

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



Winter newsletter 2015

Editorial



Welcome to the Winter newsletter, it was nice to catch up with previous volunteers and potential new volunteers at our last social in November, whilst chatting with Sallie, Kate and Dianne after the social the subject of the wild animals we had seen on our travels came up and for me the most amazing and interesting creatures I had seen were the leaf cutter ants in the Amazon rain forest. Sallie commented on how amazing it was that they worked together as a community and that got me to thinking that as a volunteer community we are like the ants, all working together towards a common goal, sometimes carrying a heavy load but getting the job done!



A Happy New Year to one and all

Nigel Pegler

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

our next volunteer social - April 23rd

Even as I write this, I can hear you saying "What? It's not even Christmas yet, and you're talking about April."



Please bear with us, as there's a very good reason: April 23rd will be our next volunteers' get-together, and we know that your busy diaries fill up quickly after New Year, so we're trying to beat the rush !

Lots of you know that we've been hosting November social meetings here in Faversham for years, but thanks to a previous volunteer's, generous offer to host a meeting for us, we're now delighted to invite you all to our spring meeting - a different season and in a different place: Val's home in Hemel Hempstead.

Everyone who's attended any of our previous social meetings knows how useful it is to get together with other volunteers and talk about their experiences and the realities of volunteering overseas, and these informal occasions are always thoroughly enjoyable.

As previous volunteer Bob wrote:

"I was able to talk directly to the staff and to people who had been before. These conversations were very helpful. I also met another volunteer who would be in the school at the same time ... so a potential 'team' identity was established."

So, whether you've already volunteered with us or you're thinking about the possibilities of volunteering in the future, you will be welcome to come along.

As you'll understand, Val will need a good idea of how many people to expect, so please **email: kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk - by 20th February. Thanks.**

We look forward to another opportunity to meet and hope to hear from you soon!

travels planned for 2016



One of my so-called friends gave me this label for my backpack last Christmas, and I am trying to live up to the sentiment. I'll be packing my bag again soon after Christmas and setting off on my next travels for *people and places*. I already have two trips planned for the spring.

In January I will be heading for [India to visit the school where our volunteers work](#) at Chitardai in Rajasthan and to do some work with our local partners there. I have been to Chitardai twice before as a volunteer and I am really looking forward to returning. The staff at the school and at the Mahal (former royal palace, now heritage hotel) in the nearby town of Deogarh are all so friendly and I am looking forward to meeting them all again. The timing of my trip has been planned so that I am there for the arrival of our next two volunteers to do their placements at Chitardai . . . so, Yvonne and Sue, I will see you in India!

My second trip for 2016 will be in March to Cambodia. This trip is still in the planning stages, but will be to visit Michael and Salin, our local partners there, to go to [Grace House Community Centre](#) where a number of you have volunteered in the past, and to visit [Treak](#), a new community centre managed by Michael and Salin in Siem Reap. I will certainly be telling you all about that in one of our newsletters later in the year.

And where next? I'm not sure yet, but all being well I'll certainly be doing a third trip to one of the other countries where we send volunteers later in the year. I love this job!!

Dianne

Volunteer programme advisor

local groups - volunteers get together

In our summer newsletter, we floated the suggestion that volunteers in different parts of the UK may be interested in meeting other volunteers in their area ... to which many of you responded, both speedily and positively. We know that informal and informative get-togethers are always popular, but our regular '**people and places**' meetings in Faversham are too far away for many people.



So, we did a little map-making project here in the office and we're delighted to say that no less than 10 groups have already formed - not quite 'from John O'Groats to Land's End' ... but from the Scottish Lowlands to the Jurassic Coast is pretty good coverage!

With Christmas and the holiday season almost upon us, it's unlikely that any of the groups will manage to meet until the New Year, but we're looking forward to news. Maybe your group will arrange to meet in someone's home, perhaps at a local tourist attraction, or at a convenient mid-point cafe or restaurant ... the options are many and varied, but will give you opportunities to meet and chat with like minded people about volunteering, about your projects (and to catch up with more local news, of course!)

As this new network gathers pace, you may also want to invite an interested friend or colleague to join you ... and when we have new volunteers who are interested in joining a local group, we'll make sure we share relevant contact names and email addresses with them too. Something that occurred to us since we identified the various local groups, is that you may want us to update you with news from or about particular projects ... so we asked ourselves how we could do that most effectively. We've come up with the following idea: if each group nominates one person as a primary point of contact, we could send recent volunteers' reports in time for any meeting you may have planned for your group. All we need to know is the name of your nominated volunteer contact ...

