to step out of my comfort zone, try new things, and become more autonomous. I was definitely out of my comfort zone my first weekend here, specifically in my accommodation. But now, since I've settled in, I'm feeling a lot more comfortable. I haven't really tried anything new, I think it's time for me to try vegemite and other cool things such as sky diving!

- In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand?

I think I have made progress in being more autonomous. While living in the states, I would often ask my parents for advice on big decisions but I haven't been doing that here. For example, I got invited to go to Melbourne with some girls in my housing accommodation and I paid for the ticket and hostel without asking my parents what they thought beforehand. I do think I could be more adventurous though and really step out of my comfort zone more than I have thus far.

- What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

I want to make sure that I spend quality, genuine time with an Australian. I really want to learn about Australia, Australian culture, and history from an Australian. I feel like the best way to do this is to make an Australian friend who is around my age.

3. Cross-Cultural Goals:

- How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals?

My cross-cultural goal was to enhance my knowledge and appreciation of Australian Culture. This is something I have definitely been doing. I love listening to Australians use their slang and talk about their holidays, etc.

- What cultural experiences have stood out to you so far?

The fact that Australians walk and drive on the LEFT. Also, all of the slang that they actually use. Some words are even completely different. For example, arugula is called rockets, strollers are called prams, and carts are called trolleys. The food is something else that has stood out, it's not as simple as food in the U.S. I think I've done a good job so far at writing down the differences in culture that I notice.

- What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

Well, I've already seen wild Kangaroos and Koalas which were one of the top things I wanted to experience. I would also love to snorkel in the great barrier reef or even try surfing since a lot of Australians surf from a very young age. I also want to experience driving on the left, just to see what it's like.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life:

- What is your work schedule like?

My typical work day starts around 9:30 am and ends around 3:30 pm. Every day is different. Some days we spend filling orders, packing boxes, and shipping them out. Other days we run programs where we have groups of volunteers coming in to assist us (this is also part of how Thread Together makes money, the programs pay to spend the day there). And twice a week for two hours each, I spend at the Addison Shop where I help people in need choose quality clothing that fits them well. Every day is different and I am grateful for that.

- What activities and tasks are you doing day-to-day?

As it needs to be done, I spend time sorting and boxing clothing to ship out in the warehouse. I help with the programs by engaging with the volunteers and leading activities such as making and packing food to bring to people in need. When at the Addison, I sort and organize clothes while also helping people find outfits that fit and represent them.

- What do you do after work?

If I get off work early, I do my best to spend the rest of the daylight by exploring parts of Sydney that I have not seen yet, usually visiting parks or new restaurants. If I get off work on the normal time or later, I usually just head home and spend the afternoon relaxing, hanging out with my roommate, or cleaning and doing homework.

- How do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

I find it quite easy. As my work ends typically around 3:30, I feel I have a good amount of time to explore during the week and then during the weekends I always try to travel a little bit farther. My boss has also made it clear that if I ever want to take a couple days off to go on a short holiday, he is more than willing to accommodate so that feels reassuring.

2. Housing:

- What is your living situation like?

I just moved. I was living in a student accommodation on Chalmers lodge up until this past week. I wasn't planning on moving but my coworker/friend had a roommate who was moving out and since her cute 2 bedroom, 2 bath apartment cost exactly the same as I was paying at Chalmers, I decided to go through with the move. Now, since I'm feeling mostly settled in this new place I am very pleased with my living situation.

- Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead?

Yes, Chalmers lodge was in a great location but it just wasn't worth the price. I moved ten minutes south (which is closer to my work) and am paying the same amount for a much better living situation. If I had had the resources to find an apartment such as the one I'm in now, I

would have done so. However, getting accommodation through IDU (Internships Down Under) was convenient and seemingly cheap.

- If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

Flatmates.com is an Australian website where you can find roommates and you may be able to find a nice roommate, in a nice apartment, nice location for the same price as one of the provided accommodations. Also, get to know people at work and in your internship program because I feel I had an easier time making friends with these people rather than those living at the Chalmers accommodation.

3. Finances:

- How is your budget working out for you?

Unfortunately, I am struggling with my budget a bit. However, I am going to receive my bond back shortly from my old accommodation and I have also begun babysitting for extra spending money.

- Are you spending more or less than what you expected?

I am spending more than I wanted to but I'm not overspending. I just want to work to make extra money so I can enjoy the fun things (grabbing a drink, doing a little shopping, etc.)

- How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc?

