Preventing for an Effective Volunteer Experience
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Dear Volunteer,

Congratulations on joining a long line of Cross-Cultural Solutions volunteers!

As a leader in the field of international volunteering, CCS always strives to provide our volunteers with as many resources as possible to make their experience abroad successful. This Placement Guide is the latest of these resources, and is intended to give you a better understanding of your role at your volunteer placement.

Your placement will be determined based on our in-country staff’s assessment of the Volunteer/Intern Profile that you submitted, and is matched with the needs of the local community. Our placements are designed in partnership with sustainable community initiatives, and your work directly helps them carry out their objectives. Your skills and interests, start date, and length of stay are all carefully considered when we meet with our Partner Programs.

Placements are assigned close to your start date — about a week before you depart. This allows us to address the immediate concerns of each of the Partner Programs, so your work is always relevant and timely. But how can you begin preparing for the experience now?

This Placement Guide is intended to address that question and help you to be more effective and productive once you do receive your Placement Description. Inside you will find resources, ideas, and recommendations, some of which are applicable to all types of placements, and some that can be tailored to your specific placement, once you receive it. It is not a ‘cookbook’ with formulas to follow, rather this guide is meant to be a resource to empower you to generate ideas and bring your own skills and interests to your volunteer work.

CCS now has more than 15 years of experience operating international volunteer programs, with more than 25,000 volunteer alumni. We’ve learned that it is our long-term commitment to the community that has the greatest impact; the continuous presence of volunteers supporting our partners. Over the years, we see how volunteers from years past continue to make a difference in the community by leaving instructions on what to do and how to be effective, respectful, and successful in their placement. In time, just one volunteer’s efforts to share their experience with others can make a tremendous difference.

This Placement Guide is the result of compiling all of these combined experiences. It comes directly from hundreds of volunteers providing feedback during and after their program, CCS in-country staff, representatives from our Partner Programs, and others dedicated to international volunteering.

As a volunteer traveling with CCS, you represent the next link in a long chain of CCS volunteers working side-by-side with local communities around the globe. It is our hope that you will use this Placement Guide as a resource to help you prepare for your volunteer work and serve as a practical guide when you are in-country. We also hope that you bring back more great ideas and recommendations for us to pass along to those who will continue to support your Partner Program after you have returned home!

In Partnership,

Farhana Rehman-Furs
Executive Vice President
Our Philosophy and Values

Since 1995, more than 25,000 volunteers have traveled to countries around the world with CCS. Our commitment to international volunteer work is based on a strong philosophy that provides the focus for all we do as an organization. This philosophy consists of a vision, a mission by which we achieve that vision, and a set of core values that define how we approach everything we do:

Our **Vision** is of a world where people value cultures different from their own, are aware of global issues, and are empowered to effect positive change.

Our **Mission** is to operate volunteer programs around the world in partnership with sustainable community initiatives, bringing people together to work side-by-side while sharing perspectives and fostering cultural understanding. We are an international not-for-profit organization with no political or religious affiliations.

Our **Values** are:

*Shared Humanity*
When people of different cultures have an opportunity to connect, there comes an understanding of our shared humanity.

*Respect*
We accept, appreciate and respect that people know and understand what is appropriate for their own communities.

*Integrity*
We commit to ensuring the safety, flexibility, professionalism, transparency and excellence of our programs.

Your Approach to International Volunteering

As you begin preparing for your experience, reflect on your role as an international volunteer. You can start by reading the essay on *International Volunteerism* in the small Program Handbook in your welcome packet. When you volunteer abroad, you'll be seen as a representative of your community, country, and CCS. As a CCS volunteer, you are responsible for upholding the values of Shared Humanity, Respect, and Integrity in the community where you volunteer.

Your expectations and approach to volunteering have a great impact on how productive and effective you can be at your placement, so it's important to set realistic and achievable goals. Consider the Mission, Vision, and Values of CCS, as well as the partner organization's goals for having volunteers. While in-country, you may find that the pace of activities is slower than expected, or that you are not accustomed to the ways in which the Partner Program approaches daily tasks. Remember, CCS respects that local people know and understand what is appropriate for their own communities, and by working side-by-side with them you are helping to further their goals and expand the reach of their work.

“What really makes a difference is a combined effort, people coming and volunteering in succession. You are a part of that chain: there were volunteers before you and there will be volunteers coming after you. But the better you do your work and the more you put in it, the stronger the chain is. Never forget that simple thing like attention can make a day: a smile, a hug, a word.”

