

## **WELCOME TO NEW LIGHT...**

In preparation for your arrival in Kolkata as a volunteer/intern, please read the following orientation materials.

- 1) General New Light and Volunteering Information
- 2) Kolkata in a Snapshot
- 3) Wisdom to Keep in Mind
- 4) FAQs
- 5) Contact information
- 6) Volunteer/Internship Contract

It is as important for us, as it is for you, to enjoy your time at New Light. We are excited to have you as a part of our team and look forward to your arrival!

Please let us know if you have any questions or comments in the meantime.

## **VOLUNTEERING AT NEW LIGHT...**

A walk down the dark lanes of Kalighat way back in 2000 changed the life of Urmi Basu, the Founder of New Light forever. Fifteen years ago Urmi combined her passion for gender equality and her background in social work to join forces with two young members of the Kalighat community, Krishna Mondal and Shib Narayan Bhattacharjee. Together using Rs 10000 or \$200 and no blue print for success they set up New Light.

Initiated by caring for 9 children in the year 2000, the programs of New Light today serve more than 250 children of various age groups. The services offered by New Light includes education, healthcare, nutritional support, recreational facility, HIV/AIDS care, income generation opportunities for the women and residential care for many of the young children from the community. Legal aid and advocacy against gender based violence are other thrust areas of New Light's operation.

New Lights first initiative was setting up a Crèche-cum-Night Shelter on the terrace of a temple deep inside the red-light district. This shelter was to provide the children of sex workers a safe haven, particularly in the evening hours when streets are the most dangerous and their mothers are working. The centre now accommodates around 35 resident children and supports another 80 to continue regular school education. These children receive wholesome meals, healthcare, and opportunities for recreational and therapeutic activities.

Over the years, New Light has set up three other facilities to cater to the needs of children and young adults at risk. New Light Shelter for Dalit Children cares for the children of municipal crematorium and sanitation workers. Those born into this caste hold professions that are considered extremely dirty and looked down upon. Since it is a rigid caste system, these individuals are never expected to hold any other profession other than that of their caste. In fact, this group is more commonly known as the "untouchables." Though not children of sex workers, they live in equally precarious circumstances, exposed to violence and subjected to discrimination and social stigma. Therefore with New Light, the children receive support to continue formal education, remedial education, nutrition and healthcare.

The residential facility Soma Memorial Girls Home protects adolescent girls with the cooperation of their families. Thirty-eight girls ranging between 6 and 18 years old reside and are cared for by dedicated staff recruited from within the community. All the girls are enrolled in regular schools in the neighbourhood.

The home offers the children a variety of support, such as counselling, positive relationships with caring adults, connection to family, therapeutic activities, dance, music, and boxing lessons to help them grow and develop into healthy young women. In the last year, several of the girls even participated in national, state and local level boxing championships. Several of whom won trophies for their talents.

New Light Sonar Tori accommodates girls who have grown up in Soma Home and other at risk young women who are pursuing higher education, professional, or vocational training programs. Currently there are 12 young women in residence. New Light provides all necessary financial and technical support, but the home itself is managed by the residents.

New Light operates two small playschools, one in Kalighat named “Jhinuk,” and another in Sonagachi, a sex worker district in the north Kolkata, named Operation Starfish. These two meet the growing demand from mothers to strengthen care for the toddlers whose needs are largely neglected. The schools follow traditional as well as the Montessori system of teaching and accommodates around 50 toddlers and older children up to the age of five. The two facilities have adequate supplies of appropriate equipment make learning a pleasure for the little ones. They encourage children to make going to school a habit and encourage them to join the mainstream schools at the right age. Equally importantly, they address the health and nutritional needs of the children.

New Light Boys Home “Khela Ghar” was set up on the 14th of November 2014. The Boys Home operates in the same manner as the Soma Memorial Girls Home, offering similar facilities and opportunities to male children of sex workers. These children learn respect for women and are encouraged to have aspirations that are nurture with mentors who volunteer.

Through these shelters, New Light strives to construct an environment of security, stability, care and affection to give each child a normal, healthy childhood unlike the daily traumas they experience. The aim is to help the children grow into socially responsible and productive citizens. Now, after the brave beginning in 2000, New Light is flourishing with numerous volunteers, sponsors and of course beneficiaries.

The shelters mentioned above are not situated in the same area as the New Light safe shelter but all of them are New Light's property. Though it does take time to travel from one shelter to the other, in order to volunteer, **traveling is mandatory**. Volunteers frequently take a combination of metro, bus, auto-rickshaw, and taxi depending on what shelters they volunteer at. Not only volunteers but all the staff members at New Light distribute their time amongst all the shelters.

