How we work with volunteers

Volunteers support our overseas work through two different initiatives: Expedition and International Citizen Service (ICS). Both bring together rural communities in developing countries with young people from around the world to work on sustainable development projects and build a youth leadership culture.

We have been running our Expedition programme since 1984. Placements are for ten, seven or five weeks and involve up to three phases: community, environment and adventure. Volunteers are recruited from countries around the world and work alongside local youth.

Since 2012, we have run Raleigh ICS. Placements last for 10-12 weeks and an equal number of UK and local volunteers live in host homes within the communities where they work. Delivered by respected development organisations, ICS is led by VSO and funded by the UK government.
Raleigh in 2015

In 2015 we worked alongside communities and local partners to deliver projects in some of the world’s poorest, most remote and vulnerable communities.

We work through young people to create lasting change in rural communities. Young people embed themselves in the heart of communities, bringing new ways of thinking and doing. Communities tell us about the passion and creativity of youth and how it inspires them to take action themselves. All our work was in support of the Global Goals, which were launched by the UN in 2015 to end poverty, fix climate change and tackle inequalities.

Why young people?

There are 1.8 billion young people in the world today. We believe they are the most important resource the world has yet they are often undervalued, underestimated and expected to underachieve. We’re working to change that.

We know that young people have the energy, optimism and creativity to make change happen. For more than 30 years, Raleigh has been inspiring and empowering young people to harness their full potential.

“I have talked to people in the communities who say that they are inspired by volunteers coming to their community to work. They say to me, ‘Why shouldn’t I work for the welfare of my community if they are?’ They see the passion and vocation in it. It inspires them to do more.”

Ignacio, local project partner staff, Juan Francisco Paz Silva Cooperative, Nicaragua
Our monitoring, evaluation and learning systems

We have always had strong anecdotal evidence of our impact and have long been able to demonstrate the scale of our activities and outputs. But we want to do more. Over the past few years, we have also been strengthening our monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. As well as enabling us to demonstrate longer-term changes, this helps us learn from our successes and failures so we can improve the quality of our programmes.

We are already beginning to see results. Our project plans are better designed, with measurement indicators that will help us fully understand the value of our programmes. We collect baseline information before working with each community, so we can measure progress later on. Our monitoring information is increasingly useful in telling us what does and does not work, so we can adapt programming to be as effective as possible. We are also putting more resources into evaluating our work. So we know much more about the long-term benefits our programmes bring to communities and can increasingly develop programmes with more impact.

“The involvement of volunteers in communities is vital for us as a local partner. The fact that they are living in communities gives us a more accurate picture of the needs felt by the people, and it makes us focus our efforts on managing projects with more realistic short and long term outcomes.”

Ramon Ivan Bertrand, local project partner staff, INPRHU, Nicaragua
Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

We tailor our WASH projects to suit local needs, which helps promote community ownership and improve sustainability. While continuing to provide infrastructure to increase access to water and sanitation, our WASH activities increasingly focus on raising awareness of safe WASH practices and promoting positive behaviour change. We’re starting to show how effective Raleigh volunteers are at changing behaviour in the communities where they live and work.

- 15,441 people benefitted from our WASH activities
- 80 WASH promoters trained
- 352 household toilets and 15 school toilet blocks built
- 151 water systems constructed or rehabilitated
- 91 WASH committees trained

“You have brought a big change to the village. Before you arrived, people did not know about hand hygiene and sanitation. Now people know what to do and will be protected from disease. We will continue to value your support as a way of improving education and the living standards of pupils, women and the society as a whole.”

Pastor Sulemani, Headteacher of Mkapa primary school, Tanzania
An evaluation of our ICS work in Tanzania highlighted our success in encouraging the use of toilets and more than 80% of survey respondents said they understood the benefits of safe sanitation. Similarly, a follow-up survey in India found that more than three quarters of villagers no longer defecated in the neighbouring forest or farmland and used a latrine instead.

We have been particularly successful in improving hygiene practices in Nicaragua. An evaluation found that community members saw this as the project’s greatest impact – more important than access to WASH facilities – and 64% said they now wash their hands more often.

Follow-up visits in Borneo show further evidence of our impact. In an interview with the village Headman of Soniton Ulu, we found that after 15 months a range of changes had taken place in the community. As well as having a plentiful piped water, villagers washed their hands much more frequently and now buried or burned their rubbish. He also said there was much less diarrhoea, especially among children.

“Behaviour around soap and hand washing has changed. Before [community members] sometimes used to wash their hands, now they always do and ensure that they have soap and make it a priority to find more when they run out.”