—Nadia Savelieva, founding Country Director, Russia

Short-term volunteer work yields the most value when it is sustained and there is a continued presence. The long-term impact often goes unseen by volunteers, but is greatly appreciated by the Partner Programs. For example, schools in many different countries have noted that attendance and participation increases when volunteers are assisting the local teachers. The volunteers themselves are not aware of this change, but local educators have recognized the impact.
How to Use this Resource

Over the years we have consistently received feedback from our volunteers that they wish they had more time to prepare for their experience. Being sensitive to the needs of the community and our Partner Program staff, your actual placement will not be assigned until about one week in advance of your start date. We have therefore produced this Placement Guide to cover all types of volunteer placements and hope that it helps you to prepare for your placement possibilities, but more importantly, act as a valuable resource while you are in-country. It is a hands-on tool meant to be used as you prepare the next day’s activities, and developed from the past experiences of volunteers in your position.

The resources in this guide are meant to help you plan and prepare for day-to-day activities at your volunteer placement. Once you arrive in-country, take time to reassess and evaluate your goals. This will help you to be effective and helpful at your placement, and to appreciate your short-term achievements as a part of the big picture.

As always, it is very important that you remain flexible as you review the information in this guide. Though our in-country staff works their hardest to match everyone with their first choice in terms of placement, it is not always possible due to the needs of the community. Additionally, not all placement types are found in every program site, or year-round. Therefore, it is important that as you read the different descriptions that you do not get too attached to any one type of placement…take our word for it: they are all amazing and inspiring!

The chapters of this guide are structured in the following manner, so as to be useful during your pre-departure process in addition to when you are in-country:

- General preparations
- Placement-specific sections
- Activity Bank
- In-country resources

The General Preparations section contains advice that Program Managers would give to any volunteer, regardless of their placement or program site. Certain suggestions hold true in all situations, such as brushing up on the local language. These are great first steps for all volunteers who are curious or anxious about how to get started before they travel in-country.

Next is a series of Placement-specific sections. These sections are meant to provide a better understanding of what is entailed in each specific kind of placement. No Placement Guide or Placement Description could replace the firsthand experience of arriving at the Partner Program and observing how it is organized, managed, and the needs of the organization that a volunteer can address; however, we hope that they offer volunteer a better idea of the reality at the placements. Read through them all as you are completing your Volunteer Profile forms, and then refer back to the appropriate section when you receive your placement information. Look out for helpful, additional resources at the end of each section.

The Activity Bank is where you will find lists of games, songs, activities, and other things you can do at your placement that have been suggested by past volunteers. Since so many activities are applicable to multiple types of placements, they are grouped thematically and not in the placement-specific section. These lists are meant to merely get you started; the best activities are always the ones that volunteers come up with from their own experience. Just make sure that before you implement any activity, you make sure that it is appropriate with the CCS staff and the staff at your placement.

Last, there is a section with In-Country Resources available to you. You will find a problem-solving section with some common frustrations of past volunteers and how they were resolved, as well as a description of the resources and materials available to you in the Home-Base.
Pre-Departure Preparation

Over the years, CCS volunteers have come up with many useful, innovative ways to prepare for volunteering abroad. The following ideas are offered to help you maximize your experience, but they are not required. Remember, educating yourself about the country, culture, and social issues of the location where you’ll be volunteering is the most important thing you can do to prepare.

Ways to Be Proactive

- **Search the Web**
  Learn about early childhood care, creating lesson plans, teaching English, and more by searching online. The internet is also a great place to find activities, songs, interactive games, crafts, and ideas to use while volunteering. Here are some websites our volunteers have found useful:

  - [www.crayola.com](http://www.crayola.com)
  - [www.eslflow.com](http://www.eslflow.com)
  - [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)
  - [www.un.org/cyberschoolbus](http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus)
  - [www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org)
  - [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

- **Visit and volunteer locally**
  Visit a local elderly center, school, daycare, etc. to get tips and ideas on daily operations. Volunteering locally can give you hands-on experience practicing the traits of an effective volunteer — flexibility, open-mindedness, taking initiative, etc.

- **Utilize your local library**
  Libraries often have an extensive travel section; children’s sections with books, games, and learning activities; and information on working with the elderly, people with disabilities, and more.

- **Think like a kid…**
  Generate ideas for working with children by reminiscing about activities you enjoyed as a child, or even visiting your former teachers for tips. Spending time with kids — relatives, family friends, etc. — can help, too. Remember, there are more commonalities between populations in your own culture and others than you might think.

- **Go to your local gym or health club**
  Visit your local gym, health center, or YMCA to see if a staff member may be willing to share simple stretches and tips for working with older clients, children, people with disabilities, etc.

- **Familiarize yourself with information from your country**
  In many places, people know about your culture only through TV or magazines, so it’s a good idea to brush up on your country’s pop culture. Doing some research on community issues in your area, such as women’s empowerment initiatives, can help you to be more aware and better relate to the community where you’re volunteering. By seeing your own culture through an outsider’s eyes, you’ll be prepared to answer questions and give a more realistic impression.

- **Create a photo album**
  Compile photos of your home, family, pets, and more to show to people at your placement. This is a great way to “break the ice” and promote cultural exchange through show and tell.

Here is a simple timeline to help you begin preparing:

**As Soon As You Enroll:** You can start volunteering locally, practicing the local language, and compiling a photo album to help enrich your experience.