Finally, once you have a date for your local meeting, please let us know when and where you'll be getting together and if you'd like to invite any of the '**people and places**' team to join you, we'd be delighted to come along if one of us is in the area.

do you have the skills and experience to volunteer with us in Swaziland - we need you!

Written by Dianne our volunteer programme advisor (and retired teacher).

Are you a primary school or pre-school teacher, or classroom assistant? Maybe you help in a local primary school or pre school group.

If so, and if you are considering doing some volunteering during 2016, please read on to find out more about this project.

During September I went to volunteer with our project in Swaziland, to work with our local partners at the six Neighbourhood Care Points (NCPs) they support. NCPs are run by a number of organisations in Swaziland – they provide a caring environment, including food, for children orphaned or made vulnerable by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and essential support for their families. Educationally the aim is to give these children the right grounding to enable them to start formal schooling successfully at age 7 – although Swaziland is working towards free primary education for all there is still an expectation that children should be able to recite the alphabet and do simple writing and adding up before they are allowed to start school.

The NCPs are very basic structures – just simple structures providing some indoor space for teaching, a covered cooking area, a basic outdoor play area and simple sanitation requirements. The ladies who work there, both as teachers and as cooking ladies, come from their local community and are committed to helping to improve the lives of the children who attend. Most of the teachers have had little or no training and they receive no salary; they do eat dinner with the children and are given the odd celebratory meal, but I felt this was a real mark of their commitment to their work – I cannot think of a single teacher here in the UK who would do their job for no payment other than free school dinners and the Christmas party! They were desperate for any suggestions I could give for different ways of teaching the children – although formal work at the NCPs is only in the mornings, they were begging me to stay after school to run workshops and willingly travelled into town from their isolated rural communities so we could all meet together.



At the NCPs there are very few resources other than those brought by previous volunteers and the teachers have little idea of how to use these effectively. The classroom walls have been painted by young volunteer groups with educational materials such as numbers, the alphabet and the days of the week, and teaching up to now has involved little more than teaching the children to chant the information from the walls. Children are provided with quite a lot of time for free play, but there are few toys and no concept of guided play.

Although the teachers are very aware that they should be giving the children opportunity to do creative and imaginative work they have little experience of how to do this. They are desperate for ideas!



My role was to help to structure the curriculum for them. Our local partners have committed to producing a termly workbook for each child and a teachers' workbook containing suggested activities, and my role was to work with the teachers and our local partners to produce these resources. This I did – the workbooks are currently being checked by the local team to make sure all the activities in them are culturally appropriate and they will be printed and ready for the start of the new school year in January. The curriculum is structured around a theme a week, and the teachers' booklet contains a suggested activity for each day of the school year, covering different learning areas such as art, PE, role-play, stories, discovering the world and simple maths.

A couple of weeks of the new curriculum have been trialled with the teachers, once while I was there so I could see how it worked and take account of their suggestions for improvement, and once since I came home. There is no doubt they are very enthusiastic and keen to get their hands on the new teaching materials in January. However not surprisingly there is also a certain amount of trepidation and lack of confidence!

It would be fantastic if we could find some volunteers who could work alongside them as they start to implement this new curriculum. Is this somewhere you could volunteer yourself or do you know of someone who could?

There is a lot of scope for primary/nursery teachers to adapt or add new ideas to the work I have done. Alternatively, the structure of activities is provided in the booklets if you don't want to be creative but could work alongside the teachers and help them to develop the confidence to try out this new approach.



Please get in contact if you think this is the project for you! They would be so grateful for your help.

Email kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

[Read more about this programme here](#)

volunteer in a learning centre close to Kruger National Park

We are thrilled to announce that we are now working with a very special programme in South Africa.

Here is what Dianne wrote about it after her visit.

To learn more about how you could work here [take a look here](#)



Good Work Foundation, led by their CEO Kate Groch, have set up Digital Learning Centres in four different rural communities, with a fifth due to open next year. They believe that traditional education methods are failing people in rural communities, largely due to enormous class sizes and overcrowded, poorly resourced schools. Their aim is to set up 'Centres of Excellence' for these rural communities, leapfrogging traditional teaching methods and jumping straight into the digital age. Their digital learning centres provide education through computers, laptops, tablets, data projectors and interactive whiteboards, and more importantly teach how to use this technology, with the aim that their learners will be able, like everyone else in more privileged communities across the world, to access the enormous body of knowledge and expertise which is now so easily available to us all online.



