

“Volunteering on your gap year? Do your research” urges development charity

Sustainable development charity Raleigh International expresses concerns that young people are volunteering overseas without researching why their contribution is needed and how sustainable it is.

When A-level students receive their results on August 18th, many will be weighing up whether to take a gap year. Some will look to volunteer overseas because they want to do something positive, experience a new culture and to develop skills for the future. However, sustainable development charity Raleigh International is urging young people to do their research before signing up to make sure their contribution is genuinely needed and will make a lasting impact.

“Many young people do want to make a meaningful difference, and there are organisations that need their time, energy and creativity to do that effectively. However, other organisations may place more importance on profit over impact,” says Rachel Harrison, Raleigh’s Director of Recruitment, Delivery and Communications. “It’s important that you do your research and ask the difficult questions.”

So what steps should young people take to ensure that what they are signing up to do will make a positive, lasting difference?

“If the main motivation of the volunteer is to help improve the lives of poor communities or the environment for the future, they should look to work with an organisation that runs long-term development programmes, based on local and national development plans. The organisation should also work with local partners and monitor and evaluate its work. Ask how your work will help local communities in the long-term, not just whilst you are there.” says Harrison. “The organisation’s experience in working through young people and running safe programmes is also crucial.”

According to Raleigh, organisations that work successfully through young volunteers to make an impact are committed to helping their volunteers develop the skills, such as team working, communication, adaptability and global awareness, as well as the passion to become active citizens and contribute positively to society.

Georgie Russon, 19, from Cheltenham, volunteered in Costa Rica and Nicaragua after completing her A-levels last year: “I had applied to do geology at university but when my grades came through I didn’t get my place. I decided that I wanted to study global development and sustainability instead, and when I applied I wrote about how I was doing Raleigh. I think that played a big part in me getting my place.”

Raleigh runs development projects where a youth peer-to-peer model, empowering in-country volunteers, international volunteers and communities to work alongside each other, can be most effective, and where the energy, creativity and skills of young volunteers are put to best use. This could include raising awareness of safe water and sanitation practices, forming youth and women’s community groups, or supporting young entrepreneurs to establish small businesses.

ENDS

For more information, please contact Raleigh’s Senior Communications Officer, Mike Butcher on m.butcher@raleighinternational.org or 02033841854.

Raleigh International's 10 tips for impactful volunteering

1. **Organisation's ethos** – research why the organisation exists in the first place? What are its aims and its values? Do you share the same ethos?
2. **Young people's role** – ask why the organisation needs young volunteers? Where does it feel you can make a lasting difference? Are local young people involved?
3. **Realistic expectations** –make sure you know what is expected of you? What will you be doing? Where will you be living? Will you be on your own or in a group? How will you contribute to making a lasting difference?
4. **Project meets real needs** - projects should be designed in collaboration with local partners, who understand the needs of local communities. How does this project fit into a longer-term programme of work that helps meet local and national development plans?
5. **Costs** – find out where your money goes. Is the organisation a charity providing public benefit or a private company making profit?
6. **Support and training**– will you receive full training and support both before the programme and when you are there?
7. **Safety** - make sure the programme has been audited to conform to the British Safety Standard BS8848, the standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities outside the UK. If it isn't accredited then what is the organisation's safety management system?
8. **Personal recommendations** - speak to people who have been away with the organisation before and are enthusiastic ambassadors for the programme.
9. **Do something you're passionate about** – you will get the most out of a volunteering placement which you're passionate about and are excited to do.
10. **Be adaptable** – if you want to make a genuine difference then you need to be committed and adaptable. Yes, you will also benefit from volunteering but the main reason you are doing it is to make a difference to others.

About Raleigh International

Raleigh International is a sustainable development charity that inspires communities and young people around the world to create lasting change. Our programmes focus on providing access to safe water and sanitation, protecting vulnerable environments and building resilient communities. We connect communities wanting to improve their lives and their environment with passionate people from around the world who want to take positive action. We operate in partnership with communities, non-governmental organisations and governments in Malaysian Borneo, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Nepal and Tanzania. Since our foundation as a charity in 1984, Raleigh volunteers have become a global community of more than 40,000 people committed to building a sustainable future.

Notes to editors

- Raleigh focuses on working through, for and with youth to inspire and make positive change in the following programmatic areas:
 - Water, sanitation and hygiene
 - Effective use of natural resources
 - Building the resilience of vulnerable communities
- Raleigh International works in partnership with communities, NGOs and Governments to run long term programmes of work in Malaysian Borneo, Costa Rica & Nicaragua, Nepal and Tanzania.
- Volunteers from all over the world can join an expedition for 5, 7 or 10 weeks at various times of the year. Young people between the ages of 17-24 can apply. Those over 25 can apply to lead groups as a volunteer manager.
- Upon return, volunteers will be joining an incredible network of 40,000 people who have joined a Raleigh International programme.
- Raleigh's youth peer-to-peer working focuses on building teams of young people from the country where the programme is taking place, as well as volunteers from around the world.