

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



Spring newsletter 2016

Editorial



Welcome to the Spring newsletter

I write this on the Monday after our latest people and places social at volunteer Val`s home. As always, it was a pleasure to meet previous and potential new volunteers ... and to catch up on the latest news.

There is always a great buzz at these occasions with volunteers talking about their past experiences on volunteer placements and the excitement of talking about their next placement, whether it is finalised or a potential placement.

Dianne has written a blog about the day which goes into far more detail.

Enjoy the newsletter and please spread the word about people and places: we would love more volunteers!

Nigel Pegler

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

a really great visit to UPS Chitardai, the school we support in India

I have recently returned from a really satisfying and encouraging trip to India. I went to visit the school where our volunteers work, [Chitardai Upper Primary School, in Rajasthan](#).



I have volunteered at Chitardai twice myself, in 2010 and 2011, working with the English teacher in his lessons and helping all the teachers to develop their school motto 'Learn Through Play' by showing them a number of techniques for active learning – I must confess it's my favourite of the places where I have volunteered. Other volunteers have taken a similar approach: bringing books, games and a variety of other resources to show the children (and teachers) that learning English can be fun! Like all of us who volunteer, I have sometimes questioned whether the resources I took to Chitardai were really relevant and useful to them, and whether the teaching techniques I demonstrated to the teachers would ever be used when I returned to the UK. So it was fantastic to see on this trip that some of the teaching strategies and resources taken to the school by me and other **people and places** volunteers are now embedded in the school. Some examples . . .

. . . in the store cupboard are several sets of flashcards, taken by volunteers, which are covered in dust and clearly not being used. But one teacher has ordered a set of flashcards of her own, showing letters from the English and Hindi alphabets, and is regularly using them in her teaching – a clear example of a teacher taking a technique demonstrated to her by volunteers and making it her own. Several volunteers have introduced techniques for keeping all children involved in learning, for example the use of red/green cards to hold up if you agree/disagree with a statement, and the use of named lolly sticks to decide which child should answer the next question.

A teacher new to the school knew about both of these techniques – he had been shown them by another teacher who had worked with some of our volunteers in the past.



Class 2 teacher using flashcards

Another example: as part of the volunteer orientation I was walking through the town of Deogarh when a man on a motor bike pulled up. He was introduced as a teacher from another school who had attended a teacher training session I ran in 2011 – he told me he is still using a resource I distributed then. I repeated my teacher training session as part of this visit so I hope it had a similarly useful impact this time!

And my favourite example – last year a volunteer took a magnetism box to use in her Science teaching and left it with the school for them to use. A teacher and three students from class 8 took this to a Science Fair at a secondary school in Deogarh. They described its use, speaking in both Hindi and English, and won top prize and a commendation from the local education officer. Despite the fact that I and two other volunteers were at the school at the time, including the person who took the magnetism box last year, they did not ask us for help with this or even tell us they were going to the Science Fair – they had the confidence to do this entirely on their own.



All this has contributed to the school being designated a 'model school' by the local education department – the numbers on the school roll are increasing and I felt the teachers were more focused on helping the children learn than when I was working there before. This does have its disadvantages – the school is rather crowded and there is not enough furniture for all the children to have desks and chairs. Ideally they need more classrooms and more teachers – currently they have three temporary members of staff brought in to help cover the deficit – and one of them used to attend Chitardai himself! He is such a fantastic role model

for the children and really goes to prove that a child from this economically-poor and rural community can aspire to a professional career as a teacher. Don't get me wrong, this is still an under-resourced school in a rural location, and there is still a very long way to go before it can aspire to the standards set by schools in wealthier parts of India, as well as in the developed world. Those teachers at Chitardai who speak some English understand the language but are reluctant to speak it – they have learned English as an academic subject not as a spoken language. They are also shy, especially the women, until you get to know them, so patience, persistence and encouragement are needed when you first arrive to form any rapport. Some of the resources and techniques volunteers have brought have proved not to be of use to them, and I'm not surprised by this. However I am hugely encouraged to see the uptake of some of our ideas and the contribution this has made both to the education of the children at Chitardai and to the standing of the school in the local community. As volunteers, we often feel we achieve nothing and worry that we are trying to impose ways of teaching inappropriate to people living in such a different community and culture. Well, this trip has proved to me that these feelings are wrong – in this school our contributions have been genuinely welcomed and are yielding great results.