They work with two groups of learners. At Hazyview, their main centre and the place where our volunteers are likely to be based, about 1500 grade 4 children (aged about 10) come to the Centre for about an hour every week.

They really look forward to coming – it was a pleasure to see children running to get to class. Through the use of carefully selected apps they learn English, Maths and some Science (focused on conservation), as well as learning how to use the computers. All teaching at the centre is in

English, and this is also important as up to grade 3 children are taught in their own local language (in this area siSwati or Xitsonga) but in grade 4 teaching of all subjects goes into English, so this is a year where many children struggle and any additional exposure to English really helps them to manage at school.

The Centre has only been open for three years but the first school to send children to them has already recorded a massive 35% improvement in English scores in national tests. Their second group of learners is young adults. Many of them have completed grade 12 at school, but have little idea of what options are available to them next or of how they could go about achieving any ambitions they do have. At the Centre in a bridging year course they teach what they define as the 'languages of access – digital and English'. Students study for the International Computer Driving Licence, an internationally recognised computer course which covers, among other things, the use of all branches of Microsoft Office. Their English studies follow a recognised South African adult learning course and focus on oral work as well as written. Within this course they learn skills such as how to present yourself at interview and how to write a good CV. They receive Careers guidance, both through formal lessons and on an individual basis, and at the end of the year, if they wish, they can continue to study at the Centre on courses specifically designed to provide employment opportunities in their local area. Tourism is one of the main employers, so there are courses in Hospitality, Media, Music, advanced IT and Conservation. I was privileged to attend one of their graduation ceremonies, as Sallie was last year, where about 60 students received their certificates and celebrated the successful completion of their courses. Their pride in their achievement, and their families' pride in them, was palpable and the staff at the Centre were rightly proud of what they had achieved, giving these students not only internationally recognised qualifications but a belief in themselves and their ability to achieve whatever targets they set themselves in life.

Before I went I had researched GWF and my fear was that they are so well organised that they would have little need of any skills or expertise that we might offer. This is not the case – there's lots we can contribute, ranging from people with teaching experience to help the facilitators develop their teaching skills (GWF 'grow their own' staff and few of them have formal teaching qualifications), to careers advisors, to people with business skills to help adult learners find possible areas for employment, and lots of other areas too – check out our website for specific details of what is needed here.



I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to GWF, both for the project itself but also because it was such a comfortable experience and set in such a lovely part of South Africa, the country recently voted the most beautiful in the world. Our local partners could not have been more welcoming and helpful, and they have a lovely house they rent for use of volunteers, so I

loved having my own home for the two weeks I was there. Hazyview is within 10 minutes drive of a gateway into Kruger National Park. I went in twice, once with a group of school children as part of their conservation work (and although they live so close none of these children had been into the Park before), and once as a tourist at the weekend. Our local partners were able to get me a cheap seat with an established game drive company, so for just the cost of entry to the Park (about £15) I had a 6 hour game drive with an experienced guide, and we were lucky enough to see 15 different species of animals, including all the Big Five, on the one drive. Those of you who know me well know how much I love cats, so it was wonderful to have a really good view of a leopard sheltering in the shade of a rock and a lion so chilled out it was more or less sleeping in the road.

Do think about offering your skills and expertise to volunteer on this project – they would be delighted to have you and I know the right volunteers could do a lot to help them move forward on this really worthwhile project – and you would have a great time as well.

orphanage volunteering - there is a better way

In November Sallie paid a flying visit to Bangkok to participate in an important child protection workshop.

(and our local partner Paul from Calabash Tours in Port Elizabeth was there - so an additional treat!)

Volunteering in orphanages is a hugely popular way for many to "give back" but child protection experts have been telling us for some years that there are many dangers in this well meaning practice. A whole "industry - that would horrify well-meaning volunteers - has grown from this desire to work with orphans.



Sallie (far right) & Paul (back row left) attend child protection workshop

To learn more take a look at the links at the end of this post

We at **people and places** are passionate about child protection and we have listened and learnt a huge amount from child protection and child rights experts - so we have been advocating against volunteering in orphanages for a number of years.

We are therefore very pleased and proud to be involved with an initiative that seeks to highlight these issues and help a greater understanding of the issues involved.