I spend about \$70 AUD on food per week, which I feel is pretty average. For fun/recreation I probably spend about \$20-50 per week depending on how I spend the weekend. On travel, using my opal card I spend about \$30 dollars per week. I am lucky to now have a roommate who occasionally gets to borrow her boyfriend's car, in which case, I save money on travel.

- What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

I would have saved up more funds before coming here. I have enough to cover rent and food but

I wish I would have more money to travel and spend on recreational activities.

4. Travel and Transportation:

- How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice?

I typically get around via bus and walking. I am very satisfied with this choice as it is an easy and quick way to get around. I occasionally take the train as well, depending on where I'm traveling.

- Would you recommend other options?

No, I think public transport in Sydney is great and the easiest way to get around.

- Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on your time off? How do you manage that?

Yes, as I mentioned earlier, I feel I balance my work and personal life quite well. I manage time to explore because I get off work in the afternoon and still have a couple hours of daylight to spare. I also typically have weekends free to travel and visit beaches, etc. My babysitting work has so far only been evening jobs so it has worked out very nicely.

- Where do you recommend exploring?

I would recommend exploring the beaches of Sydney (eastern beaches, northern beaches, and even the beaches down in Royal National Park). I would also recommend exploring the heart of the city (Opera house, Harbour Bridge, the rocks, Darling Harbour). I would also recommend the zoos (Taronga and Featherdale wildlife). If you like wine, I would recommend taking a visit to the Hunter Valley.

Question Set #4

1. Professional Learning: Describe the workplace culture at your host organization.

How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

Compared to many U.S. work places I've experienced, this culture is very laid back. Our team gets the necessary work completed but we take our time to do so and we never work overtime. It's also quite different in terms of behavioral norms. For example, I feel comfortable swearing in front of my coworkers and manager, I feel comfortable talking about my personal life, as do the others I work with. We play rap and pop music as we do the work in the warehouse. It's a very open environment but the work is hard and sometimes I feel like I'm just free labor but other days, I feel like I'm truly gaining valuable experience here.

• What parts of your work have you enjoyed the most? Is there any part of your work that you find particularly challenging?

I really enjoy spending my time at the Addison shop, which also happens to be the most challenging part of the work. As the rest of the time, I mostly spend packing and sorting clothing. The Addison shop is where people in need who are associated with our partners come in with a voucher in exchange for three brand new outfits. This is the most rewarding part of the work I do here as I am actually able to help people pick clothes that they will feel comfortable in, or clothes that will help them feel confident in at an interview, or even clothes that will keep them warm through the night. However, as we are dealing with a vulnerable population, it can sometimes be difficult to communicate with the clients at the shop. Some people have very little English skills, others beg for more clothes than their voucher allots for and we must be stern, and unfortunately,

we've caught a person stealing once. But overall, it's the most enjoyable part of the work because when I can help somebody find something that makes them genuinely happy, it makes my day.

- **Describe a professional accomplishment that you are proud of - be specific.**

I would say helping manage the Addison shop has been my biggest professional accomplishment thus far. I've bettered my human service skills, specifically communication, by working one-on-one with the costumers at the shop. I've also helped "renovate" the shop by adding in a children's play area. Before this, families would come in and the children would be restless, tugging on their mother's handbag or attempting to climb crates we have in the shop. So, I brought the problem and the solution to the problem to my boss and he supported it 100%. I then moved some furniture around, brought over some play mats and toys and viola, a children's play area was born.

2. Cross Cultural Learning: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences.

I can't think of a specific event considering the cultural difference is not to strong. However, I do remember feeling a bit shocked to hear about some of the societal differences. Australia is more socialist whereas the U.S. is more capitalist. In Australia, the prison system supports the convicts by providing them with rehabilitation while they're in prison. For example, an ex-inmate I've spoken to was able to earn a degree while in prison. Another thing I found odd is the fact that Australians typically, live with their families until their mid-twenties. Unlike Americans, Australians don't typically move away for University. In fact, they stay with their parents to save money. Just an interesting cultural difference.

- **What did you do? What would you do next time?**

I cannot answer this question as it does not relate. But in relation to the answer above, it was personal experiences talking with Australians and I just responded and shared how the U.S. differs and I would do it again next time because it's one of the best ways to compare cultural differences.

