

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



July newsletter 2019

Editorial



Welcome to the July issue of the volunteer newsletter. There is a very interesting article by Luci on our Instagram campaign, a couple of blogs from the ever busy Dianne and of course blogs by our wonderful volunteers!

Nigel Pegler

Have you looked at our website recently - <https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/> We have had a "refresh" - what do you think? and big thanks to Kerry our marvellous webbie for this. In addition we also have a new site - <https://www.responsiblevolunteer.co.uk/> - take a look here too!

Many of you will be aware that there have been important changes to the data protection act recently - we at people and places welcome them - we have already emailed you about this but please take a look at our policy here

<https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/privacy.aspx?category=14#.WyfOcdR95pg>

and if you have any questions please email sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

It's a hard life being programme advisor for people and places – I'm just back from beautiful Saint Lucia!

Saint Lucia – what a stunning place to volunteer! And there are several rewarding projects we support there, requiring a range of different skills, which enables us to match volunteers to projects where they are really needed.

I was last in Saint Lucia in 2013, right at the start of our volunteer programme there, so a return visit was long overdue. I was delighted to go back and spend time with our local partner, Nova. Together we visited all the projects where we have placed volunteers in the past as well as a couple of new ones and she was able to give me useful insights into how local needs have changed in the intervening years.



Dianne (right) and Nova (left) visiting a school sports-based programme

Our first visit was to Saint Lucia National Trust (SLNT). As in the UK, SLNT is responsible for conserving the historical and natural heritage of the island – and they are situated in one of the most historically important and picturesque spots on the island, Pigeon Island. We enjoyed a stimulating discussion with Conservation Manager Shirlene James about some of the challenges posed to the local natural heritage by climate change with erosion of the coastline and decline in some marine species, as well as the perennial problems for all conservation societies of balancing the books and balancing the need to attract more visitors with preserving the landscapes they have come to see. I was delighted to hear her speak so enthusiastically of the work done by our volunteers here – in particular that the document fiche prepared by one volunteer now forms the basis for an Antiquities Bill soon to be passed into Saint Lucian law. [For more information about our volunteer programme with SLNT take a look here:](#)



View from Pigeon Island

However the majority of our placements in Saint Lucia work, in one capacity or another, with disadvantaged young people, mostly between the ages of 12 and about 20. Saint Lucia may be a beautiful tourist destination, but for local young people there are few jobs available on the island and the education system is strict, meaning many leave school with few or no qualifications. There are many poor and disadvantaged communities on the island, and little for people to do. Alongside our local partners we support a number of initiatives which are providing support to these young people, and we have placed a number of volunteers on these programmes over the last six years. The programmes all offer their students training in life skills and vocational skills focused on encouraging them to make something positive of their lives, and equip them with the skills to do this.



SSF mentors

Some of these programmes are run by our local partners themselves, whose organisation, Sacred Sports Foundation (SSF) was set up to tackle critical social issues for Caribbean youth, such as crime and violence prevention, conflict resolution and health lifestyles, using sport as a catalyst for change. Their courses are run by young mentors, previously unemployed themselves, who they have trained in youth development, child safeguarding and special needs participatory programmes, to enable them to run these sessions. I was delighted to meet some of these mentors and watch them at work. I particularly enjoyed the session they ran at Lady Gordon Opportunities Centre, a school for children with physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties – the programme they run there is called Ability Counts and the mentors were clearly aware of each child’s level of ability and physical challenges and took account of that in the activities they asked them to do. The mentors I met were confident young people who now have a purpose on life – however despite their best efforts they failed to get me onto the sports field!

Similar programmes are run by other organisations, and our local partners work closely with them. Nova and I visited several of them, including Upton Gardens Girls Centre and the Centre for Adolescent Renewal and Education (C.A.R.E.) which has several centres across the island and where we have placed a number of volunteers. I was pleased to renew my acquaintance with Dr Mason from C.A.R.E. and with staff at two of the Centres, at Odsan and Anse la Raye. We were lucky enough to visit the Anse la Raye Centre on their Open Day, so were able to talk with many of the students and staff more informally and to see some of their work on display. Trainees in the carpentry and catering departments had particularly impressive work to show us, and in the life skills area I met a young lady who was a real ambassador for C.A.R.E., telling me how she used to think the programmes were just for losers but she now knows they are for people like her who for one reason or another were unable to complete their education and needed another chance – she is completing a business and IT course which should give her the skills and qualifications to find work in the future.