Village Headman, Soniton Ulu, Borneo
Improving WASH sustainability

Since 2013, our WASH work in Nicaragua has been fully integrated into the holistic, government-backed Families, Schools and Communities (FECSA) initiative. As well as improving access to water and sanitation and raising awareness of hygiene and local environmental issues, we build local capacity to help ensure long-lasting behaviour change. We train young people as FECSA promoters, who work with individual families over several months to jointly assess household behaviour and agree how to improve it. We also help set up committees to look after local water resources and infrastructure and promote hygiene.

An external evaluation in 2015 found that our approach is highly effective. The four main areas of success were: changing hygiene behaviour; increasing community engagement; improving access to WASH facilities; and empowering women and young people.

We have already incorporated nearly all of the evaluation recommendations into our programming. We extended the length of time that we work in communities. We developed clearer agreements with partners and local authorities and have joined the steering committee of the WASH sector coordination body. We have also improved our monitoring and evaluation, with more specific indicators, weekly monitoring sheets for project partners and more frequent follow-up visits.
In action: Yunerlin

Yunerlin, 20, was trained by Raleigh volunteers as a voluntary FECSA promoter in his home community of Las Brisas in Nicaragua and is also now a member of the water committee. His commitment to helping his community has ensured that people living in Las Brisas have strived to sustain the good health and hygiene practices they have learned.

“I like to work for my community, to see what they need and to try find a way to provide my help.

“The three greatest changes in my community since Raleigh arrived have been that the people are now aware of the importance of looking after themselves and the community around them. The resources will not last for ever. That the young people are now engaged and have been given an opportunity to empower themselves and that the women in the community now have a voice. They are much more involved and take a lead in hygiene at home as well as a voice on community matters.

“My eyes have been opened to many issues. I feel much more motivated to engage with the issues that our community faces and try to seek out solutions rather than focus on the negative perspectives. I feel as though I have become a global citizen. I have loved understanding more about the world around me and how I can play my part in my community. Interacting with Raleigh has been the best experience of my life.”

“The people living here are the ones being trained and so it’s sustainable and will inspire others to do the same.”

Yunerlin, community member, Las Brisas
Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (SWASH)

In Tanzania, we align our WASH work with the Government’s School WASH initiative. We work with schools to set up WASH clubs where children learn about water, sanitation and hygiene in engaging ways. They are encouraged to share what they learn with their families.

In action: SWASH at Endagikot Primary School

Restitutie is a teacher at Endagikot Primary School in Tanzania, where Raleigh volunteers have been working with project partner the Diocese of Mbulu Development Department to improve access to safe sanitation, building a second toilet block for girls as well as providing handwashing facilities for both girls and boys.

Volunteers ran awareness raising lessons at schools, explaining why it is important to wash your hands and reinforcing the reasoning behind using soap, aiming to make germs a simple and understandable issue. Volunteers also worked closely with a number of young teachers who are role models for the pupils to raise awareness, bringing enthusiasm and motivation to the SWASH program.

Restitute’s own son Edwin came home from school and resolutely built a tippy-tap outside their home using a jerry can, some string, four sticks and a bar of soap, as demonstrated by Raleigh volunteers. “The young students are powerful agents for change,” said Restitute. “They take home all their knowledge on safe hygiene and sanitation practices that they learn within school and share with their families.”
Community resilience: Livelihoods

One of the ways in which Raleigh helps rural communities to become more resilient is by improving livelihoods and entrepreneurship opportunities. In Nicaragua and Tanzania, ICS volunteers trained young people in the communities as entrepreneurs, helping them develop business plans, access finance and set up new enterprises. Follow-up reviews have shown that the vast majority of businesses set up since the project began in 2014 are still operating and profitable.

In a pilot project in Costa Rica, we worked with young women living next to conservation areas to develop social enterprises. The impact on the young entrepreneurs is already significant. They all spent three months as ICS volunteers in Nicaragua, sharing their new knowledge with other budding entrepreneurs. This helped to reinforce and further improve their leadership and communication skills as well as honing their knowledge of business. In 2015, Google staff were recruited from across Europe to work with Raleigh International in Nicaragua, supporting young entrepreneurs to establish their businesses.

Our livelihoods work in India focused on sustainable farming. Our evaluation found community members were continuing to produce organic compost and had significantly changed their attitudes and behaviour around keeping domestic animals healthy.
Building pathways to youth entrepreneurship

We launched the innovative ICS Entrepreneur pilot project in Nicaragua in 2014 and Tanzania in 2015. An early review by Overseas Development Institute (ODI) a year after the project started confirmed the effectiveness of our peer-to-peer approach in building the skills of young entrepreneurs. It highlighted key success factors, such as nurturing support from families and mentors as well as building confidence and other soft skills.