3. Personal Growth: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

I've learned that I am strong and independent. I've learned that I can go out and enjoy life with just the company of myself. I already knew this but it has been reinforced since I've been here, life does not always go as planned. And I accept that, I appreciate this experience for what it is and I am beyond grateful. I do my best to be mindful every day. I've learned that it's best to be friends with people you only genuinely want to be friends with. As I tried to hang out with some girls who were fake towards me, and shockingly, it didn't work out, it's just best for me to be around people who genuinely like to be around me and vice versa.

The greatest personal challenge was trying to make friends and to feel accepted during my first few weeks here in Australia. I really had to accept the fact that I may not make any close friends and eventually, I felt okay with that and now, I feel comfortable exploring on my own or eating on my own, etc. but in the beginning, it was a big challenge. Now, I have a very close friend here who also happens to be a coworker and my new roommate so I'm very grateful to her. I also have friends through my internship program who are supportive and kind. The greatest reward is the feeling of mindful happiness that I know I will treasure in my heart forever. This occurs when I'm visiting somewhere new or looking out onto the harbor, the opera house, and the bridge. It's just such a rewarding feeling to recognize that I made it, that I'm here in Australia doing an

internship helping me towards my degree, exploring, and enjoying it all at the same time.
Definitely very rewarding.

Question Set #5

1. Professional: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths?

I've learned about a few new possibilities for career paths but they stem from outside of my internship, although I wouldn't have learned about them without having done this internship. One of the possibilities is working as a caseworker for people who are rehabilitating into society. I learned about this career by meeting these caseworkers and their clients at the Thread Together pop-in shop where the clients come to receive brand new clothes for job interviews. I think it sounds like a very rewarding career. Another possibility is something I've found online, an agency located back in Portland, OR which pairs "friends" (mentors) with children who need a stable, caring adult in their lives. I think it just sounds like an amazing organization, as the single most important thing a child needs in their life is a loving, consistent adult figure.

• Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?

Yes, I'd say I've done an informal interview to learn more about the case worker who helps rehabilitate clients into society. However, I would need to do some research to see if there are similar career paths offered in the U.S.

2. Cross Cultural: • Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

Before arriving, I thought the culture was more open-minded and laid back. Sometimes I feel like this is reinforced and other times, I feel as though it is not true at all. In terms of work life,

sometimes the day is very easy and go with the flow but other times, I feel like I'm being bossed around and have even stayed later to finish up work after my manager and boss left (they didn't tell me I could leave). In terms of general open-mindedness, I've realized that Australia is a little ignorant in terms of racial equality (I have met white people here who believe it is okay to use the N-word). They are also still working to legalize gay marriage in this country. I would say that the culture is made up of open and closed-minded individuals, as well as easy and stressful work days.

• What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

I can't really think of the most frustrating aspect. I guess it would have to be the closed-mindedness but obviously that doesn't apply to the entire country at large, just something they still need to work on as a nation, as does the U.S. The most rewarding aspect is the flexibility, in my work place and in social settings. At work, I feel comfortable asking for days off if traveling, sick, etc. and I have never been denied a day off or a short day. In social settings, I don't feel the need to have a set plan. I just meet up with friends, go here then there, and have a very good time doing so.

3. Your Culture Curve: The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a “W” curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Further Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley).

Outline your personal W Curve or cultural adjustments starting from when you arrived in your host country to the present-marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and

descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that you are still in process of adapting to life back home).

Honeymoon: when I first arrived (mid-June) I was so excited to hear people talking in their accents, to see people walking and driving on the left side of the road, and to try new foods.

Initial Culture Shock: This occurred to me during the same time as the honeymoon phase (upon arrival), as I was shocked by the size of the accommodation I was going to be living in. I thought, the U.S. would never charge so much money for such a small, isolated room.

Cultural Adjustment: I think this occurred to me as I began to become friends with my coworker and now flatmate, Josefa. (Around end of June/Early July). She has an Australian boyfriend and herself, had lived in Australia for 6 months already and had visited several times prior to living here. She and her boyfriend helped me learn and gain more respect for the Australian culture.

Further culture shock: This occurred to me quite recently, about end of July, as I learned about the closed-mindedness and slight racial and sexual orientation ignorance. This shocked me, not because I've never seen racism or sexism but I wasn't expecting to be on the receiving end in my workplace nonetheless. Someone I work with, without realizing, has been slightly sexist towards me and my counterpart female coworkers. This came as a shock to me because I knew that he doesn't mean it to be sexist, but it still was.

