



## The Model Volunteer

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Village Volunteer—a person who values international service and is committed to working successfully across cultural lines. Through our programs, you will have the opportunity to offer a hand in friendship and partnership by sharing in the work of local communities; in this way, you champion the cause of compassionate global citizenry. We hope that the philosophy and mission behind Village Volunteers will inspire you as you set out on your journey.

### Understanding the Village Volunteers Approach

The Village Volunteers approach is one of consideration, kindness, and a commitment to human rights. Through collaboration with local communities on a wide variety of projects, volunteers have the opportunity to strengthen ties across the boundaries of international borders, race, gender, age, and culture.

**If you are accepted as a Village Volunteer, we will ask that you follow the below guidelines.**

**Approach your international service experience with an open mind and heart; see yourself as a student rather than an educator, as a helper rather than a leader.** Village Volunteers asks that before departure, volunteers understand the realistic limits of their abilities to solve a community's problems. This approach can sometimes seem frustrating, as volunteers frequently feel that they can offer many solutions to a village's problems. These feelings are usually deceptive, however. A community's problems are often complex and interwoven with its cultural practices, beliefs, and history. Answers are rarely found on the surface or developed in a matter of weeks. Come without preconceived ideas, and your opportunity to learn will be greatly enhanced.

When volunteers are placed in a village program, their safety and needs are paramount to the hosts, Program Director, and the U.S. team. **Remember that Village Volunteers does not assume to manage specific projects from a distance; much freedom is given to you and your**

**Program Director in identifying your volunteer activities.** It is in working together that mutual understanding is rooted.

We understand that it is important for volunteers to feel engaged in the community. However, we ask that you remember that the pace of life is typically much slower in village communities. Still there is much value in simply taking time to absorb your environment and learn from those around you. **Don't expect to leave your fast-paced life, enter a village, and feel like you are immediately useful and fully engaged. Be patient.** Try not to get frustrated with the slow pace. You may feel that there is simply not enough time to "make a difference," but understand that your very presence is valued and *that does make a difference.*

**Be tolerant and understanding of conditions that may arise during your stay.** At any moment, the best-laid plan may have to be put aside because of a death in the community, inclement weather, lack of funding, or a multitude of other factors. Life in a rural setting is unpredictable, particularly to those who are just visiting. If you tend to need to feel in control, try to control those impulses. The benefits to you will be a greater peace of mind and appreciation for the intangible contributions you are making to the community.

Rather than starting a new program, it's best to empower others to have ownership. Without local ownership, the project will most likely dissolve when you leave. Village Volunteers model is based on self-empowerment: all village projects are initiated, executed, and managed by locals.

**Never hand anyone money as charity.** While you will probably be asked many times for money, and you may be compelled to give, please refrain from giving money to anyone. This enhances a victim mentality and creates precedence for success from begging. Tell those who ask that it's against the policies of Village Volunteers. If you would like to give money to someone, please make your donation through Village Volunteers and we will wire your donation to your program's director and they will disburse the funds accordingly.

### Words of Wisdom for Volunteers

The model volunteer embraces the below words of wisdom as shared by one of our partner NGO Program Directors:

*Come with an open mind, ready to absorb a flood of new information and new frame of reference. Leave your expectations at home. Observe without judgment until you fully understand all the factors. If something strikes you as being "backwards," objectively consider why it is acceptable in this culture. You will probably find valid reasons. I do recommend that during your first few weeks or months simply observe, learn, and try to*

*understand the culture. See how things "work" here. Try to remember that there is never just one right way to do something. You most likely will see many things that are considered backward, but are common and appropriate here. Just remember that often there is no right or wrong.*

*Leave your material possessions at home. You will need very little of them here. What you will need is natural curiosity, a positive attitude, plenty of patience and a willingness to help those in need. You certainly will have to deal with frustrations of development work. But a generous smile to warmly offer, the desire to accept many friendships, and an untiring sense of humor will assure you that a trip of a lifetime is ahead of you. You will never see the world the same way. It is up to you to make the most of this valuable experience that you have created!*

- Joshua Machinga, Common Ground Program Director

### **A Catalyst for Hope**

Distinct responsibilities come with being a volunteer. By making the commitment to assist people of another culture, you have accepted an obligation as an ambassador of goodwill to carefully adhere to the policies, goals, and principles of Village Volunteers.

All of the villages are struggling economically and have substantial needs. However, they also have tremendous hope for the future. Village Volunteers participants provide a catalyst for this hope. Your efforts support the goals and further inspire the endeavors of the village communities. Your helping hand is magnified a hundred-fold by the goodwill that it brings.