



people and places: responsible volunteering

AUTUMN

2009

"Truly accountable, ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel"

# Newsletter

EDITOR Nigel Pegler

we work with communities in

AFRICA; The Gambia, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland  
ASIA; Indonesia, Nepal and India SOUTH AMERICA; Peru

## From the Editor

The road shows at Faversham on the 3rd of October and Leeds on the 10th of October are fast filling up and as we are limited to the number of people we can accommodate, if you would like to attend either, please email Sallie asap at [sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## Good guys and bad guys

There have been a few stories about volunteering in the press lately concerning some bad experiences that people have had with certain companies. I know from experience how difficult it is to find the good guys. I found people and places very open and honest about what they do so I felt pretty secure in the knowledge that I was volunteering with the right company.

But I still had to take a leap of faith, now of course having worked with Sallie and Kate I know what questions to ask. Sallie has written a list of questions to ask before volunteering and these can be found by clicking on this link <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/About.aspx?category=20>

## Is this true?

This story appeared in the Daily Mail and to read it click on...

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/article-1205226/Not-profit-gap-year-firm-Frontier-shares-fees--directors.html>

## Mind the gap year exploitation

Idealistic young Britons who want to help people in the developing world are being exploited by firms that set up their trips — and they may be doing more harm than good anyway

This article appeared in the Times online and perfectly illustrates how the local organisations that need volunteers should be put in touch with them and say what they need a volunteer to do, not what the travel company think they should do.

Support from the local team and from the company that sent you are **vital** should any problems arise during your placement. Which is of course exactly what you get from *people and places*!

Click on this link to read the full story...

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/news/article6788628.ece>

## The pitfalls of gap volunteering

Jill Sinclair reports on a costly gap year placement that did not work out.

You would think that a basic qualification for somebody visiting South America to teach Spanish was to be able to speak the language!!

Click on this link for the full story

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/6065538/The-pitfalls-of-gap-volunteering.html?state=target#postacomment&postingId=6068009>

Some while ago I did a little **research!** on good and bad companies whereby I contacted them as a potential volunteer and asked a lot of questions, you would be amazed how many couldn't answer **all** of my questions, or wanted money up front because there were limited places! So whether you plan to travel with *people and places* or another organisation please make sure you ask the questions.

Highly commended-Virgin Responsible Tourism awards

## The Kugler family return to A.V. Bukani School in Addo South Africa

We arrived safely in South Africa, and equally important, our luggage did too! After a night in Johannesburg, we flew into Port Elizabeth this morning and it feels like we never left. Met at the airport by Nelson, one of our favourite staff members at Calabash Tours. Nelson grew up in a nearby township and chooses to live there now because he would miss the special culture if he lived in the city. We're staying for the weekend at 5th Avenue Beach house, a few blocks from the beautiful beach. This is where many of the volunteers placed by Calabash Tours stay. Those who work in schools in Port Elizabeth stay here for 3-4 weeks. For us, it is our weekend retreat. We enjoy spending time with Anthea, the owner, who not only helps the volunteers who stay here, she is also supporting another school in Port Elizabeth. Nelson is picking us early Monday morning to take us out to the school before the first bell rings. "It will be quite a reunion," he notes.



### The School Has Made So Much Progress!

We returned to A.V. Bukani Monday morning, just in time to see the students singing some of our favourite songs. The teachers each gave us warm hugs. But beyond the deep friendships formed last year, we wondered what lasting impact our visit had on the school. How would the second visit be different and would there be a motivation for future visits? We soon saw that the school had made progress beyond our expectations. Larry had hoped that the teachers he and Sara worked with last year continued to read aloud to the students and use the Think-Pair-Share technique. He hoped to see the books we left for them and the additional books we purchased from South Africa Partners, with the generous donations of our many donors, being used in the classrooms.

The first day he went into classes to do shared reading using the "big books" we brought. As he was about to ask the children to tell him what part of the book they liked, the teacher said, "OK. Think...now pair.... now share," and the students immediately started talking to each other! We mean all the students and immediately. It was amazing. This happened in all eight classes that Sara and Larry worked in last year. When Larry asked the students to share, some hands went up and the students talked. Their English at 2nd and 3rd grades is still really limited, but these are very beginning English learners and just a word in English sometimes is all they are capable of, given the very limited exposure they get to English during the day. Some of the grade 4 learners speak in phrases and sometimes full simple sentences. It's definitely something we can continue to build on. Some of the teachers in K (their R) and first grade have been coming to the classes to observe Larry teaching, even though they don't teach in English. After taking part in some professional development Larry presented on the many uses of "big books," the head teacher in 1st grade said she wanted to order some big books in Xhosa that she saw in a catalogue from one of the publishers. Mr. Thambo, the principal, has the Heinemann rep coming on Tuesday with samples of big books. Hopefully they have some good titles and we can use some of the \$1,000 we have remaining from the donations to buy many more English and Xhosa titles.