You can distribute your time amongst all the shelters or work in particular shelters as well. We have a dedicated operations team who will guide you and your area of work/expertise once you start volunteering at New Light. Upon arrival, volunteers are exposed to all 7 shelters to get a better understanding of our projects and then they are free to decide which area/shelter to work on guided by our operations team. Please note, that apart from Jhinuk, Star Fish and Syamatara morning section, all other work is done in the evening after school hours (approx. 5:00pm-8:30pm).

Kolkata is a vast city and the locations/addresses cannot be explained over email. You will be able to learn about the areas where the projects are situated and also other locations in Kolkata once you arrive.

It is not difficult to commute in Kolkata as we are well connected in respect to transportation in the city. Do not worry because you will have someone to escort you to all the project locations until you are familiar and confident with traveling on your own.

For more information/pictures, along with our website [www.newlightindia.org](http://www.newlightindia.org), you can also follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/newlightkolkata](https://www.facebook.com/newlightkolkata)

## **KOLKATA IN A SNAPSHOT**

### **Quick facts:**

Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), the City of Joy, is the capital of the Indian State of West Bengal located along the Hooghly river. Most people speak Bengali and Hindi. It was the former capital of British India and parts of the city have been built like a European Capital.

### **Places to visit during your stay:**

*Please note that these are just a few of the places to visit within the wonderfully diverse and fascinating city. Kolkata is busy with life at all times of the day and you will always find something to do!*

- 1) Victoria Memorial
- 2) Flower Market
- 3) Chinese Breakfast @ the Chinese Market, Teretta Bazar, from 6-8am
- 4) Saint Mother Teresa's House
- 5) New Market
- 6) Howrah Bridge
- 7) Dakshineswar Kali Temple
- 8) Kalighat Kali Temple
- 9) Indian Museum
- 10) St. Paul's and St. John's Cathedrals
- 11) Marble Palace
- 12) Eco Park
- 13) Park Street has nice coffee shops and good restaurants. (Good for a night out but more expensive than other areas)

### **Eating in Kolkata:**

From the street food vendors to fancy restaurants, you will find incredibly diverse and delicious meals in Kolkata. The app, Zomato and Swiggy, is very helpful! Some restaurant recommendations from previous volunteers include restaurants in the Park Street area like Peter Kat, Mocambo, One Step Up, Flurry's etc and Bengali cuisine restaurants like Kewpies and 6 Ballygunge place. But don't miss out on the street food – we recommend that you eat things that are cooked right in front of you to avoid getting sick (see FAQs for more info on how to stay healthy).

### **Volunteer recommended tour guides:**

- 1) GetYourGuide – A/C car plus personalized tour. Will take you for lunch but you have to pay

## 2) Calcutta Walking Tours

**For more information on India and Kolkata, please take a look at the following reading list:**

*You can purchase these books at any bookstore in Kolkata. They may be cheaper here than in western countries.*

- *Mother Pious Lady*, Santosh Desai
- *Age of Kali*, William Dalrymple
- *River of Smoke and A Sea of Poppies*, Amitav Ghosh
- *Lowlands and Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri
- *Calcutta: A City Revealed*, Geoffrey Moorhouse
- *In Spite of the Gods*, Edward Luce
- Anything written by Amartya Sen
- Anything written by Arundati Roy

### **WISDOM TO KEEP IN MIND..**

For any kind of volunteering opportunities, you need to adapt to the right mindset. You must understand that everything here in India will be different to what you are used to. The right mindset means to...

... Understand the environment in which you will be working in! The children at New Light come from very difficult backgrounds and carry deep marks of trauma within them. You will not even recognize it at first when spending time with them, but it is important to be sensible to that and treat all of the children with the same kindness, respect and love.

... Feel comfortable around children and especially adolescents! Working with children, teenagers and young adults is already a challenge when you both speak the same language and live in a similar environment. It can be an even bigger one if you don't. Be extroversive, open-hearted and pro-active. Get ready to take over the role of a group-leader and step up for yourself and your goals.

... Be aware of the cultural differences you will be facing, not only when it comes to your interaction with the children, but also in your working environment, with the staff at New Light and in the community. You will find out what the differences are very quickly for sure. Be patient and relaxed. Things do go differently and most of the time a little slower than what you will be used to.

... Know what you are doing! Be pro-active and independent and when something does not go according to plan, be creative and change your plan!

