21,000 steps for a 21,000L water tank
42.2km, 21,000 ancient steps - this adventure is not for the faint hearted! On May 15th I will be partaking in The Great Wall of China Marathon to raise money for a water tank to be built for the village Sop Chem in remote North –Eastern Laos, partnered with Growth International Volunteer Excursion (GIVE).

Let Me Introduce Myself!

My name is Sally or Salii as the locals call me (which is Lao for Corn)
I am 22 years old from Perth, Australia. I studied interstate and just finished my undergraduate degree in Science majoring in Pathology with a concurrent diploma in Global Issues at The University of Melbourne.

I have just spent the past year traveling, working and volunteering throughout South East Asia. I first visited Lao PDR on an internship as a volunteer tourist guide with GIVE in June last year. For three months I worked to introduce volunteers to the history and culture of Laos whilst teaching English lessons and building a dormitory for the school in the village Munag Ngoi along the Nam Ou river in North-Eastern Laos. I fell in love with the Lao people and the exquisite scenery, which was unlike anywhere I had travelled to in South East Asia.

Hop Chem and their water crisis

The time we spent with volunteers in local homestays were some of the most eye opening experiences of everyone’s time in Laos when our local guide approached myself and another guide with a suggestion from the Sop Chem village chief to build a new water tank as a future project, we jumped onboard right away to find out how we could make it happen. Currently there are over 300 villagers living without access to fresh, clean drinking water and no hope for government assistance in the foreseeable future. These issues are only compounded by a series of hydroelectric dams built by international corporations. One of which is just a few kilometers upstream of Sop Chem and was finished earlier this year. In just a few short months since it’s completion,
the dam has already altered the flow patterns and ecosystems of the Nam Ou River, which runs adjacent to the village and is the primary means of survival for locals. The water has now been polluted so heavily that locals are unable to use the water for household use and human consumption. Beyond that, their closest fresh water aquifer is located on a piece of land that was recently bought by the same international corporation, with plans to bomb sections of the land to utilise the limestone for building another dam.

The solution lies in building a 21,000L water tank (using repurposed plastic bottles filled with sand as bricks) and connecting it to the nearest aquifer by piping through 6km of dense jungle.

Laos has a development history scarred by 40 years of civil war and unnecessary involvement in the Indochina war and so one of the least developed country in South East Asia. Creating access to safe and clean drinking water through this project will drastically impact Sop Chem. Safe drinking water will decrease the prevalence of preventable diseases, leading to a longer and healthier life for the locals.

**Why the Great Wall of China Marathon?**

To put it simply, the challenge of running along The Great Wall of China and training to work towards that goal excites me. Since experiencing travelling solo and being a GIVE volunteers, I am now hooked on seeking out new adventures and ways to push myself to absolute limits. GIVE showed me a new way of getting the most out of any experience abroad: being able to see all a country has to offer by travelling mindfully, off the beaten track and creating opportunities to give back to local communities who often, wholeheartedly, gave so much to me.

When I get asked this question I have to quote the famous Mountaineer George Mallory when he was asked why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest, to which he replied,

‘Because it’s there. Everest is the highest mountain in the world and no man has reached it’s summit. It’s existence is a challenge. The answer is instinctive, a part, I suppose of a man’s desire to conquer the universe’.
I have always wanted to run a marathon and have always wanted to see the Great Wall of China so it seems only fitting (and a little crazy) to combine the two!

So how can you help?

So how can you help? Our Fundraising Goal is $10,000 AUS (~$7,500USD) and we have until race day (15th May 2016) to get there. Every donation, big or small, will go along way to helping us achieve our goal!

100% of the proceeds will be managed by GIVE and be allocated directly to the project. Furthermore, I will be visiting Laos after the marathon to oversee the beginning of the tanks construction. Every donor will also get their name engraved on a plaque, which will be cemented into the side of the tank! So spread the word and donate and help make the Sop Chem Water project become a reality.

Blog/Website: www.runforlaos.org
Crowd Fund: www.gofundme.com/runforlaos
Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/runforlaos
Video: https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=_XCykGk0N2g
GIVE: www.givevolunteers.org

A further breakdown of the fundraising goal:

- 6000m of pipe: 1,050,000kip/100m roll x 60 rolls = 63,000,000 Lao kip
- Connections: 55,000 each x 60 pieces = 3,300,000 Lao kip
- Truck transportation = 5,500,000 Lao kip
- Total: 71,800,000 Lao Kip = ~$12,000

- $5 = one pipe fitting for the 6km of piping
- $7 = one bag of cement for building the water tank
- $12 = one shovel for digging trenches and mixing cement
- $25 = local engineer’s daily salary
- $130 = 100m roll of pipe for 6000m of piping necessary