### computer lab



A new computer lab was donated by a local business. Students as well as teachers are getting computer training, thanks to donations which are supporting a teacher. Big thank you to Burness Communications for helping the part-time teacher become full time.

Words cannot describe what we felt like to see the students in the computer lab, completely comfortable with the key board and mouse after only three months! We thought this day would not come for a few more years, but through Mr Thambo the school had a donation of new computers and every class gets to work in the lab.

Right now the students are using donated educational software that is several years old. Some of the games are great and some are terrible (don't even ask about the "puzzles"!)

But the teachers are committed to aligning the students' work in the computer lab to the curriculum in the classroom. Having the computer teacher there full-time, thanks to the donation from Burness Communications, will make a great difference. It is hard without the dedicated computer teacher now, because many of the teachers are not computer literate. Similar to what we saw in the early days of computers in U.S. schools, some teachers feel there is enough on their plates already and they just leave computer teaching to that teacher. But the teachers are starting to realise they must improve their own skills because very soon the students will surpass them.

The computers are loaded with Encarta encyclopaedia, but the teachers had received no training on it. Eileen offered training after school at 1:30. Last year, training like that would end up starting at 1:45 as the teachers wandered in. This year, she arrived in the computer lab at 1:32 and the entire room was packed with teachers who had already opened Encarta on their computers. Eileen started by telling them to put in "South Africa" in the search box. Their eyes were open in amazement as they clicked to video of Mandela speaking at his inauguration or maps of the area near their school.

The following day, Eileen happened to be in the computer lab when one of the newly trained teachers was showing her 4th grade class Encarta, opening the South Africa section. The students could barely contain themselves as they watched Mandela speak or listened to the national anthem when they clicked on the nation's flag. They ignored the bell that rang for lunch and finally had to be encouraged to leave.



### BIG BOOKS

The teachers continue to amaze us, soaking up new knowledge and constantly eager for more. After demonstrating how to use Big Books in a lesson during the first week, Larry worked with the teachers on co-teaching this week. Their planning session the Friday before was serious and thoughtful. And their lessons this week were impressive. Some have made enormous strides in their teaching from last year. All are committed to serving their students better. Larry continues to provide feedback and mentoring.

### READ ALOUDS

The teachers have also presented engaging lessons using the quality read-alouds donated by the Developmental Studies Centre. Larry modelled the use of the excellent teacher's manuals that come with these materials and the teachers have found them easy to follow. They include just enough directions and suggestions to provide the support needed when Larry is no longer here. This week the teachers included the creative use of props to add meaning to their dramatic and expressive readings of "If You Give A Mouse a Cookie" and "When I Was Little." The students loved seeing their teachers act out these stories!

### It All Starts Coming Together

We've added a new element to our work in the school this year, renting a guitar so Larry could sing with the students. The kids and teachers love "She'll be coming round the mountain" and even corrected Larry when he mixed up the order of the verses. "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" resonates with both students and teachers as well. Singing reinforces their English and helps them see that it can also be a language of fun, not just serious study.



### Family meetings



In the Xhosa culture, names are very important. For example, the names of the older grandchildren in our host family are *Yanga*, "one who doesn't give up", and *Simantanda* "he is loved" That's why it was so meaningful when the mothers and grandmothers at Eileen's meetings gave her a Xhosa name this week.

The family meetings have been very successful, with about 75 mothers and grandmothers attending at least one of the meetings. Many have been to 3 and 4 meetings, taking time out of their busy lives for sessions that typically run for 2 to 2½ hrs, twice a week. They are thoroughly engaged in creating the school quilt, with many taking their squares home to spend additional hours on their handiwork. At each meeting there are discussions on how to help their children become successful and reach their dreams. Guest speakers have given information on adult education

classes the family members can take or the resources available at the nearby library. None had ever been to a library and few knew this one existed.

It was the end of the fourth meeting when one of the grandmothers, a leader in the class, said that they must give Eileen a Xhosa name. "Your name is *Nosango*," she said and all the family members nodded and clapped. "*Nosango* means 'gate.' You have opened the gates of freedom to us. You have opened the gates of learning." Truly a moment.