An important part of setting up valuable volunteer placements and of making sure volunteers are well looked after while they are working at the school is the role of our local partners. On this trip I worked closely with Nanaki from Ibex, our local partner in India and with Bhavna, from the royal family whose former palace provides a home for volunteers while they are in India, and whose role includes supporting volunteers on a day-to-day basis. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know them both and believe we achieved some useful work together.



I also enjoyed renewing my acquaintance with lots of people in the town of Deogarh and at the hotel, and was gratified how many people remembered me after nearly five years! I also enjoyed working with our two volunteers who were then working in Chitardai – Sue was on her first placement there and was working alongside the teachers with the younger children, while Yvonne was on a return visit and was teaching English and Science to the older children, showing their teachers how to make use of practical experiences in teaching, ranging from a trip to the local town as a stimulus for writing in English to practical experiments in Science.

So if you have experience in teaching or as a classroom assistant, I really encourage you to think about volunteering at Chitardai. The school would like people who could encourage oral activities with the children – they are used to learning in a book-based, teacher-led way and really need people to help them develop the confidence to speak English and to pronounce it correctly. The teachers have not been taught in this way themselves, so they are keen to learn any techniques we can show them. They have benefited greatly from volunteer help in English and Science and would now love volunteers who could show them how to extend the active learning approach to other subjects, especially Maths. With the younger children their emphasis remains on making learning fun. The teachers would like to learn new games to play with the children, as a means of teaching, as well as new stories and songs. The school curriculum does not include any form of craft work, and no music or drama, so the teachers are always happy if volunteers can show them ways of incorporating some of these activities into their normal curriculum. There's plenty of scope here to match people with a wide range of skills related to working with children, so why not give it a go? It's a really interesting cultural experience for you too – living in a former royal palace, in the centre of a small and vibrant Indian town.

I love it there and I think you would too.

[For more information about volunteering at Chitardai read here.](#)

South Africa: 2 community projects & 1 great volunteer story

Gosh - where to begin ? Best to let Sonia tell you something of her six months in the townships of Port Elizabeth, where her work involved counselling in both [Emmanuel Advice and Care Centre](#) and in Emafini School, which is one of a cluster of township schools supported through the [education development programme](#).

So, in her own words, here are some extracts from Sonia's blog and volunteer report.

"I am going to try and paint a picture by sharing with you how my time is going here in South Africa...

"day 5 of my time in South Africa and I still can't quite get my head around it all. Starting to settle into South African life. As I write this I can hear drumming, children playing and a hum of traffic and car horns outside. Life is quite different in PE, (Port Elizabeth) living in this township. I'm living New Brighton which is a black township with a mix of houses, some are very basic and not too dissimilar from the day they were built in the apartheid years.



"I'm living in Mickey's house which was originally one living room with two bedrooms but she has since built extensions and it is now quite a spacious home with four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a good size dining room, lounge and kitchen.

Home in New Brighton



Sonia with co-volunteers and hostess Mickey

"I have my own room ... and at Mickey's I feel safe and enjoy the company that Mickey and her boyfriend Mxloisi offer as well as having the time and space to myself. Mxloisi is a Xhosa name and I'm guessing that you may be wondering how to pronounce the x? Xhosa is a language spoken in South Africa which has three click sounds as part of its language, x being one of them. The clicks are not something that I'm finding easy...however something I am determined to master before I leave.

"almost three weeks in, can you believe it? I've had a busy few weeks here and feel like I have a lot of work to do. The projects are very grateful to have me as there aren't counsellors here. After explaining what I do as a counsellor, (confusion between counsellor and psychologist) they are all very keen to use my skills. It really is a dream come true to be here. Counselling is a vocation for me so the opportunity to help people here is a privilege. I'm working at the Emmanuel Advice Community Centre on a Monday and Tuesday and Emafini Primary School on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.



"Emmanuel consists of a team of 7 ladies and 1 guy who give so freely of their time. They volunteer as they feel the community needs the support of Emmanuel. Amazing! They are all brave and courageous individuals with huge hearts. I felt instantly at home at Emmanuel as they were all so welcoming and greeted me lovingly with hugs and smiles.

