

Development Education Pledge

Personal Development through International Development

Our experience is that by connecting people in a good way we have enriched lives. We adopt our principle of empowerment and equality to everything we do, which includes the placements, school trips, volunteers and of course the beneficiaries.

Simply by meeting someone from another country and spending time together, and realising that underneath it all we're all the same means those people get the empowerment and motivation to change their circumstances. These interactions are very powerful and emotional for all parties, and over the years we've seen some incredible stories come out of those visits.

In every case we have seen that giving someone the chance to help another person is a good thing, and that it leads to lasting friendships and enjoyment of life. It is a happy experience and it has all sorts of psychological and social benefits.

But it often involves visiting people whose rights have been abused or have had their rights limited or even removed. For example, it is a shock to meet people who don't have access to basic rights like a proper standard of living or an education. Those people undeniably need more 'help' than somebody whose basic human rights are valued and upheld.

The trick is to approach the visit in a spirit of equality, and understand that the 'beneficiary' of any visit is as much the visitor as it is the host. All the benefits of self-confidence, self-esteem and happiness apply to everyone in the equation.

Let's get away from the idea that only the 'haves' can give something of value to the 'have nots'. Everyone has something to give, even if they are materially poor, and nobody ever got rich just on money alone. Leading by example and promoting values and morals can make as much of an impact as any amount of money.

Volunteering and participating builds skills, experience and confidence. It heightens self-awareness and self-esteem and it facilitates an exchange which helps develop ideas about our place in the world, but the important words to add here are "for everybody".

Not Saving the World

We're not making any claims to save the world, but clearly a combination of travel, learning and sharing does change attitudes and empower people. The right values have to be in place to create an environment where doors are opened in people's minds and we have worked very hard to achieve this.

Our placements provide benefits for the visitor and for the people being visited, but we are not trying to over-sensationalise the idea or make it out to be something it is not.

One person going out to a different country to 'help' could be seen as great for the individual going but of very little benefit to the hosts, and having negligible impact on the size of the problems we face in the world. At worst, some people see it as a bad form of tourism and even colonial as a concept.

Again, it all depends on the ethos and basis of the organisation and the way in which these experiences are presented. We have found that if the trip is presented realistically, and expectations are realistic for everyone concerned, then actually those few months, if they are part of a long term programme which is sustainable and enjoyable and beneficial to all, perform a vital function to the local economy and they allow schools, clinics, children's homes and the like to develop. We have so many examples of this, you only need to look at all of our project and programme pages on this site. But the best part is that the stories are not just about us installing a way of doing things, they are collaborations over many years and decades.

Volunteering does not have to be about cynical marketing, callous selling of dreams and commercial opportunism. We work with Adventure Alternative which funds our administration and handles all of the logistical elements of running a trip like transport, food and accommodation, but it is the Moving Mountains NGO and the communities which determine the content and priority of the visit, and ensures that the donated funds are properly managed and evaluated.

That's not saving the world, but it is getting the priorities right.

Opportunities

Our Trust Deed specifically defines one of our objectives as providing volunteers with benefits and experiences and opportunities. Our placements are not only for the well-off, they are not a luxury and they don't deny someone else of a job. We do select and prepare people properly, and we would love people to stay involved with Moving Mountains afterwards of course. We very much take the view that if you can help us deliver our programmes and help us pay our professional staff, then our commitment is to provide you with a very good placement that will hopefully enhance your own life choices.

For us, visitors going to spend time with our staff and learning about the work of an NGO is an education in itself and an adventure. The simple aim is to offer an experience that encourages exploration and innovation and puts people in a place where their opinions and morals would be challenged.

Our visitors engage with teachers, counsellors, social workers and community health practitioners to learn what words like poverty and discrimination and prejudice actually mean. They are encouraged to look at solutions in terms of the Millennium Sustainable Goals and how different communities tackle these age old problems.

We also provide similar opportunities to our country staff to travel and expand their own horizons and many of the Kenyan field workers have come to the UK to deliver lectures and training programmes to schools and organisations.

Fundraising Goals and paying for a trip

When somebody signs up to one of our trips we separate the costs clearly into Trip Fee and Fundraising Aim. That means there are normally two payments to make to two different organisations.

Trip Fee – This is a payment to the travel company Adventure Alternative for the logistics like transport, accommodation, activities and staffing, plus the organisation of your trip and the back-up while you are in-country. A breakdown is provided on the invoice. Costs depend on time spent in country. Legally any package trip abroad must comply with national and international laws, so as a charity we cannot 'sell' a trip as a package because the charity is not a tour operator.

Fundraising Aim – This is a donation to Moving Mountains which contributes directly to the area of work you will visit and also helps pay our field workers, teachers, community health workers, counsellors and staff. This donation is really the heart and soul of our fundraising initiatives and it enables us to exist. We provide a complete breakdown of how your donated funds are spent.

We are flexible about arrangements like when you visit, but we ask that you respect the ethic of Moving Mountains when it comes to the What and the How of your visit. Our priority is as much the benefit to the host community as your personal experience.

Our ethos behind placements

There is a lot of controversy and debate about volunteering, yet there will always be a desire in people to help others. The issue revolves around how the relationship and attitudes of the visitor and host are managed, and the integrity of what is being done in the name of 'development'.

There is an argument that volunteering is used to market commercial tours using emotionally driven messages and packaging. Understandably, it becomes an emotionally charged subject if people feel they have been exploited and that the project or programme has somehow been 'used' for nothing other than commercial gain.

Frankly, it all comes back to values, and the priority given to the development aim. Any activity like this has to offer equal priority to both personal development and to the international development aim. Give people transparency, and follow a 'fair trade volunteering' principle with clear values and aims, and you're more likely to succeed.

The main principle of volunteering or placements should be one of humanity and people making a difference. In Moving Mountains our ethos is that there should be something for everybody who has something to offer. Every person who contributes brings something of themselves to the sense of community good. We place people according to their interests and skills, but also according to the needs of the community or programme in any particular area.

We also work with other development organisations and we don't adopt an isolationist mentality. Our ethos is very much about long term sustainability and co-building programmes. The visiting groups or

volunteers end up being part of a team of many stakeholders and understanding their role in the bigger picture. We simply don't take people just for the sake of it.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

One of the biggest pitfalls of volunteering today is that the aim of personal development for the visitor overshadows the aims of the international development organisation. We believe that the objectives of the charity should determine the nature of any volunteering visit, and that the local stakeholders should be involved in deciding the nature of any visit and how the benefits should be shared out.

In Moving Mountains every visit by any group or individual is assessed and decided by the local Moving Mountains NGO and by the stakeholders. This could be the parent's committee or co-operative or educational authority. Also, every visitor raises an amount of money which is collected by the local NGO and used to help fund that particular programme or project, and also contribute towards other programme costs that the NGO has (not administrative costs, but costs like employing teachers and counsellors and field workers).

Additionally, every visitor is required to learn about the programme they are visiting, and expected to communicate with the local Moving Mountains staff before they leave home. There are rules for people visiting schools, children's homes, villages and project areas, which reflect country laws on child protection and a healthy dose of respect.

Fair Trade Volunteering

We are founding members of Fair Trade Volunteering which provides clear guidelines on how organisations should prioritise and manage their volunteering programmes with the benefit of the host as important as the personal development of the visitor.

Ultimately it's about being fair and honest, and not sending people out on irrelevant trips which do nothing for the host and make false claims to the visitor. We have been working hard at making sure our trips have integrity and meaning for a long time now, and all of our visitors understand that they are part of a long term development aim.