Further adjustment: I think I'm still working on this stage. Sometimes I feel like my personality is "too much" for this country and that I just need to let things be, but I'm not here to let people walk all over me or take advantage of me. I came here to learn and to have fun, so that is what I continue to try to do best. I have not yet experienced re-entry shock, as I will not be arriving back in the states for another three weeks.

4. Articulating your Experience: Please write one paragraph to sum up your experience, touching on the professional, the cross-cultural and the personal. Discuss your learning, the rewards and maybe challenges of the program. You may think of this as a summary you might give in an interview, or to a fellow student who was asking you about your internship.

To be honest, I don't know how to put it all into words. I think I could write for hours about this experience without making a whole lot of sense, but I'll give it a go (something Aussie's say).

This experience has been everything. I've experienced almost every kind of emotion- happiness, sadness, fear, anger, jealousy, hope. I've experienced new friends, fake friends, even an old friend who came to visit. I've experienced different foods, places, and animals. I've experienced good times and bad times. I've experienced life truly as an individual. Although I've been receiving a little financial help from my parents, I've been living completely independently. This is the first time I'd ever been away from home for this long, I miss my family but it was worth it. In terms of personal goals, I've truly learnt a lot about myself these past few months. I've grown so much. I've come to appreciate, truly and gladly, being in the presence of myself. I enjoy spending time with myself whether it be taking a day to explore or grabbing lunch alone or doing yoga. I just appreciate myself more. Professionally, I've grown as well but not as much as I thought I would've. I ended up doing a lot more busy work than gaining valuable learning experiences through my internship. But, you win some you lose some, right? And now I know what I don't want to spend my life doing, packing and sorting clothes for charity. Cross-culturally, I learned a lot more than I thought I would. I was expecting Australia to be the twin of the U.S. but it's not, it's more like the long-lost cousin. An Aussie friend once told me that

"everything here [in Australia] is inside-out and backwards" and those words could not ring more true to me. The culture is different. Point blank. University is free, health care is free, truck drivers get paid more, fast food workers get paid more, children live with their parent's way longer (about 25 years old), the language incorporates a lot of different slang terms, the list goes on and on. All in all, it's been a wonderful experience but if I could would I change a few things. Perhaps I could have accepted an internship better fit to my studies. Perhaps I could have saved more money before arriving. Perhaps I could have found better housing from the get-go. But, perhaps I did all these things and my experience would have been completely different. In fact, maybe it's best I didn't do any of those things, otherwise I may not have learned so much about myself and where I want to go career wise and how different the American culture is from the Australian culture. I do not regret anything about my experience here as it's taught me more than I imagined it would.

Question Set #6

1. Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

My impressions have not changed much but rather have been further reinforced. Australia is a laid-back culture in many ways, at the work place, with friends and family, and in society at large. People work to get things done but compared to the U.S. it's a slower process. I've noticed this in politics, Australia is currently working towards marriage equality for the LGBTQ community. In fact, they just voted on the matter, but it was a plebiscite vote which means they're only using the votes as a census. Whereas, in the U.S. people were marching the streets for this change. Also, I expected Australia to be similar to the U.S. in terms of individualism however, I've come to find many Australians are dependent on their families well into adulthood,

about 25-27 years old. I do not see a problem in this but a notable difference between the countries.

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

Hello Future Intern,

Firstly, I hope you are doing this internship for yourself. Not for whatever credit you'll be receiving or for "how good this will look on your resume". Yes, those reasons are important factors but ultimately, you should be doing this as a personal learning experience for yourself. Now, go into this experience with no expectations, be expecting only to go with the flow. At your internship site, listen to your boss and coworkers but do not be afraid to join the conversation and make suggestions if you feel passionate about something. Ask questions about the culture, the politics, and the history of Australia, not only at your work place but with Australians that you meet other places as well. This is when you will learn the most, first hand from an Aussie themselves. Plus, it's fun to compare cultural differences between the U.S. and Australia with an Australian. You need to get out there and meet people, it may seem hard at first but other interns in your program are also looking for friends. I have made some great friends from all around the world simply from attending one intern meet pizza night. Finally, make the most out of every day. You will only be here for so long and considering it's all the way across the world it's hard to know when you'll be back again, if ever. So even if you're feeling down or it's a rainy day do something that will make you happy in each day. It can be simple, for me it's yoga or buying a coffee. That way, you will truly feel like you made the most out of this experience. At least, that's how I feel. Have fun, meet Australians, learn about Australia, and oh also, it's expensive here so plan for that!

Dearly,

Past Intern