### Our home stay

We are thrilled to be back with the Mofu family. In addition to their grandson Yanga, who is turning 8 this week, we are joined by two other grandchildren. Their daughter Pam (Yanga's mother) has moved back and is working nearby. Her older sister Yolanda is also back in the township, with her 2 adorable boys, ages 5 and 2. They are staying in a nearby home while we are there, but we get to see the boys every day and they never fail to entertain us. They are bright, full of life, and totally charming



## Naxal Orphanage Report

Monica Placzek, 29th April - 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009

I had always wanted to do volunteer work with children in a developing country and after retiring as Consultant Paediatrician I was delighted to have the opportunity to work in Naxal Orphanage in Kathmandu, Nepal. I was prepared to take on any task, whether it be physical labour, play, educational, medical or financial. My true hope was that I might be able to make a lasting contribution to the lives of the children. So, full of enthusiasm, prayers for success and the support and encouragement of my husband, I set off for Nepal.



Naxal Orphanage, just outside Kathmandu city centre, is one of several OCCED projects (Organisation for Community, Child and Environmental Development), run by a group of local professionals with the core objectives being the provision of shelter, food and education for children of the community and the empowerment of women in rural villages. My co-volunteer was Anne Allen, a senior neonatal nurse in Belfast who shared my ideals.

The orphanage is in a leafy suburb far removed from the horrendous poverty and pollution of Kathmandu. It consists of two blocks separated by drying laundry and several water tanks, and is home for 49 children aged between 6 months and 15 years. They are looked after by six ladies (Didis) and one man (Di) who live and work there 24 hours a day 7 days a week for £22 per month. Uneducated and from rural villages, but desperate for employment, the commitment of this team is unbelievable. Two of the Didis have responsibility for cooking, two for washing and cleaning and two for the care of the children. The Di, (Shanker), helps with the older boys and general maintenance. There is also a resident nurse and a part-time teacher for the pre-school children.

The children are accommodated in separate areas. The under two's spend all day in a double room with their one Didi, and sleep there in rocking cots. At night they are joined by the two-year olds who sleep in a row on the floor with two other Didis. The over two's sleep in bunk bedded dormitories, with the smaller ones being two to a bed. For most of the children this has been their home since birth, either having been abandoned at the door or brought by a family member, usually following the death of a parent.



Our first day was a public holiday so we took the opportunity of getting to know the school-age children, who were polite, welcoming and well-behaved. They were clean, (Saturday being bath and change clothes day) but several had nit infestations. Communication was not a problem, as English is taught in school. We had a fun time introducing them to Twister, Simon Says and other traditional English games. Even the older boys wanted to join in the singing games! They appeared to be more emotionally needy, wanting to hold our hands and stroke our arms.

The pleasure of the day was somewhat overpowered by a nauseating stench, which on investigation we found to come from the one bathroom shared by 14 boys. Not wishing to cause embarrassment, we enquired from other sources, who confirmed that Western style clean toilets were the norm for educated people in Kathmandu. Anne and I were in agreement that it was not appropriate to give the children a good education, but fail to teach them basic hygiene. The following Monday we met the Board members and asked their permission to clean the boys' bathroom. Their response was one of disbelief, that two western professional ladies actually wanted to clean the toilets of the untouchables! They told us that some earlier volunteers had paid to have the girls' toilet refurbished.

We wasted no time in purchasing appropriate equipment, and spent the rest of the day bleaching and disinfecting whilst the Didis and Shanker took a curious interest. Closer inspection revealed that neither hand-basin nor toilet cistern was actually connected to a water supply, due to broken pipes! Anne and I were very pleased with our efforts, but the following morning were truly delighted to hear cries of 'Miss, Miss, bathroom beautiful!'

We were rushed upstairs to discover that at 6am, under Shanker's guidance, the boys had scrubbed down the door and walls of their dormitory. What an achievement! We took the opportunity to explain the importance of maintaining this cleanliness and of always using the toilet pan and not just 'anywhere'.

At a subsequent meeting with the OCCED Board, they explained that whilst many overseas voluntary agencies run orphanages in Nepal, they felt that local Nepalese are better able to understand and address the underlying reasons for children being orphaned. They believe that by helping women recognise and achieve their vital role in the community, child labour and abandonment will be greatly reduced. Their local projects to date include three orphanages, paediatric, dental and gynaecology clinics in rural locations and the education, literacy and empowerment of women. We really respected the motives of these sincere hardworking men and their achievements over ten years.