... Get ready to not find western standards here! May it be that the toilets are different, the food is (too) spicy, the dress code is conservative, etc.

... Be punctual! Take your work at New Light as serious as any other work. Don't let anyone wait for you and stick to your arranged plans, informing someone if you need to change your plans around for any reason.

... **Know that you will not change the world!** It is great that you are thinking about spending some time with our NGO, but you are not able to change lives in such a short time. The social issues we are facing are too complex to structurally change them on macro-level. So we are a "grass roots" organization, helping from the bottom up. And we are only now - after 16 years of hard work - seeing the effects of this work. Be humble and thankful about small achievements! Maybe you are not changing the world, but you have taught one child to respect himself and follow his dreams. And that is the greatest gift he can receive.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. What will my daily living costs be?**

That totally depends on you. Kolkata is a very diverse city. You will find upper-class restaurants next to local tea stalls. A meal in a local restaurant costs between Rs.300 to 400, and in an upper-class restaurant you can easily spend Rs.800 and above. Fruits and vegetables at the market would cost around Rs.300, i.e. if you are buying locally grown products.

### **2. How do I get around the city?**

A metro ride (a very easy and fast way to get around in Kolkata!) costs between Rs.5 to 20, depending on the distance. Kolkata just wouldn't look the same without the plethora of yellow ambassador taxis that ply on its roads. They're easily available and relatively cheap, and will usually use their meters, especially outside tourist locations. But you have to insist on them using the meter. If they refuse, walk away and ask another cab, unless you want to pay what they are asking. Fare is Rs.25 for first two km, and Rs.12/km afterwards. Some meters are, however, outdated.

We also have other cab services available like Ola and Uber which can be booked using the app. These services are more expensive than the local taxi but most have A/C.

Any other public transport services like the bus, tram or the auto rickshaw usually cost between Rs. 5-15.

Mapsme is a free app that determines where you are using your phone's GPS and therefore, does not require data to operate. You must download the map of Kolkata when online however.

### **3. How do I contact people?**

We recommend that if you are staying for any length of time longer than 2 weeks, you should get a SIM card. In India, you can pick one up at the airport or look for a Vodafone or Airtel store. To get a pre-paid SIM card, you will need your:

- Passport
- Copies of front page of passport

- Copy of Indian Visa
- Phone number of host with home (guest house) address
- 1 passport photo
- Make sure you give a few signatures on documents before you go, they forgot to do this for me and it took an extra week to have it fixed
- Try to do this as soon as possible and give your number to New Light
- Available in 10-12 hours by activating the phone – you will need to call the activation phone number and provide your information

You can also use WhatsApp, email, Facebook, etc. to contact people.

#### **4. How likely is it to fall sick during my stay in Kolkata?**

Falling sick is always a possibility. You need to take care of yourself and be careful with what you eat and where you eat. **DO NOT drink the tap water.** You are advised to drink packaged drinking water only or filtered water. If you stick to well cooked food - don't miss the famous Bengali street food – you should be fine. Any hot, steaming food and fruits that you can peel and eat is not a hazard to your health. One famous rule concerning food is: Peel it, boil it and cook it.

Mosquito borne diseases do exist - but they are very rare and not one of our former volunteers has ever had it. Volunteers sometimes get a common flu, which they get from the change in weather, timing and environment. Keep in mind that you are working with children and make sure you wash your hands frequently before and after interacting with them. If you get sick in India, there is no need to worry - we will take good care of you and assist you in getting a good treatment. Please ensure that you have a health insurance that will cover all of your expenses in that case!

#### **5. If I can't drink the water, can I brush my teeth with it?**

Brushing your teeth should be fine, as should washing your dishes, etc. but if you are at all worried, just use filtered water for brushing teeth. Washing dishes in the water is fine as long as the dishes are dry before you use them again.

#### **6. What will the weather be like?**

Kolkata has a tropical wet-and-dry climate. Most of the time the temperature ranges from 30 - 40 Degree Celsius, with a humidity of an average of 75%. The only months of winter are December, January and February with a temperature of 10 - 20 Degree Celsius.

#### **7. What do I wear during volunteering/interning at New Light?**

Loose-fitting, breathable clothing is a good option. However, it is advisable to cover up your knees and shoulders, although sleeveless is allowed. You can wear any kind of pants/trousers, as long as you are comfortable in them. Long skirts (ankle length) and also skirts that cover your knees are OK to wear.

