

From Re think orphanages website (I will have this translated)

READ OUR 10-POINT VOLUNTEERING CHECKLIST

People generally volunteer overseas to contribute something meaningful and experience a new culture. However, some volunteer-sending companies may be more concerned with creating a ‘life-changing’ experience for the volunteer, with less focus on the purpose and the needs of local communities. Here’s what to look for to make sure your time overseas is genuinely spent making a difference:

ABOUT THE VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITY

1. THE NEEDS HAVE BEEN SET OUT BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Find out why the project has been set up and volunteers are needed. It should be directed and run by local people.

2. IT’S SUSTAINABLE

Projects shouldn’t create a dependency on volunteers. Ask what happens to the project when volunteers return home.

3. THERE’S NO LOCAL ALTERNATIVE

Look for projects where volunteers are brought in to enhance local capacity, e.g. to provide training or meet a short-term skills gap working with local people.

4. IT DOESN’T INVOLVE ‘ORPHANS’ OR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Choose a company that has never or has ceased running orphanage volunteering programmes

ABOUT YOU

5. THERE’S A SKILLS MATCH

Think about the skills you to offer. Those in demand include digital, monitoring and evaluation skills, photography, fundraising, language and computer skills. Don’t be tempted by placements for which you are not skilled or qualified – e.g. teaching or caring for children or providing medical care.

6. It adds value

Seek opportunities where you can apply your learnings back home. Employers will be interested in evidence of impact, not just the fact that you have volunteered overseas.

ABOUT THE VOLUNTEERING-SENDING COMPANY

7. THERE'S EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Check that the company you will be volunteering with has a proven track record. Find out about their achievements and how projects are monitored and evaluated.

8. YOU'LL BE SAFE

Some companies simply recruit volunteers for third parties, whereas others recruit volunteers for their own projects. Find out who will be responsible for your safety and is the point of contact for you and your family should anything go wrong.

9. YOU'RE NOT BEING 'SOLD TO'

Be wise to emotive language sometimes used to recruit volunteers. Avoid companies that talk of volunteers 'saving the world', 'giving children the love they need' or focus heavily on the tourism part of the trip.

10. YOU MUST APPLY TO VOLUNTEER

Be prepared to apply for a post and be vetted, as if you were applying for a job or university. You should also receive pre-departure support and maybe training before you travel.

BENEFITS OF A GAP YEAR

A gap year can be a great opportunity for young students to make a difference and explore new realities and find their interests. Many students speak of the gap year as a transformative experience and are glad to have done it.

GAP YEAR CHALLENGES

People generally volunteer overseas because they want to contribute something meaningful and experience a new culture. However, some gap year providers may be more concerned with creating a 'life-changing' experience for the volunteer, with less focus on the purpose and the needs of local communities. This is particularly the case with gap year programs that offer volunteering with children. Despite the best intentions of volunteers who want to care for children, it can do more harm than good. Children who live in orphanages are quick to form relationships with volunteers as they arrive, only to feel abandoned once again when they leave. What's more, an estimated 80% are not actually orphans and have at least one living parent. A growing number of volunteer operators never have or have ceased orphanage volunteering programs. Find out **who they are**.

GAP YEAR

The term gap year was coined in the 1960's UK. The term gained more prominence in the early 1980's in United States. A gap year, in essence, is a year spent away from traditional education focusing on service, charity, and exploration. Today, the Associated Press reports that as many as 30-40,000 students taking a gap year. This number is on a steady increase.

GAP YEAR PROGRAMS

There are a lot of options to help figure out how to go on Gap Years. There are a number of organizations that help students decide how best to utilize their Gap Year. Many universities encourage or run their own gap year programs for their incoming students.

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GOING ON A GAP YEAR

Prior to embarking on a gap year, please use our **volunteer checklist** to help you select a program and ensure your time is genuinely spent making a difference.