"A typical day at Emmanuel: I'm picked up by the Calabash bus and taken to the centre for 8am. Once everyone has arrived, we meet in the crèche for prayers and singing with the children and then all hug each other wishing each other a good day ahead. I've read that 10 hugs a day improves our well-being and happiness, well you'll get your quota of hugs here. We all share a hot drink and play with the children before the crèche and pre-school lessons and activities start. The care workers then meet in the office to discuss who is doing what on that day. I often go out with the care workers to meet my clients carrying out counselling appointments with them at their home. I am having to adapt my counselling and be a little more flexible with my boundaries here. People aren't used to counsellors and privacy hasn't really got the same meaning here as it has at home. Despite this I have built positive long term counselling relationships and I am inspired and humbled by people's strength and resilience. As well as going to see clients at home, I meet some at the centre.

"I also help in the kitchen when there is food to feed the children of the community. Emmanuel has a vegetable garden and use their home grown produce of beetroot, onions and carrots, spinach and cabbage in their community kitchen. Emmanuel work as an outreach service and often support their clients in accessing support with social workers and at the local clinic. On occasion I walked the 5km distance with care support workers to the medical clinic which offers a free medical service. People need to arrive early in the hope to be seen and treated [and are] grateful that there is some kind of medical service even if they have to travel several miles and wait hours to be seen.



Lunchtime for the crèche kids

"Emafini Primary School teaches children from grade 1 - 7, up to the age of 13/14 years. The school was built to teach 800 children and it now has approximately 1300 pupils.

"My school day...after the daily staff meeting which has usually finished by 8.15am, I greet the teachers and make my way to my room which is connected to classroom 2. Like the teachers, the learners at Emafini are all very friendly and greet me when I enter their classroom.

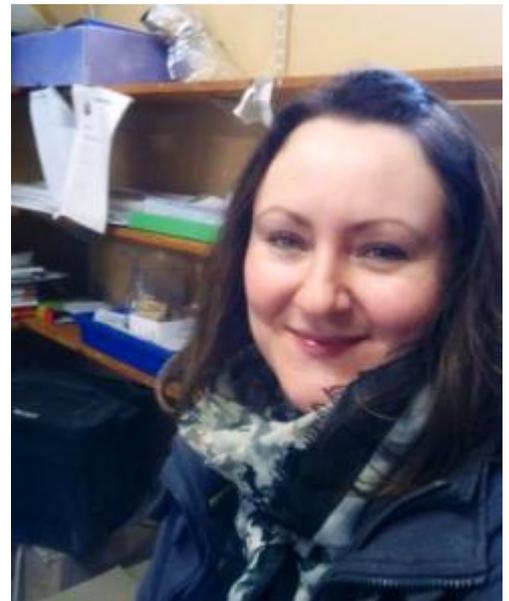
"I have my own room to carry out my counselling. It is in fact a large store room with a small rectangular window at the front and back of the room.



Sonia`s "office"

Quite dark and cold, even when very hot outside so I have become accustomed to dressing in layers to keep myself warm. The weather is now turning and the temperature is dropping to around 20 degrees in the day and 13 degrees when dark. That sounds mad doesn't it, I am talking about 20 degrees being too cold...how am I going to cope at home this winter? I am smiling at this thought and in part amazement at how I have so easily adapted to the climate here.

"So my day at Emafini is usually taken up by 3 to 4 counselling meetings, all usually lasting the 50 minute counselling hour. My clients are mostly the children but I have also been asked to meet with some of the parents and the school teachers and staff have also been meeting with me too. I can't tell you how happy I am with how my work is going. I am building really positive therapeutic relationships and feel very lucky and privileged to be here, doing what I am. My day at Emafini ends at 2pm on a Monday and at 1pm on a Friday. A very short day compared to what I am used to at home. On a Friday, lessons are over at noon with children then having the responsibility of cleaning their classroom. A hive of activity then ensues with children mopping the floors, polishing the tables and floors and washing the windows.



Sonia in her office

"At the end of my school day, I'm picked up by [Nelson or Monga from] Calabash who either takes me back home or to the sea front, depending on how I feel. The sea front with the Board Walk and Summerstrand is very similar to what I am used to at home.

