



50 *years* OF VOLUNTEERING

Werkgroep '72 Celebrates a Special Birthday

It all started 50 years ago, when a group of Dutch expats living in Indonesia wanted to give something back to their host country. Back then the volunteer work was focussed on fundraising to provide medical help. Right now the **Werkgroep '72 aids local initiatives in reaching their goals.**



Jakarta, it's a love-hate relationship I have with this city. Many who lived here can relate. It's the chaos, the traffic, the pollution, the skyscrapers, the culture, the food, the cafes and restaurants, the big glitzy malls and the small vendors on the streets, it's the people.

I have an Indo background and have been living in Jakarta since 2017. Currently I am doing volunteer work at Werkgroep '72 and this has a very personal purpose. For me as an Indo, charity work has a special meaning. For me, it feels like I can give something back to Indonesia. Indonesia is the country where my dad was born. My family was repatriated back to the Netherlands in 1958, they were lucky. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened to them if they had stayed? They could have been in the same situation as the people we are helping with the volunteer work.

We from Werkgroep '72 help people in Jakarta who live at the edge of society. For them, we try to make a difference. Yet sometimes it feels like, as we would say in Bahasa Belanda *'als een druppel op een gloeiende plaat'* or *'dweilen met de kraan open'*. Meaning: a small change or a drop in the ocean. However, any penny, or Rupiah in this case, is worth it. 'Being meaningful to others who are less fortunate in life is what gives me strength to do what I do. It's crucial to me.' Says one of my co-boardmembers Hermien who is living in Jakarta for the third time now. She has seen the changes in the city and the changes at Werkgroep '72. Jakarta has become more wealthy, living conditions for many have improved. However, the gap between rich and poor has become wider, and conditions for groups who are not 'seen' (refugees) have become harder.



Pleun Drachman-Pinsel

We try to be the feet on the ground

Werkgroep '72 was founded 49 years ago by Dutch expats who wanted to give something back to their host country by supporting local foundations, *yayasans* in Bahasa Indonesia. These *yayasans* are active in different fields as education, health care,



and elderly care. As an expat, you usually live in a privileged situation. So if you want, you can stay in that bubble. However, a group of volunteers decided to look into other aspects of Jakartan society and do volunteer work at different yayasans. Although, many did it at an individual level only. So in 1972, this group decided to set up a foundation to make sure their hard work continued after leaving the country.

I got introduced to Werkgroep'72 by my friend Kai Yin Or who is currently Chair of the organization. She is Dutch Chinese herself and feels very connected to the Jakarta people as well because of her Asian background and her parents' migration history. As she says herself: 'Our help might not change the world but sometimes it changes the world of someone: a youngster who got the opportunity to participate in a vocational training gets better chances in finding work, a child who received orthoses can walk and participate in society again, and sometimes just a simple gesture as providing a Sembako-package for Idul Fitri or during the Covid-pandemic can already mean a lot to many families.' The offered help can be small, but for these groups, getting the right medicine or participating in a vocational program can make a big difference in their life.

MEANINGFUL WORK

Giving back is one of the reasons our volunteers want to be involved, but there are also other reasons why people choose to commit themselves. As for many partners moving to a foreign country for their spouse's work, it can be challenging to find a paid job, I have experienced it myself. So some do the volunteer work temporarily, as an alternative and

a meaningful activity. During the years, Werkgroep '72 has known many different kinds of volunteers with different backgrounds: teachers, engineers, social workers, communication specialists. One of the volunteers, Mirjam Piët-de Jong, says: 'So many people with different backgrounds, all putting their effort in the volunteer work to support Indonesians. The dynamics between board members were also different in every setting. It was very nice for me to contribute to such an organization.' Beside that I would say that I learn a lot from working with people with different background as well.

Because of the diverse backgrounds and the mobility of expats, Werkgroep'72 needed to professionalize their work over the years. Therefore, an internal system to exchange expertise and preserve the relationship and network of yayasans and fundraisers was set up a few years ago. The last years we have also tried to professionalize our external communication so with my communication background, I helped to design the new website and stimulated the social media outings to show people what we do in Jakarta and what the needs are of people in Jakarta.

LONG TERM VOLUNTEERS

I am not the only one who has an Indo(nesian) background. Several other volunteers are Indonesian or have an Indonesian background. Some are born in Indonesia and have lived in the Netherlands for years. They return to Indonesia for professional or private reasons. Their knowledge of cultural traditions and their Bahasa Indonesia form a valuable bridge between the Dutch and Indonesian ways of working. Another volunteer group are the Dutch who live in Jakarta for longterm. Arnold is a retiree



in Jakarta. After working for decades in Indonesia, he decided to stay and became a sponsor and volunteer. His motivation is to share his money with the ones who need it. 'To transfer money directly to yayasans or people is quite a challenge because you don't know where it will end. Werkgroep'72 is a wonderful intermediary to help to get the money in the right place.'

This mix of volunteers makes the group special, the work meaningful and the experience valuable for me.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR ALMOST 50 YEARS

In 1972, Werkgroep'72 provided help to a hand full of yayasans. Some of these yayasans are still receiving this support because its still needed and because of good relationships and trust. These are also the core values of our organization. Many of the former volunteers still remember going to the yayasans and seeing the living or educational settings of the people in the Kampung. As one can imagine, a few decades ago, Jakarta was quite different from now. Illnesses such as TBC or typhoid were quite common, and volunteer work was mainly focused on fundraising to provide medical help.

Our help has developed over the years and can take different forms: financial donations, goods and expertise. Depending on the question from a yayaan, we try to offer the matching help. Sometimes it is simply money, and sometimes it is combined with expertise.

One example of a project was building a boy shelter for a yayaan in Bekasi - just outside Jakarta. Apart from donating money, Werkgroep '72 also helped to find a suitable construction builder and mediated in

the service, leading to lower costs. In that sense, the mindset has changed over the years too. 'From, only want to do a good thing – to – more think about (self) sustainability of a yayaan as well,' says Hermien. That's a more complex way of thinking. Yet, a more interesting challenge.

This year Werkgroep'72 is celebrating its 50th birthday. We are currently preparing this celebration, setting up small exhibitions and bazars, making a book about the past 50 years. We reflect on what has been done, what we are still doing and what is needed for a further development for the people we help. There have been many changes over the years in the yayasans we support, the kind of support we give and the volunteers who help with the executions of the projects, but for one thing: our main goal, act as an intermediary between funds, volunteers, and the yayasans remains. We try to be the feet on the ground. To explore where help is needed in whatever way. So we can make a difference however small it may be.

