

# Information for prospective volunteers

## Where can I volunteer and what will I be doing?

We welcome volunteers to support our work at all of our locations. The majority of our volunteers initially work at the Infants Home and we recommend that unless volunteers have specialist skills and/or significant experience of working in Sri Lanka or other developing countries, volunteers start their volunteer placement here. This is because this location has the best facilities for volunteers, an English speaking management team and is close to Colombo, the capital.

As a volunteer, you will be working for the majority of your time directly with the Akkas (older sisters, or carers) who are employed to care for the children and adults with disabilities that live with us. At the Infants Home, their day begins at 6am with the first feed and finishes at 8pm with the final check of the residents in their beds. Your timetable is very similar to theirs and it is hoped that you will work with them as colleagues and learn from their experiences as well as sharing your own.

## Do I need previous experience or specialist skills?

Previous experience and specialist skills are desirable but not essential. Those who have most impact at Prithipura are those who are able to build strong, non-judgemental relationships with our staff, recognising where support is needed and working with enthusiasm and dedication.

**Caregivers** do not need to have specific qualifications or experience, although experience with working with people with disabilities is very useful.

What is required is a healthy dose of perseverance, patience and love for those who are the most vulnerable in society. The main task is to provide our children with the basic care they need e.g. washing, dressing, feeding, playing etc.

Caregivers should work with and learn from other members of the staff rather than try to advise. The main qualification would be a willingness to adapt to a new context and provide loving care for those who live with us. Basic care work requires only these qualities and could be one of the most memorable experiences of your life.

**Skilled workers** should have at least two years' experience in the relevant field as well as qualifications from their country. They will be able to advise our staff within the boundaries of the job description, which will be negotiated on arrival with members of management.

We are in need of qualified Physiotherapists, Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Special Education Teachers, Agriculturists as well as NGO Specialists including Fundraising, Organisational Development and/or Communications. For these

positions, we would of course need details of your qualifications and experience, and would hope to work with you closely to improve the provision of services at our sites.

## **How long can I volunteer for?**

We welcome volunteers who can work for at least 6 weeks and we can get a visa for you for up to one year. We find that longer-term volunteers are most beneficial to those who live with us and the work we do.

## **What about accommodation and meals?**

We provide individual and/or shared bedrooms, a sitting room, kitchen area, shared bathrooms, solar heated water and flush toilets. Volunteers are responsible for doing their own personal clothes washing and room cleaning. Pillow cases, sheets and towels are provided. You may use the washing machines in the evenings as they are in use throughout the day for those who live with us.

We provide meals three times a day. The main diet is very simple and made of rice and curry. Vegetarian food is available at every meal time. If you have special dietary needs or like to have some special food, you should make your own arrangements. At our centres the water is purified, so there is no need to use special water purifying tablets. If desired, bottled water can be purchased at your own cost.

Shops are easily accessible if you are staying at the Prithipura Infants Home in Hendala. If you are staying at Anandapura and/or Cotagala, the closest food-shops are at about 30 minutes distance by three wheeler (local taxi), so we advise you to take care of any special requirements in advance.

## **Do I have to pay to volunteer?**

We do not charge for volunteer placements; food and accommodation is also provided free of charge. Visa fees are applicable and we request a small donation towards transport and administration costs to recoup costs involved in visa processing for volunteers. We encourage and support volunteers who wish to fundraise on our behalf. Many volunteers successfully solicit support from local companies, family members, friends and co-workers.

## **What costs will I have to cover?**

Volunteers pay for their flight ticket, vaccinations, travel/medical insurance, visa and internal travels in Sri Lanka. If you wish to have special food, you can purchase it at the local supermarkets at your own expense.

## How do I apply?

You need to send us an email with details of where and when you wish to volunteer **at least 4 months** before your intended dates of travel. You will need to send the following documentation in line with our safeguarding policy and also for us to apply for a visa on your behalf:

1. Copy of your valid Passport 2. CV in English 3. At least two independent references and English translations - Ideally these should be work/education related. We also accept personal references but these should be from someone who has known you well for more than 2 years and not a family member. References should be signed by the referee and include full contact details (address, telephone number, email) 4. Official certificates and English translations - Education certificates related to the proposed volunteering work. 5. A current Police Report

## Do I need a visa?

Yes, and we will apply for a volunteer visa on your behalf. This may take some time to organise and you will need to go to your local Sri Lankan embassy to get an arrival visa stamp in the month before you come to Sri Lanka. Once you send your documentation, we will be able to provide more detailed information on the visa process.