[The Better Volunteering Better Care Network](#) is an initiative supported by Oak Foundation and the Human Dignity Foundation, and led by actors in the child protection sector, to better understand the issues associated with international volunteering in residential care centres - aiming to discourage international volunteering in residential care centres whilst promoting ethical volunteering alternatives supporting children and families.

people and places were invited to participate in the network due to our internationally recognised role in campaigning for and managing responsible volunteer travel - and our contribution to the debate on volunteering in residential care centres. Sallie is a member of the steering group.



Much has been written on the potential harm caused by orphanage tourism

[The Better Volunteering Better Care Network](#)

[Better-Volunteering-Better-Care-research-and-articles](#)

<http://www.nextgenerationnepal.org/File/The-Paradox-of-Orphanage-Volunteering.pdf>
[UNICEF](#)

[Orphanage tourism: Who are foreign volunteers actually helping?](#)

['Making mistakes with people's lives': the ethics of orphanages and voluntourism](#)

[Better Child Protection](#)

for an example of volunteer programmes that work to keep children in families - a better alternative to orphanage volunteering in our opinion - [take a look here](#)

If you would like to talk with us about this issue or learn about how you can volunteer to help keep children in families please do email sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

to volunteer as a family takes even more planning - but is so rewarding

We love hearing from families who want to travel and volunteer together - especially as we know that, to people in the projects and communities where we work, 'FAMILY' is so important !

Tim, Rosalind and Millie came along to our November meeting here in Faversham to meet us and other volunteers as they begin to make plans for their family volunteer experience in 2017, and it was so good to meet each other!



This from Tim: *"We just wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed meeting you, Harold, Sallie, Dianne, Nigel and all the volunteers. The whole session really brought to life our ideas for volunteering so we have much to think of over the next few months."*

[and here's a video of Tim, Rosalind and Millie talking with our very own Harold Goodwin.](#)

Really looking forward to our working together !

planning & preparation for volunteer visitors ... and then ...

Well ... "best-laid plans" and "circumstances beyond our control" combined to create an interesting volunteers' get-together here in Faversham on 7th November!

We love our '**people and places**' social meetings and had done as much prep as possible ahead of time so that we could enjoy our guests' company and lots of time to talk with each other. Lists, signs and name badges had been printed off the day before; food and drinks had been purchased, and with volunteers due to arrive at 1pm, Dianne, Sallie and I (Kate) were enjoying a leisurely start to our day.



Dianne



Sallie



Kate

Our morning's preparations were well-planned over coffee with final tasks allocated (planning and preparation are very important to us here at '**people and places**', you know!) so we were feeling well and truly ready for a lovely afternoon ... but then, at about 8a.m. the power went off. No worries - "this isn't The Gambia", we joked, "the power will be on again very soon" ...

BUT NO - by 10.30 we had all enjoyed (!) cold showers, found every available candle in the house (it was a grey November day), dusted the floor (as vacuuming wasn't an option) and were beginning to wonder how we would heat the food ...

Next, Nigel arrived so bacon butties all round, thanks to a gas hob, cold food prepared, signs put up, brainwave about heating food as our computer wizard, Kerry, lives just down the road and had power and would let us use his kitchen ... so far, so good ... Nigel and Dianne despatched to Kerry with food to be cooked.



Nigel



Kerry

Then Adama arrived ... Adama is our local partner for all projects in [The Gambia](#).

You can imagine the breadth of his smile, his polite chuckles and his ironic "Thank you for making me feel so at home!" when we welcomed him to a house with NO POWER !

Everything continued to go well (despite the failings of our bit of the national grid). Dianne and Nigel came back with hot food, and volunteers arrived and shrugged off the minor inconveniences ... there was quite a group of 'old hands' from South Africa who were delighted to meet up again and to share their experiences with future volunteers; Dianne talked about new projects in Swaziland; Adama talked about the need for volunteers to approach their placements with a willingness to be flexible and adapt to circumstances (!)

We all had a great afternoon, and when the power finally came back on at about 4.30p.m. everyone was so involved in chatting with each other that they barely noticed !



Dianne & volunteer Susan compare notes



comparing experiences

All of which just goes to show that a combination of good planning and preparation, and a willingness to be flexible and adaptable, make for a rewarding volunteer experience - whether at home or abroad !



Some tales are amusing

Sallie and Adama talk about being changemakers

Sallie and Adama (our partner in The Gambia) were asked to talk about their experience of and advice for **change** at a recent conference.

(Adama goes first and Sallie is last at about 43 minutes in)

[Watch it here](#)



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](#)



Kate, Dianne, Sallie and I wish you all you would wish yourselves for 2016 and want to say a huge thankyou to all our supporters - we love our work - thankyou