

**English Reading Level 2  
Resource Booklet**

## Text 1

### Volunteers and Volunteering

#### Volunteers and active communities

Volunteering can be a multi-purpose endeavour. Some students and graduates say that they volunteer to make a positive contribution to society in some way. For other people, volunteering is an important way of gaining the skills needed to pursue certain careers and to bolster their CVs.

Many if not most voluntary organisations depend for their very existence upon the work of volunteers, and organisations such as councils, for voluntary service usually include the placing of volunteers (often through a volunteer bureau) among their key activities. Nevertheless, the notion of “volunteering” itself includes a wide range of different roles, and is also only a part of a wider pattern of community involvement.



#### What does an organisation gain from volunteers?

To community organisations, volunteers may well bring a wealth of local knowledge and insight that employed staff from elsewhere could take months or years to learn – or, in some cases, would never manage to acquire. This will often include information and contact with other people through involvement in other groups and through participation in numerous networks, both formal and informal.

#### Managing volunteers

The ways in which volunteers will need to be managed will vary according to the various circumstances of their work. These circumstances will include:

- Their level of responsibility;
- The amount of time they offer;
- The period of time to which they have committed themselves;
- Their level of skill in relation to the work they are doing;
- Their special support needs (e.g. mental health needs or learning difficulties).

Management processes will need to be appropriate to these circumstances. Short-term and/or casual volunteers may in some respects need more support than more regular volunteers, but in general will probably need only brief one-

to-one sessions to ensure that they are delivering what has been agreed, that they have the facilities necessary to do so and that their general work environment (including relationships with other people) is appropriate for their needs.

### **Maintaining volunteers' motivation**

The relationship between volunteers and the organisation for which they work is a relationship of trust and commitment on both sides. Nothing guarantees that volunteers will continue in their commitment to their work, but there are numerous factors that contribute to maintaining and developing that commitment.

The commitment of volunteers is maintained by intangible factors.

- Use of a range of skills;
- Career opportunities;
- Unoppressive supervision;
- A sense of being valued;
- Receiving recognition for good work;
- Being neither over- nor under-worked;
- A pleasant physical environment;
- Team working.

Volunteers who experience factors such as these are likely to maintain their commitment over a period of time, and, it may reasonably be hoped, will develop and increase their commitment.

# The Ethical Volunteering Guide

## Get the most, give the most

People who volunteer generally hope to do something they will find interesting, something they will learn from and something that will help other people. However, choosing between all the possible projects and organisations is more complex than just signing up with the first one to show you exciting pictures and an interesting blurb.



To get the most out of international volunteering you need to put effort into choosing who

you go with and what you do. For while there are some fantastic projects to take part in, there are also those that are poorly organised and exploit both hosts' and travellers' expectations.



These seven questions are designed to help you learn as much as possible about the quality and value of the projects or placements an organisation offers BEFORE you arrive in the country with your newly packed backpack and a whole bundle of expectations.



### 1 Exactly what work will I be doing? Can the organisation provide a brief job description?

An organisation with a good volunteer programme should be able to tell you exactly what you will be doing, including how many hours a day, how many days a week and what sort of work it will be. For example, if an organisation offers a

placement in a school, this may or may not be teaching. Likewise, a placement may involve 50 hours

a week or — and this does happen — a mere four. The greatest source of dissatisfaction for volunteers usually comes from not doing what they planned (and paid) to do.



### 2 Does the organisation work with a local partner organisation?

If a volunteer programme is to be of value to a local community it should work with, rather than be imposed on, that community. High value programmes will have been built in collaboration with a local partner organisation. Find out who that partner is and find out about the relationship. Key things to look for are whether someone from the local organisation is involved in the day to day management of your project, what sort of consultation went into building that project, and why the project is of value.



### ③ Does the organisation make any financial contribution to its volunteer programmes? If so, exactly how much?

Many volunteer organisations charge a lot of money, but where does it go? Volunteer programmes need funds as well as people to do the work; indeed, in much of the world, unskilled labour is one thing of which there is little shortage. The most important thing is that your organisation is up front about how your money is spent. So ask where your pennies are going, and be persistent about getting a clear figure, not a percentage of profits. Also, be aware that payments for your own food and lodging often do not assist your volunteer programme.



### ④ Does the organisation have policies on eco and ethical tourism? If so, how are they implemented?

Running volunteer programmes is ethically complex. If you really want to make a valuable contribution to the community you work with, then you have a responsibility to ensure that the organisation with which you travel has proper eco and ethical policies. Look for organisations that have a long-term commitment to a community, employ local staff and have some mechanism for local consultation and decision-making. Otherwise, how do you know that the clinic you built is really needed? That an adult literacy programme is not more relevant than a new bridge? Or that when you have left, there will be the funds and commitment to maintain the project on which you have worked?