## What support will I have when I am volunteering?

We arrange a pick-up at the airport for volunteers and one of the team who speaks English will do an induction. This includes the provision of a comprehensive volunteer manual and a full tour of the site where you will be working, where you will be introduced to those who live with us and our staff team.

Volunteers are not expected to work as soon as they get here. The first day is for you to unpack, recover from jet lag and become familiar with the surroundings and local area. The second day is a period of observation where you can observe the work that goes on and start to get to know those you will be working with.

Once you start working in your assigned group, the Head Akka will show you what to do and provide daily supervision. On-site Care Managers speak English and are also around on a daily basis for any questions you have.

We will arrange a meeting with you after your first two weeks to review your work and give you an opportunity to share your experiences.

The Admin team is available throughout your stay if you need help. However, you should be aware that we are a small team, all with varying and complex roles, and that unless the matter is urgent, we may not be able to respond to all requests immediately.

## **Do you provide references/reports for internships?**

Yes, we are happy to provide references at the end of your placement and will do our best to accommodate any internship requirements.

## **Do I need vaccinations?**

Yes. Contact your nearest vaccination centre and meet with a doctor in your country. They will tell you about the vaccinations that are required and recommended for travelling to Sri Lanka.

## **Do I need malaria prevention tablets?**

Contact your nearest vaccination centre and meet with a doctor in your country. They will tell you about the latest updated situation regarding malaria risk areas in Sri Lanka.

## **Is access to medical support easily available?**

At the Infants Home and at Anandapura Farm, there are good private hospitals available close by. Private medical care is less accessible at Cotagala School and Asokapura Farm. We support all volunteers who require medical treatment.

## **Is it possible to come with a partner/spouse or friend?**

Yes, you can apply with a partner/spouse or friend and be placed at the same location. You may/may not be able to sleep in the same room, depending on the availability at that particular time.

## **Can I combine my volunteering with a holiday?**

Yes. Your free time though must be coordinated with the Prithipura Communities before and/or during your volunteer period. Unless volunteers are with us for long periods, we prefer volunteers to holiday at the beginning or end of their stays, outside of their assigned weekly days off. You will have two days off a week that will be agreed in arrival.

## **Can I bring gifts for the children?**

Yes. Please be aware that our policy is to share the gifts among the children and any gift giving should be done in conjunction with one of the Admin team, to ensure fairness. Please ask the Prithipura Communities team prior to departure if you would like to bring anything special. Many items are available in Sri Lanka and can be bought here.

## **Will I have internet access?**

We have internet access at the Infants Home and at Cotagala School. Please note that at both locations, we have a limited amount of GB per month, so request that volunteers do not spend a lot of time with video calling etc. Local sim cards with data packages for mobile phones are readily available.

## **I am already in Sri Lanka and wish to volunteer, is this possible?**

If you are Sri Lankan, or have a valid residence visa, yes, we welcome your support. We allow local volunteers to work on a part-time long-term basis if they wish – for example, one day a week. If however, you are not a Sri Lankan national and are in Sri Lanka on a tourist visa, we are sorry but we cannot accommodate you, due to volunteer visa requirements.

## **Finally...**

We ask that all volunteer applicants consider very carefully as to whether they are able to meet the demands of the volunteer roles we have on offer. It is a long day and can be physically and emotionally draining especially in the first few days. We are looking for people who:

- are resilient, enthusiastic and able to give 100% commitment to working with some of the most vulnerable in society.
- are able to work in a non-judgemental manner building strong relationships with our staff team and those with disabilities who live with us.
- are able to accept and work happily in a culture that is different from what you are used to.
- have the ability to understand that Sri Lanka is a developing country and support for those with disabilities is much less resourced than what you may be used to.

The volunteering opportunity we offer is excellent for gaining direct experience of working with those with severe disabilities and gives the opportunity for people to really integrate into the Sri Lankan way of life. Previous volunteers have developed life-long friendships and gained hands-on experience that has supported their career development. Volunteering at Prithipura, however, is not suitable for people looking for a 'voluntourism' experience or a long holiday. We expect full commitment from those who work for us.