RECOMMENDED READING

Claire Bennett, the founder of one of our partner organisations, Learning Service, has co-authored a book, about international volunteering. *Learning Service: the essential guide to volunteering overseas* encourages a learning mindset for making the right decisions about the type and choice of volunteering placement. It is available to purchase from Amazon.

Faith Missions

Millions of Christians, Muslims and members of other faith communities who want to make a difference travel on international short-term mission trips every year, most often to countries that are in development.

MISSIONS FOR ORPHANS

Many traveling to visit or volunteer in children’s residential care centers, often referred to as orphanages and children’s homes, are motivated by a desire to care for orphaned children.

Whilst good intentions underlie the increasing trend of short-term mission trips to residential care centers, there are significant concerns about the effect this has on vulnerable children and how it contributes to sustaining the residential model of care over family care.

USE OF RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS

Up to 8 million children around the world are living in residential care centers. A large proportion of these children have at least one living parent who, with some support, could care for them.

Children are living in residential care centers for many reasons. Research shows that poverty, not lack of caregivers, is a primary cause for placing children in residential care centers. Parents and other caregivers struggling to provide for their children may feel compelled to use a residential care center to meet their children's basic needs. Other causes include abuse and neglect, disability (either children or parents), natural disaster, or conflict.

ENDING FAMILY SEPARATION

Scripture, social science, and international guidance all agree the best environment in which to raise a child is a healthy, loving family. A family provides the love, nurture, stability, protection, and care that are integral to the healthy development of a child. There is a growing movement among international and national policymakers, missions agencies, and nongovernmental organizations who are shifting away from the overreliance on residential care centers toward increasing family-based models of care.

ARE YOU PLANNING A SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP?

If you are planning a short-term mission trip, please read the guidance that has been developed by our faith-based partner organisations on how to avoid potential harm and ensure positive outcomes for vulnerable children, their families, and their communities.

Australia

- [ACCI Missions](#)

USA

- [Christian Alliance for Orphans \(CAFO\)](#)
- [Catholic Relief Service \(CRS\)](#)
- [Faith to Action](#)
- [SOE \(Standards of Excellence in Short-term Mission\)](#)

UK

[Home for Good](#)

Study Abroad

Most universities and colleges encourage volunteering to help communities - both at home and overseas - as an integral part of student life.

For some students, volunteering may be a service learning component of their studies, particularly those studying for a career in international development. For others, it can help to gain valuable life skills and experience to add to their CV.

Volunteering as a student can be a good way to:

- Make a difference to the local community
- Gain practical/applied experience to complement your more theoretical learning from school
- Learn new skills and put your existing ones to good use
- Meet new people and make new friends
- Have fun
- Get a reference

A CAREER IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most employers will expect candidates applying for a role in international development to have some overseas experience. Many universities can support their students to find placements as a volunteer or an intern to help students gain practical experience and build an awareness of different working practices and cultural differences.

SERVICE LEARNING ABROAD

Some students may be involved in service as an integrated aspect of their course - universities often have established partnerships where students can apply course content to community-based activities.

STUDYING ABROAD THE RIGHT WAY

Our [volunteer checklist](#) can help students make sure that their time spent overseas is to the benefit of all.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TAKING A STAND AGAINST ORPHANAGE VOLUNTEERING

In Europe, several universities have pledged to not support volunteering in orphanages overseas. The pledge has been designed as a collaboration between the [London School of Economics Volunteer Centre](#) and the ReThink Orphanages coalition. Find out more about the [University Pledge](#) and how your university can sign up.

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Three of our partner organisations in Australia - Save the Children Australia, World Challenge and ALTO - have developed a [Self Assessment Tool for schools and universities](#) to undertake due diligence on their service, volunteering and community engagement activities overseas.

If your school, college or university currently supports a residential care institution overseas we can help to review this to ensure that efforts are directed towards programs that will help families to stay together. [Contact us](#) to find out more.