Open Day - Carpentry student shows his work

These are worthwhile projects which need your support, whether your expertise is in education, sport, entrepreneurship or practical skills. If you are interested in finding out more about the projects we support for disadvantaged youth take a look [here](#) and [here](#)

OUR INSTAGRAM CAMPAIGN

By Luci Gardner O'Brien



Campaigning for responsible volunteering has, and always will be, a big part of people and places. We are committed to the implementation of responsible volunteering, be it through our own placements, or by simply getting the information out there!

This is the main reason behind the launch of our [Instagram page](#). Through our page we want to share, and create, an active discussion about HOW to volunteer responsibly. Lots of organisations have been campaigning, us included, about what NOT to do when volunteering - and rightly so! Although, by concentrating on the negatives, responsible volunteering is being defined through calling out BAD practice. We're just worried that all this doom and gloom is putting individuals off volunteering - which is absolutely not our goal - so many projects need volunteers! Instead of only calling out bad practice, we feel there is a need to talk about the many ways to implement good practice. In our opinion it is absolutely fundamental to call out bad practice, but to also give guidance on good practice - this means giving tangible advice regarding responsible volunteering.

My name is [Luci Gardner-O'Brien](#) - I am people and places' Young Professional Advisor and I am running our Instagram page.

I am a law graduate, from both a French and a British University, but most importantly I am a millennial. At people and places we know how fast things are moving - people are reading the news on their phones, listening to podcasts instead of the radio, and streaming their music instead of going to buy an actual record. We want to be part of this change. We want to create an open discussion about responsible volunteering. We want to share our experiences, the amazing things that we have seen, the incredible projects we work with, just as much as the bad experiences and the mistakes we have made along the years.

Having launched the Instagram page this March - we have been able to start talking about our work, and more importantly our campaigns. With our first campaign, "[RESPONSIBLE](#)", we are going to touch on all aspects of this word, when it comes to volunteering at least!



How to be responsible?

We know how complicated it can be to navigate through the challenges of responsibility when it comes to volunteering or donating to charities. We've made mistakes and learnt a lot over the years (more about this later!). There are so many issues to consider. For example, how do I empower not disempower? Where's my money going? Is it right to volunteer with children? Should I be allowed to do work I wouldn't be allowed to do in my own country? There's so much more to consider than if we were just booking a holiday.

It's really important to us that we are as honest as possible with you about the challenges and rewards of responsible volunteering, and we want to give you lots of tips and heads up on the sort of checks you need to do.

We're going to go over three big topics with you :

Our responsibility to you as volunteers,

Our responsibility to the projects we support,

How you can be a responsible volunteer!

Any other responsible organisation should be able to give you the same information.

We will be sharing lists to make sure you get bite sized information. We'll also share some little anecdotes with you.

We can't wait to have an open discussion about responsible volunteering! .

(As always, for more information please click the link in bio.)

[#pandpresponsiblevolunteering#pandblog #pandpcampaigns#pandpvunteers#ethicalvolunteering#responsiblevolunteer #volunteer#volunteering #ethical #responsible](#)

While thinking about HOW we were going to get the message across, we started making lists - lists of things to do, things not to do etc. So we thought we'd post them! So far we have posted lists about our responsibility to volunteers, and how to seek support when you return from volunteering - there will be more to follow! Lists will not be the only content we will be posting - we want to take full advantage of the visual aspect of Instagram. On Instagram - for those who are wondering - you share images on your profile which you can add a small caption to. It is a perfect way to share the realities of volunteering with our followers - the incredible scenery, the vibrant projects, the thought-provoking social encounters, and many more positive experiences.

