

Doing Volunteer Work Abroad

What does volunteer mean?

a volunteer: (*noun*) a person who does something, usually helping other people, because they want to. They are not paid to do it. Volunteer can also be used as an adjective, "I'm a volunteer hospital worker. I help out at the hospital on weekends."

to volunteer: (*verb*) to offer to help or do something.

Volunteering

When I finish studying, I would like to work for a charity and possibly spend some time abroad.

When I was researching this, I found some really heart-warming stories about people who are making a real difference overseas.

This lesson is about a man called Nick, who went to Indonesia to try and better the quality of life for deaf people.

Read through the article, then try and answer the true or false questions at the end.

By Caroline Devane

Useful Vocabulary

deaf - unable to hear.

developing countries - countries that are less developed in terms of economy, wealth, income, education, industry and life expectancy than 'developed countries' (USA, Japa & Germany).

abuse - very bad treatment of someone or something.

discrimination - treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people.

disabled - not having one or more of the physical or mental abilities that most people have.

Interview with volunteer

What made you want to volunteer with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)?

I got involved with VSO because I am **deaf**, and I have always felt lucky growing up as a deaf person in the UK. My parents and my teachers always had high expectations of me – they gave me support and told me that I could achieve anything I wanted. Then, in 2006, I heard the president of the World Federation of the Deaf give a presentation about how different life is for deaf people in **developing countries**. Less than 20 per cent of deaf children go to school and **abuse** is much more common. I was really shocked by that. So I had this strong desire to work with deaf people in another country and share my skills and knowledge.

What has the situation been for deaf people in Indonesia?

There is a lot of **discrimination**. People have few expectations of them at all. If they are lucky enough to go to school they won't learn very much, and they then don't get choices about what they can do for a living. I think over 90 per cent of **disabled** children don't go to school, whereas over 90 per cent of non-disabled children do go to school, so there's a huge gap there.

Tell us about the organisations you worked with?

I was working mainly with two deaf organisations, both of them on the island of Java. One was Matahariku, which means 'My Sunshine', and the other is called Gerkatin Solo, which was our local branch of the National Deaf Association. They were both small organisations that didn't have an office.

What challenges did you face?

In the Indonesian culture things did not necessarily go as I would have expected them to! For example people would turn up to meetings two or three hours late, and once they had arrived trying to get everyone to focus and take part in the main activity could be hard, so I had to think of creative ways of getting people's attention and explaining things in interesting ways.

How has the experience changed you?

I'm still working out how it's affected me, and I think that will continue for a while. The biggest thing is that now I've had that personal link with Indonesia I don't want to let go of that. So in effect the direction of my life has changed now.

So what are you doing now?

I've decided I want to do something that will build upon the experiences and memories I have from Indonesia. I want to continue to aid the development of deaf people there, so I'm going to do a research degree which will look at the sign languages that I used in Indonesia. Hopefully that will increase the amount of information we have about the sign language that deaf people use there, and that will create an alternative that can be used for educating children in Java and maybe in other regions in Indonesia as well.

Now decide if the following statements are true or false. And please tell us about your experiences doing voluntary work.

- 1. Just over 20% of deaf children go to school in developing countries.
- 2. Many deaf children in developing countries don't get to choose their career.
- 3. Both the organizations Nick worked with in Java were quite large.
- 4. Indonesian people are never late for meetings.
- 5. Nick feels he has a relationship with Indonesia now.
- 6. Nick doesn't want to continue his work in Indonesia.
- 7. Nick's experiences in Indonesia were mostly negative.