

## **Volunteering Options - Promoting best practice in volunteering for global development**

### **A. Have you ever done any voluntary work?**

We asked a number of former volunteers what had motivated them to work overseas: the answers show that there can be a wide range of reasons for making the decision to pack up and go. Some saw it as an opportunity to help them make bigger decisions about their lives:

**Natasja**, who went with Volunteer Africa to Tanzania for three months, says that she decided to volunteer “because I had always wanted to go to Africa. I was in between jobs and didn’t know where I was going (maybe not the best reason in the world but it helped with my life making decisions)”.

For **Eleanor**, a volunteer with the Colobus Trust in Kenya in 2004, “after I finished university I was unsure what direction to take regarding my future and so I took a year out. I felt it was a worthwhile thing to do during this time”.

**Anna**, who volunteered with SPW (Student Partnerships Worldwide) in Nepal from 2001 to 2002, says that before she decided to volunteer, “I was working with a fundraising company, fundraising for several well known charities. From that work, I developed a keen interest in development work overseas. It seemed like a great opportunity to make a difference and experience a completely different side of the world at the same time.”

**Gráinne**, who volunteered with SPW in Tanzania, explains that she went for “a couple of reasons, some idealistic, some selfish: I was interested in development as a career; I wanted to go to Africa; I was a teacher and felt I had something to offer; I didn’t feel that I could watch the AIDS crisis unfold and not do anything about it; I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could manage with the isolation, the lack of electricity and running water and a new language or two”.

### **Advice: Testimonials**

So what words of advice do former volunteers have for people who are considering their options?

#### **ü Before you go:**

**Claire** suggests that people thinking of volunteering should put some work into researching all aspects of their placement before leaving Ireland: “Do research so you know what to expect in terms of what type of clothing you should wear, the type of food you will have to eat, injections you will need, etc. Go with an open heart and mind, you will learn much more than you could ever give.”

**Lynn** recommends that volunteers should question their motives before undertaking a placement, as well as doing practical things such as learning the language: “Ask yourself why you want to go; be sure you are going for the right reasons; learn as much of the language before you go; be prepared for any eventuality”.

**Anna**: “It is important that you are doing it for the right reasons. It is not a holiday but, having said that, you can take time to enjoy the experience from a tourist perspective too. Be willing to adapt to a foreign culture and accept what may seem strange initially”.

#### **ü While you are there:**

**Anne** has advice for people on their arrival in the host community: “Be humble, you are a guest in their land, live by their laws and their customs. If you cannot do that consider leaving and see leaving as a personal learning experience.”

More general suggestions include “Bring an open and positive attitude; be prepared to mix it at all levels; read up in advance about the country and ask questions” (**Pete**).

**Eleanor** emphasises the importance of being flexible in your ideas and beliefs: “Be prepared to change your ideals: what we perceive to be true is not always right - no matter how prepared you think you are”.

Source: <http://www.volunteeringoptions.org/VolunteerViews/Makingadecision/tabid/115/Default.aspx>, accessed on

October, 6<sup>th</sup> 2011

**B. After reading the testimonials do the following exercises.**

1. Complete the sentences.

- a. As Natasja always wanted to go to Africa, \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Eleanor took a year out \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Before she decided to volunteer, Anna \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Anna decided to volunteer because \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find synonyms in the text for the following words/phrases.

- a. Doing something without earning any money: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Uncertain: \_\_\_\_\_
- c. A period of time between university and starting on a job: \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Rewarding: \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Looking for information about something: \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Receptive to new and different ideas: \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Something that may occur: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What do the following words refer to on the text?

- a. Them (l.1): \_\_\_\_\_
- b. It (l.6): \_\_\_\_\_
- c. My (l.9): \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Their (l.22): \_\_\_\_\_
- e. You (l.26): \_\_\_\_\_
- f. It (l. 34): \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Their (l.39): \_\_\_\_\_
- h. That (l.39): \_\_\_\_\_