Back to the plumbing - we asked for an estimate. Imagine our surprise when the plumber arrived the following morning, and within four days we had water supplies to two basins and one toilet cistern, three toilet sprays fitted, plus various pipes repaired, all for £65! This small sum would improve the lives of 50 people!

Highly commended-Virgin Responsible Tourism awards

While the plumbing work progressed, we spent time with the pre-school children. The two to five year olds are supervised by a very capable teacher. Sitting cross-legged on the floor they recite ABC's, numbers and action rhymes, using equipment supplied by previous volunteers.

Discipline is excellent, with misbehaviour resulting in time out in the corner until invited to rejoin the class again. Voices are never raised and although there was hair pulling and nipping each other, the children were happy and played together well. We were struck by their self-sufficiency; there are no choices, no criticism but also very little praise or reward. Things are so different from back home, but it certainly works!

Meals are regular, biscuits and milk at 6am, rice-flakes and vegetables for lunch, corn based broth after school and rice and dal at 6.30pm. All meals are eaten from a metal bowl with a spoon and each child rinses their own dish

We never saw any food refused or thrown away. Anne and I took in boiled eggs, cake and fruit each day and the older ones supervised its distribution. The eggs were eaten immediately but the cake and fruit taken to school - was it status to have these things?



Medically the children were healthy, a couple had asthma and one had a kidney abnormality. I was able to educate the nurse regarding these conditions and purchased a spacer device for more effective administration of asthma medication. Head lice were a problem for the girls and we educated them in the regular use of proper shampoo and washing hair brushes. We also arranged for a supply of nit combs to go out with the next volunteers.

One morning a new baby was brought to the orphanage - a beautiful healthy boy. The family lived in a small rural village and following the birth his mother continued to bleed and died two months later. The extended family continued to spoon-feed him milk but after 3 months could no longer cope, so his aunt and the senior man from the village made the 24 hour journey to Naxal orphanage. He was welcomed with a thorough wash followed by a vigorous massage. A few days later, for the sum of £2 he was weighed, immunised and tested for HIV and syphilis at the children's hospital.

He joined the four children on the floor of the toddler room and it was here that Anne and I spent much of our time as the Didi had her hands full, with a constant round of changing nappies, toileting, making up bottles of milk, sorting out squabbles, giving cuddles and rocking to sleep. Needless to say there was no water supply, hence no hand washing in this room. What amazing immune systems these children develop!

Meal times are interesting - a large dish of pureed food is provided with one spoon. The infants sit in a semi-circle around the Didi who feeds them one spoonful each in turn.

By the end of our first week the sanitation project was progressing well and we turned our attention to the grubby cooking and dining areas and the dormitories, which appeared not to have been cleaned since OCCED moved in 10 years previously. We were hesitant about making improvements and upsetting the 'Board' but by this time we had established good relationships with the Didis, having taken them shopping for cleaning equipment and a new outfit each, and it was they who encouraged us to continue with our cleaning programme.

As I was in the dining area inspecting what appeared to be a trail of dust running from the ceiling onto the table the kitchen, a Didi took me by the arm and pointed out several large holes in the ceiling and corners of the room. Seconds later a rat ran across the floor and she told me how she had had her toes bitten at night by rats. We raised the 'rat' problem with the Board and whilst we had to accept that rats are a part of life in Nepal they agreed to have the holes sealed up and set traps.

We set to work once again with scrubbing brushes but this time a Didi and Shanker were keen to join in. Kitchen completed we moved on to the bedrooms. We found mattresses so thin as to be useless and others stained and dirty. Pillows were little more than hard lumps of matted cotton inside a frayed cotton case. The darker corners of the room were home to myriads of mosquitoes and this was not helped by winter bedding and clothes piled on the top bunks.

We invited everyone to a Saturday party. The morning was taken with bathing and hair washing and, for the older ones, hand washing of their own clothes from the previous week. The Didi was an expert at washing two children at a time using only 4 inches of cold water from a bucket! We began the party with ice cream bought locally. As with all food distribution, there was a 'pecking order' starting with youngest through to the Didis and office staff. We were so impressed with the caring attitude of the older children towards the younger ones and their always being aware of anyone who was 'missing'. We never saw any arguments over food although excitement reached fever pitch when I appeared with a bottle of Coke!

The party continued with pass the parcel, ball games, bubbles and balloons. The children then entertained us to a talent show of singing, dancing, brake dancing and hand walking. Samosas and crisps were served followed by fruit, jelly and chocolate cake and the children were unanimous in declaring it a wonderful party.