We want to share a realistic portrayal of volunteering - so you can know what to expect, but also so that you understand the impact that volunteering can have on communities. For example matching volunteers' skills to particular projects has been the cornerstone of our practice at people and places. This practice has enabled our volunteers to truly flourish in projects that are adapted to their needs, and projects that need their skills! One of the first steps towards being responsible is understanding that you cannot simply book volunteering with the click of a button, like lots of volunteer organisations.

We are really looking forward to exploring the different ways volunteering can be RESPONSIBLE through our campaign. We will be talking about the different professions that need volunteers, about skills (and matching them with particular projects), the white saviour complex and many more topics! Stay tuned! [Follow us here in Instagram](#)

This has been one of the most productive visits we've had

The Kuger family have been supporting [The Education Support Programme](#) at AV Bukani for over 10 years - here are some extracts from their blog about their latest trip this year



"One of the major factors impacting this year is an improvement in electronic communication. All the teachers and the community leaders communicate through WhatsApp and email on their phones. In past years, email was spotty and the basic phones were hard to use and limited to local calls; communication basically ended once we left. But this year, we have been able to clearly communicate electronically with contacts at the school and in the community while in South Africa and now that we're home. This enables us to constantly stay in touch with the principal and to start some efforts in S.A. that we are continuing to develop in the U.S. "

" Something new, unexpected, and highly encouraging was two teachers having prepared **complete written lesson plans**. This had never happened in any previous visit. Ms. Nongongona, a grade 3 teacher Larry has worked with in the past, introduced her Big Book lesson by reading a poem that perfectly set the stage for the message of the book. She even developed three activities as a follow up, geared to the different capabilities of her students. Ms. Ntshoko, the head teacher for grades R (kindergarten) and 1, who Eileen had worked with, excitedly asked Larry to come observe a Big Book lesson. She invited her fellow Grade 1 teachers to observe and share comments. There was a desk set up with a printed copy of her lesson plan, a blank sheet of paper and a pencil (for Larry to take notes), all ready for him. Both teachers incorporated so many appropriate components of a lesson into their planning and both implemented very effective lessons that engaged their learners. "



You are Making a Difference

For those of you who have donated time and money to this project over the years, **we hope you have seen the impact**. Here is a summary of what we were able to accomplish so far this year through volunteer time and the resources provided by your continuing donations.

- * Professional development for teachers of English in Grades 3 - 7 on use of Big Books, Read-alouds and Think-Pair-Share/Write.
- *Professional development for teachers in Grade 1 on Read-alouds and Big Books.
- *Donation of laptops which were equipped with new hard-drives, Windows and Office. (We appreciate our anonymous laptop donor!)
- *Purchase of memory to upgrade existing computers in the lab.
- * Donation of new big books and accompanying sets of classroom readers (Special thanks to Reed O'Brien of O'Brien Associates of Richmond)

- * Recruitment and support of a librarian-in-training for A.V. Bukani for three days per week, including mentoring by the municipal librarians and Bukani staff.
- * Support of comprehensive computer training for the entire A.V. Bukani staff in a 10-module program after school.
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- * A family engagement program to build a love of books and reading.

To read the full story from The Kuglers about their bond with [AV Bukani School take a look here](#)

Maths in the sand



A short story of a moment in time, where Linky Nkuna used her finger to do maths in the sand, under a tree, and is now a part of digital learning revolution where the same finger is used to control an ipad, where maths is just one of the many educational programs she has access to. Learn more about our partners Good Works Foundation and how you can help this pioneering [programme in South Africa and how you can help here](#)

Learning from Cor and his work in The Solomon Islands

by Dianne - Volunteer Programme Advisor

We are always learning . . . all sorts of people provide us with useful insights about volunteering in other countries and other cultures and about the issues we discuss in our campaigns.

