



BEING THERE - *Katie*

Katie

A lot of the expats, or just exchange students hang out with exchange students. No one would really make an effort to handle the local students and really make an effort to do that. Like go out drinking and eating and stuff with all the people who are on an exchange. Which really doesn't give you that opportunity to live and understand how the culture works.

I worked that out early then I started making friends with some of the locals. Because I think it's quite a big negative that a lot of exchange students that go on exchange just go for drinking, they're over at the uni and just spend most of their time with the exchange students - by the time they get to the end of it they've hardly been to class and they haven't really been able to experience that country.

Facilitator

So in other words, and I can imagine that a part of that would be the comfort zone thing, wouldn't it?

Katie

It is, yeah.

Facilitator

They're so far out of their comfort zone that in order to cope and survive...

Katie

That's right.

Facilitator

...it's hang with the people that you know.

Katie

Yep.

Facilitator

So I can see how that would happen. By the sounds of that it requires quite a bit of effort...



Katie

Yeah it does.

Facilitator

...on your part to kind of recognise that this is something that you can benefit from and that you're going to get yourself further out of your comfort zone but it's sort of - you would say that it's worth doing that.

Katie

Oh it's so worth it. The friends that I've made that are locals - and then they've come to Australia. When I was over there they took me to their families house, they took me to restaurants. Then when they come to Australia they're just as grateful when you give them the opportunity.

Facilitator

So how - I'm just trying to figure out how you'd do that?

Katie

Yep.

Facilitator

How do you make friends with local students?

Katie

Yeah.

Facilitator

Because I know that that can be difficult for international students coming to Australia. They want to make friends with local students and find it hard.

Katie

Yeah it is. A lot was through class. But then another way that I



Katie

did it was, I created - when I was there I basically started this little project where I noticed a lot of the exchange students were buying all these goods for the six months. Then by the end of that six months they would literally - they couldn't do anything with it so they'd just throw it in the bin.

So because I was staying on for those extra two months working I thought, how about if I get everyone's stuff and if I give it to a local organisation. For me, organising that project I had to talk to locals, I was forced to, and then I had to talk to a local organisation and when we got everything there we were talking and working together. So just building those connections, getting involved in a grassroots organisation is a good way to network with locals.

Facilitator

Outside of the uni?

Katie

Yep outside the uni, which is one way I did it. Then also I got involved in, it was like an Australia Chinese association - also we started, myself and another Australian started a Hong Kong chapter there. We got young Australians and young Hong Kong people to just talk about Australia-Chinese relations. We went out drinking, went on boat trips. We gave them - we basically said to them can you guys organise us this? This was just through some - the locals that were invited to the association were through people I met at uni, people - other Australians that I knew in Hong Kong that had met other Hong Kong people throughout other associations.

Facilitator

Yep just a snowball kind of thing.

Katie

We had over 100 people and it was just amazing. Through that association we went to really local restaurants, just learning some of the language. I went on a - what they call junk boat trip and I



Katie

was the only white person, the rest were Chinese and they were all trying to practice their English with me, I was learning Chinese.

I think you have to be willing to go out of your comfort zone and it is probably quite rare I did set up two essentially projects while I was over there. But without that, I probably - if I was just with the university I wouldn't probably even come to stay with the exchange students, I'd just talk to locals in my class.

Facilitator

So setting up the chapter of the Australia-China youth thing.

Katie

Yep.

Facilitator

Did you just kind of - were you aware of that existing beforehand...

Katie

Yeah.

Facilitator

...and you kind of pre-thought that as something you can do? How did that all unfold?

Katie

Because I went to Hong Kong on a scholarship, there were a couple of other Australians who were on that scholarship as well. We were basically invited - the Australian government invited us to an Australia Day party reception thing and we all got together and started chatting. We knew this Australian-China association was started in Beijing and Shanghai. A couple of chapters at UQ and around Australia. We thought why isn't there one in Hong Kong?

There's all of us, there were about five of us and we thought even if it's just five of us, if we can get five other Hong Kong people.



Facilitator

What have you got to lose?

Katie

Exactly, that's what we thought. We thought you know what even if it was just to keep us sane while we're here, a good opportunity for us to socialise and just learn new things, what could it hurt?

Facilitator

So what did you do then? You've come up with this idea, so then how did you?

Katie

We basically just got - basically it's like a franchise model the way that they do it. Everyone has a different city chapter. We spoke with the president of the Australia Youth Association and just set up - essentially just a Facebook group was what it was. They have a website and they put us on the website but we just basically said anyone that you know that'd be interested - they put it throughout

all their Shanghai, Beijing friends and just advertise through social media.

I talked with the Australian Embassy in Hong Kong and before we knew it we had quite a big association.

Facilitator

Right so you kind of advertised it through social media...

Katie

Yep.

Facilitator

...and recruited people then got in touch with you via social media...



Katie

Yeah.

Facilitator

...or you kind of said okay this is the first meeting on this day and just see who turns up?

Katie

Basically. So we just said for everyone to add themselves to the group, we're having the first even which I think was the drinks, just a wine tasting thing. I just said book, meet here, and all these people turned up, it was exciting. It was great.

Then everyone talks about it and different people come and before you know it.

Facilitator

So for students heading off to any other country around the world.

Katie

Yep.

Facilitator

I'm just wondering about that approach in the embassy or getting in contact with the embassy.

Katie

Yeah.

Facilitator

How did you find that, because I imagine that might be a bit daunting?

Katie

I just - to be honest they actually sent me an invitation first. So for



Katie

me it was a bit easier because I had a contact there. But I know that people have just contacted the embassy saying are you having an Australia Day ceremony, or are you having an ANZAC Day thing. Then once you get there you can talk and then find out it's actually Friday afternoon drinks at the embassy. That happens every week or fortnight. Then you can start attending that.

So once you get your foot in the door.

It's just as simple as ringing up and seeing when - if you're lucky to be there when there's ANZAC Day or Australia Day or Labour Day or something, even an election, voting. Just duck in and you tend to meet other Australians - is there any other things that the embassy is doing?

Yeah.