In Nicaragua, we helped 71 young entrepreneurs set up new enterprises in 2015. Of the 55 business created in 2014, 42 were still operating after a year, providing work for 70 young people. Volunteers trained twice as many young people as planned, as word about the training spread and young people travelled long distances to attend sessions. New entrepreneurs are now supporting others going through training. They have also set up a young entrepreneurs’ association and some have even raised money to provide seed funding.

By the end of 2015, we had helped 253 young people in Tanzania develop business plans, 158 pitch their businesses and 105 set up new enterprises. We initially encouraged young people to consider setting up a business only within the dairy value chain so our project partner could provide long-term support, but our review found that there were many other opportunities that young people wanted to explore, which we now support them to do in addition to dairy. Nearly a third set up more than one business. This confirmed the need to promote a wide range of enterprises and to support mixed livelihoods – a view also proposed by additional independent research with our Tanzanian entrepreneurs.

In detail: full ODI report
raleighinternational.org/pathways
In action: Ruth Carolina

Ruth Carolina, 18, lives in the rural village of Los Copales in northern Nicaragua. After identifying a gap in the market for a sewing business, Ruth worked with volunteers to set up a micro-enterprise, which is now benefitting both her and the community. “I’ve liked sewing since I was a young girl, when I used to make handmade clothes for dolls. I was inspired to join the programme because I wanted to design and make new clothes that I could sell. This is important for my community, but there was no one permanently sewing in my village. So this is a good time for me to develop my business.

“I really enjoyed learning about the Business Model Canvas, as it allowed me to develop my business idea in a simple way. I also liked pitching my business idea for funding, as it was an opportunity to show off all the work that I’ve done. On top of this, I’ve loved doing presentations, and attending the business fair and community action days.”

“The programme has taught me how to market my business and about the different activities I can do here in the community. In future I hope to be able to employ a few people who would work with me to make clothes, especially people with disabilities and fewer work opportunities.”

Ruth Carolina, community member, Los Copales, Nicaragua
Another way in which Raleigh helps communities to be more resilient is to support community cohesion and early years’ development. Volunteers in Borneo, Costa Rica and Tanzania worked with villagers to design and build community learning centres, providing hundreds of young children with access to crucial early-years education. In Borneo, the learning centres also host adult classes and other community activities.

“The new early childhood development centre is a wonderful addition to our village. It means that many more children will have a safe and inspiring place to come to learn each day. They get a nutritious meal and the opportunity to be better prepared for primary school. We know that early childhood development centres dramatically increase children’s school attendance, so we hope this will make an impact on hundreds of local families in the future.”

Felister, Community Development Officer, Tanzania

Community Learning Centres

Another way in which Raleigh helps communities to be more resilient is to support community cohesion and early years’ development. Volunteers in Borneo, Costa Rica and Tanzania worked with villagers to design and build community learning centres, providing hundreds of young children with access to crucial early-years education. In Borneo, the learning centres also host adult classes and other community activities.

- 5 community learning centres constructed
- 7,357 people with increased awareness on entrepreneurship
- 625 young people trained in business
- 176 young people set up new enterprises
- 932 people with increased awareness about the importance of education
A decade of Community Learning Centres

Since 2005, Raleigh volunteers have been constructing learning centres to strengthen community resilience in indigenous villages in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. These hard-to-reach rural communities faced many difficulties, including a lack of pre-primary education, very few learning opportunities for adults, limited understanding about how to diversify incomes, dwindling traditional knowledge and poor community cohesion. Working closely with the Sabah government, local NGO partners and community members, we had constructed 12 centres and in 2015 reviewed the long-term impact of seven of these.

All are well maintained and in regular use. They provide much-needed space for pre-school classes and parents say they now place greater importance on early-years education as well as on learning in general. All centres are used for community meetings, which has significantly improved connections and unity.

The centres have also become a focal point for many other activities. They are important in preserving traditional customs, with classes on traditional medicine, hunting and weaving. They have improved livelihoods opportunities in several communities, hosting training programmes on organic farming, marketing and entrepreneurial skills as well as providing a space for women’s craft groups and other economic activities. The centre in Kampong Bonor Sook even provides accommodation for eco-tourists.

“Before the community learning centre not all the children could read, count or write, but now they can. It is the community learning centre that is the centre for their success.”

