

# Neil heads to Thailand for adventure

GUEST speaker at this week's Monday Motivation group was Neil Campbell (34) who is about to embark on a six-month adventure at a Thai charity where he will look after and work with elephants.

Neil addressed the regulars of the group run by Theresa Day of Abstract Coaching at the Gallery i venue where members were keen to hear about the charity and how Neil would live and work over the next six months.

He said: "I've always loved animals and my interest in elephants started

**by Susann Brown**

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when I was about seven years old and when the circus came to Inverurie."

Due to leave early next week, Neil spoke about how he was interviewed for the volunteer position at the Royal Elephant Kraal over Skype in November and informed of his acceptance during December, which meant fund raising had to begin in earnest to raise the £1,700 necessary for his subsistence which involved lodging in a bamboo hut within the Thai village of Ayutthaya.

Neil said: "My aim is to raise £5,000. I have to pay the charity for my keep for the six month period, but anything I raise over and above that will go to the elephants.

"In November, the fields where the elephants' feed is grown were devastated by floods and the money will help towards re-planting the land and the general care of the animals."

Embarking on a series of fund-raising events, Neil's first effort was a coffee morning in his home village, Daviot where he raised about £300, followed by a dance where he thinks he will have reached about half the target figure. The final event before his departure will be a quiz night in Malone's Late Bar in Ship Row, Aberdeen.

The Royal Kraal, run by Elephant Stay, is dedicated to the conservation of Thailand's elephants providing a safe environment where the retired elephants are looked after by their mahouts and a dedicated team of volunteers. As a self-funding organisation, the elephants provide opportunities for tourists who stay in bungalows on the site and learn about them and the elephants also provide tourist rides to the temples as well as being involved in Royal parades.

Neil explained how some of the rescued giants were "killer elephants" that had killed humans in attempt to retaliate after suffering abuse while others had been severely injured and lay dying or were stuck in mud wallows prior to rescue and some were rescued from illegal activities."

Talking about his role he said: "I will get up at seven in the morning - feed the elephants, pick up all the poo and take

them to the river to bathe and I'll also be involved in all the other activities including helping with rescue operations.

"I'd like to thank all my friends and family for supporting me and for all the hard work to help me reach my fund-raising goal and a huge thanks goes to Mackies of Scotland. Thanks to them everyone who sponsors me is in with a chance of winning a year's supply of their delicious crisps."

Winding up the session, Theresa Day said: "The reason I wanted you to come along and talk to us today is that I think it's amazing when people have the opportunity to follow a dream. It doesn't have to be as big or as grand as Neil's adventure, but if you have something you want to do - do it - find a way, speak to people and see if you can make it happen because that is what life is - enjoying the journey.

"The memories, the way it changes who you are as a person and what you're exposed to helps grow you and you find your purpose in life. I wish you luck on your journey."

The weekly Monday meetings incur a charge of £3.50 per person to cover the cost of the premises and refreshments and normally a donation to the Anthony Nolan Trust but after this Monday's meeting, Theresa handed over £75 - the proceeds of the morning on behalf of Abstract Coaching, Monday Motivation and Gallery i towards Neil's funds.