"My experience in South Africa has been a huge adventure that has taught me so much. If you would like a challenge, laugh a lot and cry at times with some amazing people who you'll get to call friends for life, then a volunteering experience may be for you. For me it was rewarding, magical and life changing. Before I went to SA I read a quote that helped me: 'If your dreams don't scare you, then your dreams aren't big enough and always remember, you regret the things you didn't do in life far more than the things you did do!'"

Kate says: "I couldn't have put it better myself !"

NEW local partner, NEW project, NEW volunteers

It's so exciting: a new local partner and project near Kruger National Park ... about to welcome NEW volunteers! The latest addition to our programme is about to welcome their very first **'people and places'** volunteers.

Ray and Catriona recently took early retirement from full-time work in training and mentoring, as well as business and hospitality management ... so, what better match for their placements than in the amazing [Hazyview Learning Centre in South Africa?](#)

Needless to say, Ray and Catriona know perfectly well that they are the first **'people and places'** volunteers to work in this project, and although their placement outlines provide clear areas of input for their work, both are approaching their placements with a very real willingness to be adaptable and flexible ... as well as excited anticipation.



enthusiastic young adult learners

Ray will be helping in the conservation academy, working with the staff as well as with 2nd-year students going into Kruger National Park as part of the 'wildlife conservation' course.

Catriona's primary focus will make use of her expertise in the hospitality industry, working with staff and students in the 'hospitality' course, as well as assisting in career planning and guidance.

And we're already working with the next volunteers to whom Ray and Catriona will 'pass the baton'!



So - "watch this space", as the saying goes ... there will be updates about their placements in our next newsletter, as well as [any interim posts in our blog](#) ...

from one volunteer to the next

why was April 23rd an important day?

April 23rd 2016 . . . St George's Day, Earth Day, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death . . . and, most importantly of course, the day we held **our latest volunteer social!** This time we met at volunteer Val's home near Hemel Hempstead, the weather was kind to us, and we all enjoyed a lovely sociable afternoon catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. There was a good mix of previous volunteers who could tell us about their placements in a variety of different countries and potential volunteers who wanted to find out all about how *people and places* works and were keen to learn more about the places where they might volunteer soon. We try to find venues for our socials in different parts of the country to give everyone the chance now and then to come to a social not too far from home, but some volunteers had made the effort to travel quite a long way to this one, and we must make special mention of the new volunteer who flew in all the way from Donegal!



It is interesting that at some socials the focus seems to be, quite by chance, on the projects in just one or two of the countries where we volunteer. At last November's social there happened to be a lot of volunteers who had either just returned from or were just about to go to South Africa, and our different projects there dominated the conversation. This time the flavour of the month was definitely **Cambodia**, with new volunteers in particular wanting to know all about the volunteering opportunities there. They will of course need to go through the matching process to make sure their skills and experience match the needs of the projects there, but it certainly looks as though Cambodia can expect several new *people and places* volunteers later this year! You can read more about our volunteering opportunities in Cambodia by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

Thank you once again to Val for hosting this social in her lovely home – we hope your family enjoyed eating up the left-over food! Our socials are always such an enjoyable way to catch up with each other's news, and we hope to see many of you again at our next social later in the year.

Here are some videos recorded by Harold in conversation with some volunteers on the day



Click on the image to watch the video

12th November - our next volunteers' social in Faversham

Yes, I know - November's a long way off, and you've only just read Dianne's report about this month's social meeting near Hemel Hempstead ...

But we also know that everyone's diaries seem to get busier all the time, so we wanted to give you early notification in the hope that many of you will be able to come along to our volunteers' social meeting here at 'head office' (aka Kate's home!) in November.

The usual 1-5 p.m format - plenty of time to chat and share news of the projects and volunteers' experiences, as well as meeting new friends and making plans for the future!

We'll send out further details later in the year ...

Meanwhile please [email Kate](#) if you'd like to put your name on the guest list !

local groups: putting you in touch with other volunteers who live near you

If you have told us that you would like to be put in touch with other **people and places** volunteers who live not too far away from you, you should by now have received a contact list of email addresses for volunteers in your area.

We have always encouraged a new volunteer on a particular project to make contact with others who have volunteered there before as a good way of getting to know about that project. However, meeting with other volunteers who live near you should enable you to find out about people's experiences at a variety of projects in many different countries.

Hopefully some of you have already taken the opportunity to meet up with each other.