Community member, Kampung Bonor Sook, Borneo
Natural resource management (NRM)

Our environmental projects work with local government and NGO partners to manage natural resources by building infrastructure, helping to assess biodiversity and raising awareness about local environmental issues in neighbouring communities. We are increasingly supporting the green growth agenda – fostering development and economic growth, while working to protect the natural environment.

In 2015, we cleared 17.5km of trails in six Costa Rican national parks. Park rangers report that as well as making it easier for them to patrol, monitor species and prevent forest fires, the trails have made the forests much more accessible to scientific researchers and – crucially – to tourists, which generates income for the parks. By helping to identify local needs, our community surveys have enabled the rangers to build better relationships with local villagers.

“We have achieved so much in the last two years with Raleigh. The volunteers are the arms of the national park. We have very few staff members to receive tourists, patrol, deal with reports of illegal poaching and deforestation and look after the place. There’s not enough time for other activities, such as building trails or environmental education.”

Carlos, Ranger at Piedras Blancas National Park, Costa Rica
In Borneo, we improved access to remote sections of two protected conservation areas. As well as trails, volunteers started the construction of a large suspension bridge in an under-explored area of primary rainforest and a ranger hut for guards to help mitigate poaching activities. We helped carry out 66 biodiversity surveys, enabling researchers to assess the impact of conservation strategies, and also prepared 2,500 seedling bags for reforestation initiatives.

In Nicaragua, we set up youth groups and informed young people about local environmental issues, such as deforestation and waste management and climate change. We built infrastructure to mitigate environmental impact, such as watershed dykes, eco-ovens and eco-latrines.

“We are most appreciative to Raleigh International and the volunteers who have invested lots of time and energy in helping us to undertake maintenance and works such as construction of suspension bridges, water gravity system and trail blazing”

Dr Waidi, Group Manager of Conservation and Environmental Management Division, Yayasan Sabah Group, Borneo
In action: Daniela

Daniela, 22, from Cartago in Costa Rica, volunteered on a natural resource management project in the national park of Piedras Blancas.

“I wanted to work on a long term project that would make a bigger impact. Working shoulder-to-shoulder with the community, we realised that we – especially women – are able to do a lot of things that we thought we couldn’t. When it comes to managing natural resources, changes take time. You are doing it for the future. We planted seeds, produced compost, made signage and cleared trails to make the park a better place for the local community and visitors.

“The community rely on the park for water and other vital resources, so raising awareness about managing these sustainably was really important. It’s not just about providing infrastructure or planting trees, it’s about giving the community all the tools to answer questions themselves and give them tools and experience to enable them to carry on in the future.”

“Raleigh has made me realise that I am important and useful too, and that my ideas are worth something. I would like to use my experience to work more with communities. I’m now taking action instead of just talking about things. I think actions are better than words.”

Daniela, volunteer in Costa Rica
Inspiring young leaders

In 2015, 2,309 volunteers from 29 different countries worked on our programmes. More than a third of these were national volunteers working in their own countries. As well as harnessing the energy and creativity of our volunteers to work with rural communities, we aim to inspire them to be active citizens who will continue to make the world a better place.

Our surveys demonstrate significant changes in volunteers’ knowledge and attitudes. After their placement, 90% of Expedition volunteers were more aware of global issues, 90% had a stronger desire to bring about positive change and 87% felt a stronger sense of responsibility. Almost all ICS volunteers (96%) felt differently about poverty and development, with 61% reporting their attitude had changed a lot. After their placement, 76% strongly agreed they were passionate about helping others and making a difference, 17% of whom had not beforehand.

“The main thing I will take away from this experience is knowing that everyone and anyone can make a difference, whether it be large or small. I’ve learned that we can all be responsible for helping to achieve the Global Goals and it is entirely possible to achieve them with the right attitudes. I now believe that I can make a difference and I’ve been inspired to carry on doing things like this back at home.”

Harry, UK volunteer, Tanzania expedition
Inspiring young leaders

Volunteering was also effective in building the personal and professional skills of potential young leaders. Among Expedition volunteers, 96% agreed the experience improved their personal confidence, with over half (52%) strongly agreeing, and 94% felt better able to deal with unfamiliar situations. At the end of their placement, 91% of ICS volunteers considered themselves a confident person, including 13% who had not done so before. Similarly, 86% agreed they found it easy to cope in new situations, of which 19% had not before.

Across both programmes, 91% of volunteers felt the experience was good for their professional development. Most ICS volunteers felt they were better able to organise and manage an event (88%), present their ideas to others (86%) and guide group discussions (89%), while 93% of Expedition volunteers felt better able to lead people or tasks. Other key areas of learning were team working and problem solving.