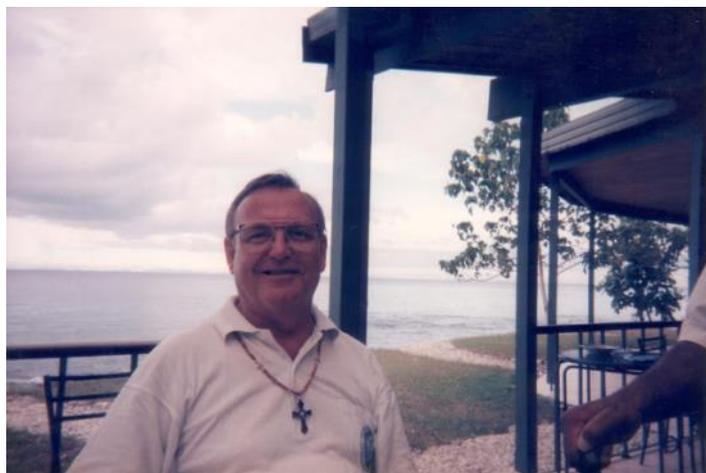
In the last couple of years I have got to know Father Cornelis Hooijmaijers a Catholic priest, originally from the Netherlands but who worked for 56 years of his ministry in the Solomon Islands – since his retirement Cor has come to live near to me. He is most interesting to talk to and has led a very interesting life, ranging from his childhood in a children's home in war-torn Rotterdam to his experiences living and working in the Solomon Islands. I am also in awe of the fact that he speaks or is familiar with many different languages, including Dutch, English, Flemish, French, German, Afrikaans, Latin, Greek, pidgin English and at least 3 Solomon Island tribal languages! Through my work with *people and places* I have learned a lot about short-term volunteering in the developing world, and as an organisation we try hard to do this responsibly, fitting in with local culture and taking advice from local people; talking with Cor has given me a new perspective on this – during his time in the Solomon Islands he has worked with many foreign charities and volunteers, and as he worked without a salary for 56 years he might be considered to be one of the world's longest serving volunteers!



Dianne and Cor

Cor was born in the Netherlands in 1934. He was only 6 when the Second World War broke out in the Netherlands and he remembers clearly the carpet-bombing of Rotterdam by the Luftwaffe in May 1940 which led to the Netherlands' surrender to and occupation by the Nazis. Cor was one of five children and his father had died so the family struggled to survive. During the Nazi occupation children were often sent away from home to families who had a bit more food to share, returning home periodically; however it was in the winter of 1944-45, described in history books as 'the Hunger Winter', that things got really desperate – bypassed by the Allied forces as they advanced into Europe, parts of the Netherlands north of the Rhine were left under Nazi occupation, there were severe food and fuel shortages and during that winter 18,000 Dutch civilians starved to death. Cor's mother knew she could not manage to support all five of her children – the parish priest and doctor advised her that some must go to a children's home or they would starve. So Cor aged just 10 and his 8 year old brother were sent to a home in Rotterdam. Cor describes the two years he spent there as the period that shaped his life. Although his family was poor they were a good family – they had little in common with most of the other children in the home, most of whom came from broken homes and some of whose fathers and brothers were in prison. The uniform the children had to wear each day was grey, reminiscent of those worn by convicts. They felt a group apart from normal society. The children were only allowed out on Sundays – Cor and his brother used to walk to their home in the freezing winter, but with no public transport and with the disruption caused by war the walk took hours and they only had about 45 minutes there before having to begin their return journey. Cor used to watch people through the windows of the home and feel totally isolated. We at *people and places* have campaigned to publicise the harm done to children through residential care and I have read a lot about it – however talking to someone who has experienced it gives a whole new perspective – it sent a shiver down my spine when Cor told me that during his ministry he has done a lot of work with people in prison – 'because I identify with prisoners'.

When the war ended Cor was 12. Since a small child he had wanted to be a priest (with very little idea of what that meant), so he managed to get a place in the Marist Fathers' seminaries where he spent a total of 14 years. Life here was also very restricted – he had in effect moved from one institution to another. When he had finished his training he wanted to study psychology or psychiatry as he instinctively knew that living in an institution was damaging and he wanted to learn more about this – however when the superior of the order realised their priests and students would be the subject of his studies they soon put an end to his academic ambitions! Unable to see a place for himself as an ordinary parish priest in the Netherlands, he applied to join the Marist Mission in the Solomon Islands where he lived and worked from 1962 until 2017.