### ⑤ What time frame is the volunteer programme run on?

A well-structured volunteer programme should have a clear time frame, and organisations should know from one year to the next whether a programme will continue. Programmes, and especially placements, that occur just once can be problematic. For example, if you are acting as an English teaching assistant for a month or two, what happens the rest of the school year? Are other volunteers sent, or is the placement simply ended? It may be very disruptive for a class, a school or an orphanage to have a constantly changing staff. Establishing the level of commitment an organisation has to a given project or placement is vital in establishing the quality, and therefore value, of that volunteer programme.

### ⑥ Can the organisation give you precise contact details for your chosen programme?

Organisations tend to work in one of two ways. The better ones build a relationship with a host organisation, identify local needs they can meet, arrange placements and projects and then fill the vacancies. A less positive approach is to wait for travellers to sign up and pay up, and then find relevant placements. A good organisation with well-run programmes should be able to let



you know several months before you travel where you will be going and what exactly you will be doing. If they cannot, or will not, give you these details then be very wary of the quality of the programme. Hastily arranged programmes can be disorganised, leaving both volunteers and local hosts with unclear expectations.



## **7** What support & training will you receive?

Organisations offer vastly different levels of training and support. Look for an organisation that offers not only pre-departure training, but also in-country training and support. As a volunteer you want to be as much use as possible, learn as much as possible and have as good a time as possible. Training in both the practicalities of your volunteer job and the culture of where you are travelling will help you get and give the most. Local support is also important. The type of programme you are on affects the amount of support required, but make sure you know what to expect before you go. If there is a local representative, how 'local' are they — just down the road, or several hours away by bus? Make sure there is somebody in the country with direct responsibility for you. All projects require some problem solving at some point and you will need someone on hand to help you with this.

## What is CAPS?

**CAPS** (Conversation Assistant Programme for Schools) is a programme designed to place dynamic and creative native English speakers in Spanish schools as

a **Conversation Assistant (CA)**, in order to aid, improve teaching and student communication in English.

## The CAPS Programme

The main role of the CA is focused on increasing student exposure to English through motivating and encouraging conversation practice. The goal is that students improve and become more confident in their English skills by practising with a native English speaker.

The CA is placed in a Spanish infant, primary, secondary, A-Level or technical school, and

generally assists students ranging from the ages of 3 to 16. (There may be some schools where an assistant could be involved with older or younger students).

From Monday to Friday the CA is required to complete 25 classroom hours per week in accordance with a timetable organized by the school.

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**CAPS** is very proud of our heritage, reputation and fundamental values.

We want to provide an honest and transparent experience for every CA and school. We believe that this programme should be as accessible as possible by trying to limit restrictions that similar programmes may impose:



- ✓ No joining/administration fees. Only after a CA has accepted to join us, will they be asked to provide a clear Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and a small placement holding deposit which is returned upon arrival.
- ✓ We really appreciate that each CA will have placed their trust and commitment in us by choosing our programme. We are 100% committed to providing as much support and guidance as possible right from the start until the end of the experience.
- ✓ As the CA lives with a host family, our philosophy is that the relationship should be natural, based on mutual respect, and the genuine willingness to want to spend time together. The CA's are not au-pairs, nor are the host families to be considered as landlords who only provide a room. Open communication is key to ensure that everyone benefits from the experience.

One of the main benefits for choosing this programme is the option to live with a host family. By living with locals rather than other travelers, the CA receives an authentic firsthand cultural experience.

If a CA really wants to give the most of themselves by spending time with the family, this is reciprocated, and it is usual that the CA forms strong bonds that continue after the programme has finished and for many years to come.

Other benefits include:

- ✓ **SAFE & COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT**  
Applicants are students or young adults who may have already lived away from home and become independent. Even so, for the majority the idea of moving to another country can seem a daunting task and there will inevitably be feelings of homesickness. Living with a host family who provide support in a safe environment is a great way to help a person adjust and settle in to their new lives in Spain.
- ✓ **LANGUAGE SKILLS**  
Living with a host family gives everyone the opportunity to practise and improve their language skills. The host family (especially the children) will want to practise English, and vice-versa the CA will want to learn and practise the host's language. There is no better way to do this than in the relaxing and low pressured atmosphere of the family's home.
- ✓ **ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE**  
Living with a host family takes away a lot of the financial pressure of living independently. Meals, laundry, internet and transport to and from the school are covered, leaving the CA free to spend their grant as they wish.