“I can say that now I am a better person who is aware of how the world works. I am more aware of my role, as a youth, should be and how important I am as just one of 1.8 billion youth worldwide.”

Ibrahim, home country volunteer, Tanzania expedition
In action: Ryan

Through our Youth Partnership Programme, we supported 36 young people from hard-to-reach backgrounds to complete a fully-funded expedition. Ryan, 19, from Perth in Scotland, volunteered on a WASH programme in Tanzania.

“Before I volunteered I was unemployed and relying on drugs and alcohol to cope. I was referred to Raleigh by Perth Youth Services. All of a sudden, after an assessment and training, I was getting on a flight to Tanzania. My team and I raised awareness in the community about hand washing and personal hygiene and constructed safe sanitation facilities. We also constructed cattle troughs for farmers in the community, as cows and goats were sharing the water source with the community members, leading to a number of preventable illnesses.

“Initially I was nervous about going away with Raleigh - I was scared about being with people I didn’t know. But it gave me confidence. I realised that I can put myself in a difficult situation and achieve so much. My team-working skills also improved loads. I can get to know people while working with them and it’s really useful for any type of job to be able to do that.”

“I’m no longer unemployed; I’m working for one of Scotland’s largest energy providers. My expedition had a huge impact on me. It changed my life. I feel lucky for what I have.”

Ryan, UK volunteer, Tanzania expedition
Alumni action: Learn – Read initiative

Elizabeth, 22, Yoaska, 24, Darwin, 24, and Asdrubal, 25, from Nicaragua, volunteered to improve access to safe water in the rural community of Pueblo Viaje, Matagalpa. On their return, they teamed up to establish the ‘Learn–Read Initiative’, promoting reading and writing in the city of Leon.

“We wanted to contribute to the achievement of the Global Goals, specifically quality education, reducing inequality and climate action,” said the group. “So we created a place where the most vulnerable and impoverished in our region can access an educational environment to enrich their knowledge.

“We set up a sustainable library, where our bookcases are made from plastic bottles, so that people can access second-hand books and improve their literacy. Our project serves more than 120 families in the neighbourhood, as well as 45 young inmates supervised by the Department of Youth Affairs of the National Police.”

The group have raised awareness about their initiative through local radio, newspapers and social media channels, and have received considerable donations to run the project.

“Many of our fellow volunteers are motivated to make a change, either personally, with their family or in their community. We, like them, firmly believe that when you have willingness and motivation, anything is possible.”
National youth societies

Many of our national alumni join a Raleigh National Youth Society, where they continue to work towards our shared vision of a sustainable future. We’re working to build strong youth civil society organisations that are able to effectively engage in local and national issues.

In 2015, more than 850 alumni in the countries where we work contributed over 3,500 volunteering days towards Raleigh society activities. Much of this was in support of Raleigh International – helping to recruit and train volunteers, hosting events and carrying out evaluations in communities. They also work on their own projects and activities. For example, Raleigh Kuala Lumpur supported relief efforts after a severe flood by providing international NGO ShelterBox with logistical support and distributing much-needed supplies to flood victims. Continuing the Raleigh legacy after the closure of our office, members from our India society attended events, raised awareness about volunteering and carried out community-based projects with local NGOs.

We also have active societies in Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Bermuda and New Zealand, which run a wide range of activities from raising funds for our work to running community and youth projects. In 2015, a new alumni society joined our Global Alliance for Youth – Raleigh Japan. Together these form a strong Raleigh family that advocates for and showcases youth action and engagement.
Alumni action: Reducing human-elephant conflict

Raleigh Tanzania Society volunteers worked with NGO Wildlife Connection in a number of villages surrounding Tungamalenga, Iringa, to help reduce conflict between local people and elephants.

Expanding villages and agricultural land have seriously eroded local wildlife corridors and habitats. No longer able to roam freely, elephants often raid crops, causing significant economic losses for local people who are largely dependent upon subsistence farming. Tanzania’s elephant population is under threat and facing a dramatic decline, but farmers attack elephants in retaliation and are increasingly tolerant of illegal poaching.

Society volunteers raised awareness of strategies to reduce conflict and promote peaceful human-elephant co-existence. They worked with local farmers to build honey beehive fences along village boundaries. Honey bees are a natural deterrent to elephants and the hives also provide opportunities for income generation: farmers can sell honey and use their new knowledge and skills to build and maintain other beehive fences.