Light, cotton clothes are advisable in the dry and wet period. By and large, one is well advised to take just the most necessary pieces of clothing to India because clothing is very inexpensive. You are

encouraged to wear any outfit that fits your mood, but keeping our area of work in mind, you are refrained from wearing hot pants, tank tops or any such kind of clothing at work. However, please feel free to wear any kind of outfit in the evenings.

You will most likely be walking around often so comfortable sandals is advisable. Especially if you are here during wet season, streets often flood so sandals are often preferred over tennis shoes by our volunteers.

### **8. What else should I carry?**

All kinds of cosmetics and toiletries are available in supermarkets and malls. Sun protection is not common and comparatively expensive. Insect repellent is always available and can be bought in India. Generally, cosmetics and toiletry items are about the same price as they are in a Western country.

Hygiene is important, especially when working with children. Therefore, you may like to bring some hand sanitizer and/or baby wipes. Most items can be purchased locally and often at cheaper rates than back home. It is recommended that you carry your own medical kit. You can consult with a doctor in your hometown to determine the medical items you should carry.

For women, if you are picky about menstrual care products, please bring the items with you from home. Though you can buy pads, tampons are expensive and overall the variety of products is smaller than in western countries.

The grocery store – Spencers/ Big Bazar at the following shopping malls are of great help!

- Spencers @ South City Mall
- Big Bazar @ Lake Mall
- Spencers @ Quest Mall

Apart from the malls, most all amenities can be purchased from the local grocery store around the corner.

Also note that toilet paper is not always available at restaurants and other places. It is wise to carry toilet paper with you.

Umbrellas are a must, as well as some volunteers have suggested bringing a sweat cloth as it can be very hot.

### **9. Is Kolkata a safe place to be?**

All of our interns and volunteers have reported that they always felt very safe in Kolkata. People in Kolkata are known to be very relaxed and friendly. You will find that you will not get harassed anywhere - a stereotype that is commonly putting India in a very bad light at the moment.

That being said, of course you still need to take precautions and always be alert, especially at night and/or when you are alone. But none of our volunteers and interns ever had a bad experience concerning safety. The area in which the guest house is located is quite wealthy and peaceful. Especially

as a foreign tourist, you will find that people are very concerned about your well-being in India and are very helpful in case you are lost or looking for something.

But please bear in mind that it is up to you to be aware of not putting yourself in a dangerous situation - like everywhere else in the world. If you want to walk around wearing gold chains and waving around big bills of money, remember that according to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal (MGD) programme, 270 million or 21.9% people out of 1.2 billion of Indians live below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day.

The safety measures that you are advised to take are exactly the same safety measures that you would take if you were visiting any other new & unknown country. Pay attention to your surroundings and you should be fine.

### **10. Emergency Services**

The prevention measures that all volunteers are advised are, within India dial 100 or 108 for police, dial 101 or 108 for medical or fire emergency, always carry your passport with you. Put a sticky note inside with the local telephone number of your Consulate. Be particularly careful with your belongings (including wallets/purses) in crowds.

However, please make sure that you pack all your key documents and papers – passport, copy of passport, transport tickets, credit/ATM cards.

Please also contact your home country embassy and register your stay in India. This way your country knows that you are in India in case of emergency, etc. They will also notify you for various events or happenings, including how to vote abroad, etc.

### **11. Who is going to be there for me if I need assistance?**

Our volunteer coordinator will be there for you if you have any questions about your stay in Kolkata and regarding your work with New Light, the Associate Director. If you approach us, we are very happy to assist you in finding a way to make your plans come to life.

**Volunteer Coordinator:** Avantika Kar

Contact No.: +919831502641

**Associate Director:** Urmi Ray

Contact No.: +918697877122

We want to make sure you have a great experience in Kolkata and at New Light, so please come to us with any problems, issues, emotions, etc. that you may have. Culture shock is real and living in Kolkata can be an overwhelming experience, especially when working with vulnerable populations. Please know that we are here to help you with your experience and can only help if we know how you are feeling.

### **14. Who do I contact if something at my guest house needs fixing?**

Please contact Avantika and it will be taken care of.



**15. In regards to the children, is it ok to give gifts? What about to the teachers as a thank you?**

This is entirely up to you. The best thing you can give the children is your time, energy and enthusiasm. However, it is sometimes useful to bring things that can be used by groups of children, for example a football or some team game. Any gift that could assist them in their education is welcome.

We ask that if you do give gifts that you distribute them equally among the children and that you are not biased with your gift giving. If you have specific questions about this, please ask.