Cor in the Solomon Islands

Cor's work in the Solomon Islands was as a priest, but also as an educator, administrator, finance manager and general facilitator for whatever needed doing. He employed local people who were unlikely to get work elsewhere, often women trying to support their families – not always a popular choice in a society which is mostly patriarchal – and always the best candidate for the job regardless of whether or not they were Catholic. His wonderful housekeeper worked for him for 30 years - he first heard of her through members of his staff when she was on trial for cursing her intended husband and refusing to marry him and was about to be sent to prison. Cor paid her fine and gave her a job, and she worked for him throughout the rest of his time on the Islands.

The Solomon Islands are too remote to be on the usual route for travellers or volunteers, though some of the major charities work there and it has been the recipient of a number of foreign aid projects. Cor says that occasional foreign visitors do turn up, often from Australia, usually with completely unrealistic expectations as to what they might find there. Visitors such as these can be a nuisance, unless they are willing to listen to local advice. The Solomon Islands are in the tropics so can be an inhospitable climate - for example first aid on minor injuries is crucial if they are not to go septic – but visitors often feel they know best. The area often suffers from what we now call tsunamis (locals always called these 'big waves') – they know what signs to watch out for but visitors are often reluctant to listen. The message is clear – local people know the place where they live far better than outsiders do and it is crucial to take local advice. It is also impossible as a visitor to have an immediate understanding of local cultural norms – Cor remembers a visitor from New Zealand starting what she thought was a holiday romance with a local man and the distress this caused as relationships are always taken very seriously in the Solomon Islands. He emphasises how important it is to have someone local to advise foreign visitors, and we hope this is a message all volunteers with *people and places* understand and abide by on their placements in the countries and cultures where we work.



A typical Solomon Island village

The country is extremely poor so foreign aid donations can be very useful, but again Cor emphasises how important it is to take local advice on where and how these should be spent. For example, some money was donated specifically to be spent on improving sanitation and the decision was made to build toilets - facilities which Solomon Islanders living in rural areas have no wish to use, preferring to use the ocean or the forest. If someone with local knowledge had been consulted as to the best area in the Islands to build these facilities or had been given time to prepare the people, the money could have been well spent – as it is, some of the toilets are used, but only for storage – not the original intention and clearly a waste of the time and money spent in building them. Cor also told me how hard he had to work to change the plans of a group planning to build water storage tanks – not because the tanks weren't needed but because the donors did not understand that due to the poor quality of local cement and poor design features the tanks would simply be unusable. Major charities carrying out building projects do usually employ local labour and pay good wages – however this means they attract the best workers and prevent local businesses, which could do the work but can't afford to pay such high wages, getting the job – the charity gets the credit for carrying out the building work and local businesses have lost out. Also, foreign aid workers do not always pay their way – their managers sometimes bring their families with them and expect them to be housed and looked after for free. In Cor's opinion, there are just too many consultants!



Local people waiting to greet visitors arriving by boat

Cor believes that volunteers coming to share skills with local people can be useful, but that local people must decide where they should do their work (a belief we at *people and places* wholeheartedly share), and volunteers must understand that sometimes local people know more than they do! For example, quite a lot of nurses come to volunteer in the Solomons. When placed alongside local nurses in hospitals in the towns they can be very useful; however they are often sent for part of their placement to clinics in outlying villages.

A local nurse in a village clinic is the only person with medical knowledge in that area – she carries out the duties of a nurse, a doctor, a midwife – then along comes a foreign nurse trying to show her what to do. Rarely does the volunteer have skills or knowledge that the local nurse does not already have – however the Solomon Islanders are polite and would not tell a visitor their skills are not needed – so the local nurse allows the volunteer to run the clinic for them. Cor says if he visits a village clinic and the local nurse is sitting outside having a coffee and a cigarette he knows she is allowing a foreign nurse to feel useful by taking the clinic for her. We hope *people and places* volunteer placements do not take this format – placement outlines for our volunteers are carefully worked out by our local partners to match volunteer skills to local needs – but the message of not assuming we know more than local people is one it is always good to be reminded of. An anecdotal example of how easy it is to assume a rather patronising attitude to local people if we do not take the time to understand local circumstances and culture - Cor told me of a well-renowned anthropologist who visited the Islands to carry out research on the customs of people from various Solomon Island tribes. Her questions were quite intrusive but the local people are polite to visitors and did not want to disappoint her, also she was paying them for the stories they told her. So they made stories up – they got the money, she went away happy, and the stories became part of her research papers which are still studied by university students today.