If you would like us to publicise group meetings in our newsletter or to share any photos or news, please do let us know.



People and places network

how did that happen ?! people and places-responsible volunteering is 10 years old -

It's 10 years since we placed our first volunteer!

There's a "curse" that many erroneously believe is Chinese -

"May you live in interesting times."

There is a wonderful Xhosa word - "Ubuntu" - which has no direct translation into English but portrays the qualities of humanity and compassion - 'I am because you are'.



Well, boy-oh-boy, have the last 10 years been interesting times for **people and places** - successes to celebrate and challenges to overcome - boy, have we been blessed by Ubuntu!

We were going to write some clever 10 point lists (apparently people are more likely to read lists!) - but we realised we just want to say thank you for and to :-

1.All our wonderful volunteers - we have always said we were in this for the long haul and the skills transfer work we are doing would not show instant results - but with each year we see how the volunteer programme has supported, and is supporting, local people to build the lives they want for themselves - this is the volunteers' work, not ours.



2.Our partners in the countries where we work - their commitment to the communities they work with - their support of the volunteers - and their tolerance of our demands.

3.The projects who have shown such friendship to the volunteers - true Ubuntu.

4.The homestay, hotel and guest house owners who care so well for the volunteers.

5.[The recognition we have received for our work.](#)

6.The travel writers and bloggers who have helped us to get the message out there about responsible volunteering.

7.The experts who have supported us (usually *pro bono* or for generously discounted fees) be it computers & websites or accountants and lawyers.

8.[Child protection](#), development and responsible travel organisations and consultants who have shared so much valuable information with us *pro bono*.

9.OK - here are the only two names in our thank you list! - [Harold Goodwin](#) and [Adama Bah](#) - who talked us into starting **people and places**.

10.Repeat 1 to 9 above - loudly and often - **THANKYOU**

...and we thought we'd share our wish list!

1. More volunteers - we're approached by really worthwhile potential projects and local partners on an almost daily basis - but we cannot commit to support them until we are supporting all the projects we work with now - and to do that ... yep ... we need more volunteers!

2. More responsible volunteer organisations - there are still a lot of bad organisations out there that are exploiting volunteers and local communities (we started *people and places* to campaign for change) - there is still a lot that needs to change.



3. Better press coverage of the issues - we passionately believe that well-prepared and well-matched volunteers can and do make valuable contributions to the "projects" they work with - all too often the press condemn bad practice without promoting good practice (and we don't just mean us - there are some great volunteer organisations out there - finding them is not easy)

4. More hours in the day and more days in the week

5. We lose less friends to disease, natural disaster and poverty than we've lost in the first 10 years.

6. The Nepali government sorts out its volunteer visa/work permit - we have volunteers with their bags packed (OK, I exaggerate) ready to work in Nepal as soon as it is no longer illegal to volunteer in Nepal without a work permit.

7. A better understanding of Search Engine Optimization (or whatever they call it nowadays) so that we could appear high up on web searches with the large organisations that can afford to pay for the privilege!



8. A time machineso we could visit all the countries where we work - and hope to work one day - more often

9. More kindness in this world

10. More volunteers :)

PS - did we say **THANKYOU?**

PPS - Did we say our ***No 1 on our wish list is to place more volunteers?***

people and places in the news

As many of you know, people and places believes passionately in the power of well-matched and well-prepared volunteers. We believe that the overwhelming majority of people want to do good ... but we also see the damage being done in communities where programmes are operating which are poorly thought out, poorly managed and poorly monitored. We believe that volunteers and the communities they seek to serve are often exploited - and that they deserve BETTER. That's why we campaign so hard - not against bad practice, but for better practice. All too often, though, the media just pick up on the against (sigh) ...

Here are a couple of media items we have been involved in recently:

[the first is a BBC programme that included a piece about the issues surrounding orphanages](#) and the exploitation of children, families and children - the topic starts at about 35 minutes into the programme.

[the second is an article in The Guardian about the benefits of "older"](#) (we think that means all of us over 50 ! :)) volunteers.

If you haven't already spotted our YouTube channel it's worth a look. There are video interviews from volunteers and 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.

click the logo



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.

If you like beautiful pictures and funny visuals we are also on [pinterest – follow us here](#)

and finally we are tweeting too – [follow us here](#)