Our time in Naxal came to an end far too quickly and we felt our farewells were full of genuine thanks and pleas for us to return soon. We spent our first days at home wondering were they cleaning the bathroom? I felt angry when I saw a newspaper article headed 'Planning a Child's Birthday Party? You'll need £5,000'. How far would this go in Kathmandu? However, Anne and I had achieved our desire to make a real difference to the children of Naxal. We had given them friendship and time, improved their sanitation and hygiene facilities and made their living areas bright and clean. Since returning home we have continued to work for the children of Naxal. We both plan to return next year and who knows what we will get involved in then?

Finally, a word for anyone thinking of volunteering in a developing country.

Provided that you are healthy, have a spirit of adventure and are willing to get involved, go for it! Important factors to consider are the choice of country and type of work, the climate and living conditions, and the local opportunities and culture.



## Giving other people's money away isn't easy

From the very beginning, we have been committed to ensuring that volunteer's have known how, and more importantly where, their money would be spent.

Over 20% of **people and places** returning volunteer's want to continue to support their projects when they return home. The challenge has been how to manage this travel philanthropy – efficiently, effectively and openly.

We are proud to announce that **people and places** is the founding partner of TravelPledge.

Many people ask why we don't simply adopt charitable status ourselves. We believe that the independence of TravelPledge proves a reassuring level of independence and transparency to donors. The discipline of submitting targeted causes and the robust due diligence undertaken by TravelPledge concentrates the mind on the efficacy of each donation – and more important, it ensures that local people are equal stake-

holders in this process... and to be quite honest, as a tiny organization, we were becoming overwhelmed by the reporting systems needed to ensure we were communicating properly with donors and monitoring efficacy – and the burden was equally overwhelming for our local partners.

Now all UK **people and places** volunteers donations are sent to the projects via TravelPledge – so all those donations attract Gift Aid which represents nearly 28% more money to the projects!! And TravelPledge takes only a small fee to cover the cost of the international transfer – and of course each volunteer gets a statement as to exactly how much that is!

In addition we have worked with the projects and local partners and returning volunteers to identify a real and sustainable needs list – these in turn have become targeted causes. So returning volunteers who want to raise funds when they return can do so and know that their donations will be managed and accounted for and put to good use.

Many of the targeted causes have been identified by volunteers working together with local people – expert education volunteers are helping local schools interpret their needs, healthcare experts work with local community support programmes – and TravelPledge then screens them and focuses donations on these needs, thus assisting meaningful travel philanthropy. And the good news is that these causes are advertised to other potential donors too – so we have all the more chance to reach the targets.

In the first 8 months of 2009, volunteer's have donated an additional £15,000 to local communities, and at least another £10,000 is expected before the end of the year. The money raised has provided sanitation for vulnerable children and adults in South Africa; paid for the education of orphans in Kathmandu; funded feeding programmes, education and medical equipment and a computer and common room for teenage orphans in Nepal.

Future targeted causes include training programmes for local bike mechanics and pre-school teachers, funding education for orphans (as well as providing them with trips and outings which are just plain fun!), horticultural training ... and as each target is met a new cause will be introduced, enabling local people and volunteer's to work together in creating better places for people to live and better places for people to visit.

For more information <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/About.aspx?category=26> or contact [sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

Travel Pledge is a UK Registered charity (No.1122270) Sallie Grayson serves as a trustee and works closely with Nick Chaffe Director of Travel Pledge

And finally a huge thank you to all the volunteers and their friends and families who are raising such amazing funds .

## **Completed targets Funds have already been raised for and sent to the following causes and work has started**

### **Emmanuel Care Centre**

The toilet block at Emmanuel Care Centre, you can read the story of how Jean Eaton raised funds for this on the next page.

### **Naxal orphanage**

A common room, library and computer room for the children is funded and work starts next month.

### **Nepalese orphans**

Enough money has been raised to send 5 orphaned children to one of the best schools in Kathmandu for a year. This will be an ongoing cause because Naxal educates at least 25 children each year.

To see any of these completed projects click on <http://travelpledge.org/projects/achieved-projects/> and if you then click on the welcome page on the website you can read all about Travel Pledge.