Another relevant message I have been reminded of through talking to Cor is that change takes time – we cannot and should not expect that on a short volunteer placement we can change the world! When he arrived in the Solomon Islands in the early 1960s everyone smoked, including children, and smoking rates are still high there today. Tobacco is grown locally so is easy to get hold of and in the rural areas they smoked pipes, often made from the fuselage of planes shot down during the war. If Cor or any foreign visitor had told the local people how unhealthy this is they would have listened politely, agreed and made no changes at all to their behaviour. It took Cor and others many years to get this message across, working very slowly. He told me that they managed to get the school only to allow the children to smoke on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays, and that on a Monday morning they would go round with a big box to collect in all the pipes! A good example of the importance of reinforcing messages over a long period of time, and that important messages cannot just be imposed by an outsider – it needs someone living locally, who is trusted by the local people, to instigate real change – so another reinforcement of our policy of always working with and sharing ideas with a local person when we go to a different country to volunteer.



Cor talking with local people

Finally, Cor wishes to emphasise that volunteers do carry out useful work, even if sometimes they think they achieve little. Most importantly, he values highly the impact that can be made by people from different cultures working alongside each other, building up mutual relationships and widening their knowledge of the world.

So thank you Cor for sharing some of your stories with us. We hear you loud and clear and fully support your views – when we go as volunteers to a country very different from our own the most important thing is that we work with and take advice from local people who understand local culture and know what local requirements are. Only in that way can we hope to be of real use as volunteers.

Gill and Mandy-their volunteering experience at Treak , Cambodia

Gill and Mandy have recently returned from their placements in Cambodia. This is what they told us.



We were known as Teacher Mandy and Teacher Gill (although we are both nurses) and we led teaching Yoga to most classes in the library. We did this to a story – We are going on a bear hunt and Yoga actions complemented this story and encouraged active learning of English. Both children and staff enjoyed the experience as did we and we were often asked to lead a short Yoga session at morning and afternoon assembly.



The second week we taught about planting, what plants need to grow and parts of a plant which was spread over two 1 hour lessons for all groups so was repeated a lot. We used a poem and the children decorated pots and sticks and we took them out into the garden to plant sunflowers and cress seeds. We also prepared worksheets and word searches.

We incorporated hand hygiene into this as the children needed to wash their hands after handling soil. This involved a lot of preparation and we recycled plastic water bottles as pots (needed over 300! So we got from hotel) and used plastic water bottles as watering cans and spades! Lots of cutting out shapes and paper to decorate pots. Be prepared to think on your feet and adapt with the limited resources available.

We also with K1 regularly encouraged and helped with teeth cleaning and hand hygiene and we took over home made playdough which the children loved. At all times we had a Cambodian teacher with us to support and translate if we led a session or if we were helping them.

I feel our successes were the Yoga and encouraging active learning through story telling to yoga actions and planting again an active lesson. We would have liked to do more lessons on hand hygiene and healthy eating but were limited with time constraint and also Khmer New year preparations and celebrations overtook the last week of our placement which was fun.

It was a great experience working at Treak. Everyone was really welcoming and friendly and supportive and they were pleased to have our help.

We also learned some Khmer. Arkun (Thank you) to everyone!

[To learn more about this programme take a look here](#)



Kate - volunteer placement director talks about the challenges and rewards of her work

there are loads of new video interviews and stories from volunteers and projects

If you haven't already spotted our [YouTube channel](#) it's worth a look.

If you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done – we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering – please send them to us so we can share them.



meet the *people and places* team [here](#)

[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

See our blog here <http://blog.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/>

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http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/privacy.aspx?category=14#.WxP_adR95pg