As for the teachers, this again is entirely up to you.

**16. Do I need to bring my own teaching supplies, etc.?**

No, we will have the basic supplies available such as pencils, workbooks, etc. If you have a specific activity in mind, please talk to the teachers, to Avantika and/or other New Light staff to determine if other supplies need to be acquired.

If you would like to donate teaching and/or other supplies (such as medical supplies), please talk to Avantika or other New Light staff and we can help you!

**17. Where can I travel after, before or during my stay in Kolkata?**

That depends on the amount of time that you have. India is an incredibly beautiful and diverse country. Highlights are the desert state of Rajasthan, the mountainous region of the Himalayas, cities like Varanasi, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, which are rich in history and tradition but also rural countryside, which will give you a ride back in time. There is also a lot to see in Kolkata itself, which is a city of cultural heritage and famous for a special friendliness of its inhabitants. Close to Kolkata and really worth a visit are for example the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, Shantiniketan, Tajpur Nature Camp, the beach city of Puri and a lot more (A Lonely Planet guidebook is always a good choice) You will find that in India beauty is not hard to find - whether you are looking at landscapes, places or people.

**Contact Information: Addresses and Phone Numbers of New Light Locations**

**1. New Light Media Centre**

361 Jodhpur Park. Opposite EEDF Hospital. Kolkata – 700068

Contact Number: 033-24733132

Contact Volunteer Coordinator – Avantika Kar - +919831502641

**2. New Light main shelter and Jhinuk**

162 Kalighat Road. Kolkata – 700026

Contact Number: 033-24850068

**3. New Light Shelter II (Dalit Shelter)**

Tollygunge Rd, Tollygunge, Kolkata, West Bengal 700026 (Keoratala Maha Samshan)Contact  
Associate Director – Urmi Ray - +918697877122

**4. Soma Memorial Girls Home**

35/1 Moore Avenue. Kolkata – 700040. Near Regent Park Police Station.  
Contact Director Programs – Sima Banerjee - +919903076510

**5. Sonar Tori**

5/7 Netaji Nagar. Kolkata – 700040  
Contact Director Programs – Sima Banerjee - +919903076510

**6. Khela Ghar Boys Home**

P-103/1 Bidhu Bhushan Sengupta Road. Kolkata – 700034. Near Ekata Sangha club and Saha  
Nagar School.  
Contact Associate Director – Urmi Ray - +918697877122

**7. HTS Operation Star Fish**

3/2A Nilmoni Mitra Street. Kolkata – 700006. Near Ranjan Club.  
Contact Director Programs – Sima Banerjee - +919903076510

**Volunteer and Internship Contract**

**Dear Volunteer and Intern:**

- Please try to familiarize yourself with and the mission of New Light and act accordingly.
- You are expected to treat the children, their mothers and all others in the community with **respect, love and compassion.**
- You are required **to report anything** that appears to be out of place to your centre supervisor.
- Volunteers/interns are requested to behave like loving adults with the children at New Light at all times.
- Volunteers/interns are requested not to visit individual homes of the children without taking the permission from the authority, New Light. If any volunteer/ intern want to meet the parents of any child, the meeting should be held within the premises of New Light.
- Volunteers/ interns **should not be biased** towards any children of New Light. Kindly treat all children equally.
- Children may discuss their views with the volunteers/interns. Volunteers/ interns should be a listener but should not come to any conclusion immediately. They are requested to discuss the same with the authority if necessary.
- Volunteers/ interns are requested not to let any children handle their personal objects like mobile phones, tab or any other gazettes. Giving children any kind of electrical gadgets is strictly prohibited.
- Volunteers/ interns should not involve any children associated and any person belonging to the community in any kind of activities/events outside New Light. Any event/outing organized by volunteers/interns will be accompanied by staff from New Light at all time.

- The children at New Light are from challenged background with deep deprivation. Kindly use empathy as your greatest tool.
- Taking photos and videos at New Light and all the other projects is restricted. But they can be permitted under special conditions and can be discussed once you arrive in Kolkata.
- We treat volunteers and interns with the highest respect and value their time here. It is our expectation that **volunteers become future ambassadors for New Light** and therefore they are welcome to have questions and queries which can be attended by competent and designated management staff. **Do remember to sign the visitor's book at every location.**

Any violation of the above mentioned rules will be taken as serious offence and actions will be taken accordingly.

New Light prides itself as an organization that encourages self expression and creativity. The most important aspects of New Light's work is compassion and love.