**Highly commended-Virgin Responsible Tourism awards**

## Emmanuel needs some toilets!

Funding raising is definitely not my thing but after running across the road to Norma's house to use her loo (Norma is a carer at Emmanuel Advice and Care Centre) and feeling faint in the stifling heat of a metal container when it is 38 degrees outside I knew I had to do something. Polly, the director of the centre, had said that her greatest wish was for a building with an office, toilets, store room and multipurpose room for HIV support groups. A discussion with Paul and Polly about my donation plus other funds I had raised led to plans drawn up, ground cleared, foundations dug and concrete poured, all by local volunteers and so I made a commitment to raise the rest ( little did I know the quotes were way out!) BUT what to do? How fortuitous that the P&P summer news letter arrived! That gave me the idea. I know that many people have stories to tell so what if I could get them to write an article/anecdote/ send a photo with a caption and I would print them in a small booklet and then sell to raise funds for Emmanuel and hopefully fund the building.



I sounded the idea out with friends who are so supportive and we had a meeting (lunch in the pub) It is amazing how somebody knows somebody who can do things, but we needed help with printing and layout which is a real skill, after much thought one friend turned to another and said "what about Les, Les it turned out had been my friends late husband's business partner and the business? Layout design for magazines! Wheels set in motion, another meeting in another pub and Les was brought on board, what a gem! My computer then went into over drive, I emailed as many people as I could, some responded straight away, some sent 4 lines or a photo others sent between 10 and 20000 words, all interesting and worth publishing, some promised but as I write I am still waiting for some and Kate, I have to tell you this, I lost yours in the depths of my computer and didn't know how to tell you and then by some miracle you sent an edited copy !! I am just so grateful for the fantastic response.

At the moment life revolves round editing, what a nightmare, of course I have only so much space, and we sit round the table ( in yet another pub) arguing "you can't leave this one out" " that's too long" I'm sure you know what I mean! I still did not know how the finished product would look; Les said he would send a PDF file! A WHAT? It arrived and I am so excited it has far exceeded all our expectations. I hope to have the booklets in print for September so if anyone would like a copy( or a few to sell) it will be under £5.00 but I haven't decided on the exact amount, please contact Sallie and she will let you know how much and when it's available. All funds will go through Travaid (now Travel pledge) so will be accountable, managed and transparent.

News Flash—my local Rotary has agreed to fund the building of the toilet block so I only need another £5,000.00!!!  
Jean Eaton

## Why should I believe you? Prove it!

This is the question **we** want potential volunteers to ask.

Kate and I are an odd pair. (*agreed Ed!*) We actively encourage volunteers to comment, question and criticise – and then share that criticism with future volunteers! We keep as little of the volunteers' money as possible, also telling volunteers up front how much that will be!

And now we have done something else that's pretty radical – we've invited an independent auditor to come and check out our claims.

The main reason we started **people and places** was that we knew volunteering should be a win-win situation, for communities and volunteers alike – and we wanted to prove that it could be. We've been surprised, and were somewhat naive perhaps, to see how some organisations have adopted the current buzz words of 'responsible' 'sustainable' and 'community-driven' to create a smoke and mirrors effect, confusing potential volunteers. And the sleight of hand used by many organisations when explaining where funds are used often takes our breath away. So now we want potential volunteers to say 'PROVE IT'

**people and places** has undergone an independent audit of the claims we make in our responsible travel policy – here are just a few examples:

- 80% or more of volunteer's monies reaching host countries – confirmed
- volunteer's know where and how their money is spent – confirmed
- all volunteers are screened – confirmed
- matching skills to need – confirmed
- comprehensive preparation – confirmed
- local projects run by local people – confirmed

Undertaken by The Responsible Tourism Partnership – <http://www.responsibletourismpartnership.org/> – this audit is a good workable alternative to a code of practise. The biggest problem with a code of practice is policing – who polices it and how? And where's the encouragement for organisations to continue to improve?

Only claims the organisation makes for itself in its responsible travel policy and marketing are audited – so the bottom line is – you made these claims – now prove it.

So Sallie spent some weeks in June reviewing the claims we make and reviewing our performance against those claims in 2008. Then an intern from The Responsible Tourism Partnership studied the claims did some desk research and then came to the office in Faversham to check us out – invoices systems emails CRB screening references.

**people and places** is the first organisation to undergo this audit, and we hope there will be many other organisations following its example.

We will most assuredly be using the audit to strengthen our work in the next twelve months. We know that other organisations are already undergoing the same process. This is not about proving you are perfect in every way – it's about proving that you're doing what you promise you'll do.

For a full copy of the audit go to <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/PressView.aspx?id=29>

## We want your stories!

Without your stories we have no newsletter, so please send them to [newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk) I don't need masterpieces just your experience of volunteering and any advice or tips (or even funny stories) for future volunteers.

The editor