**As Your Program Approaches:** Narrow down your interests on your Volunteer/Intern Profile, and then begin doing some internet searches in those areas to educate yourself on the issues and find useful tools.

**A Week Before Departure:** You’ll receive your volunteer placement, and you’ll be able to start generating ideas and preparing day-to-day activities.

**When You Arrive In-Country:** Now’s the time to put your ideas to use! Make sure to use the Activity Bank section of this guide, consult other In-Country Resources, and leave ideas and examples of your work in the logbook for volunteers who came after you.
Advice from around the world!

In a survey sent out to former and current Volunteers, we asked the question,

“What advice would you give to a volunteer on how to prepare for their first week of volunteering?”

It can be hard not to judge local practices because they seem so different to what we’re used to, but if you ask the local professionals why they’re doing something, they have their reasons which are usually culturally-based. It’s important to learn about the culture and not be judgmental in this way.

-Jesse, Guatemala

Go with an open mind, rather than a mindset focusing on accomplishment.

-Jennifer, Costa Rica

Enjoy yourself, and whatever you do, the people are always happy to see you.

-Danielle, Peru

Leave anxieties behind, feel confident and be open to learn.

-Malin, Brazil

Try to go to placement feeling rested…you will need lots of energy.

-Debbie, Ghana

Make yourself accessible with the staff at your placement. I got really “mucked in”. I talked to them, worked with them fully, and performed all the tasks they did.

-Katie, South Africa
Be ready to jump in, language barriers or not. Give the work your best! - Jared, Morocco

Don't be put off if you get a big shock on your first day of placement, it will be much better the second time you go. - Oonagh, Russia

Plan your day and have an extra half hour (at least) of activities prepared. Some things don't work and you have to stop, or things go faster than expected. - Denise, India

Ask the staff questions, they are an amazing resource for understanding culture and history. - Kathryn, China

Be open with the challenges to your fellow volunteers and staff because they are most likely feeling many of the same uncertainties you are speaking with them can be very validating. - Victoria, Thailand

Learn names! It sounds silly, but if you're there for 3 weeks or 12 weeks, you want to build relationships and you need to know people's names to do that. - Wendy, Tanzania
Preparing for Language Differences

Whether English is a foreign language or a second language where you will be volunteering, you will encounter people who do not speak English fluently. This can be a communication challenge, however, many of our volunteers don’t see this as a language “barrier” at all; it’s entirely possible to communicate successfully as long as you are open-minded, patient, and creative.

While you aren’t expected to speak the local language, one consistent piece of feedback from volunteers is that they wish that they had learned more of the local language before going. If you are already fluent, learn some country-specific slang before you go, or read the country’s newspaper online in that language.

Here are a few tips to help you prepare for any communication challenges on your program:

1. Learn as much of the local language as you can! For more localized languages (e.g. isiXhosa), this may be more difficult. Start by learning the phrases in your Participant Handbook.
2. Find a phrasebook or multilingual dictionary; a pocket-sized one is ideal.
3. Take advantage of the language lessons offered in-country. Ask our staff for help if you need it.
4. Don’t underestimate the power of facial expressions, body language, and simple drawings; laughs, smiles, and hugs can go a long way.

Popular Phrases to Learn for Your Volunteer Placement*

- Hello
- Goodbye
- How are you?
- My name is…
- How old are you?
- Stop
- Be quiet please
- Pay attention
- Sit down
- Clean up
- Be nice
- Bathroom
- Very good
- Try again
- Sing with me
- Watch me
- Show me
- Help me…
- Follow me
- Repeat after me
- Would you like…
- Colors
- Days of the week
- Numbers
- Now you try
- What is your name?
- Tell me a story
- Do you want to…
- Thank You
- Where are you from?
- It is cloudy/sunny/rainy today

*Some volunteers suggest translating these phrases on a note card to take to their placement

Qualities of a Successful Volunteer

In all placements, there are similar traits that make a great volunteer. We asked alumni, our staff, and the staff of our Partner Programs, and they gave us these suggestions for future volunteers:

Successful Volunteers:

- Take Initiative
- Have Patience
- Are Willing to Help in Any Way Necessary
- Focus on Relationship Building
- Travel with an Open Mind
- Remain Flexible
- Foster Curiosity
- Desire to Be Challenged
- Go with a Spirit of Adventure
Volunteering with Infants & Children:

Volunteering with children is one of the most popular and common volunteer placements around the world. There are many commonalities between different cultures and placements because kids are generally interested and entertained by the same types of things, no matter what culture they come from. You'll probably find that children, regardless of their country or language, will enjoy similar activities as kids in your own neighborhood, or that you enjoyed at that age.

Our volunteers have found it helpful to learn about the developmental stages of infants and children to determine the types of activities to plan. Read our “Developmental Stages in Children” guide as a reference. The chart is not exhaustive, but is a good reference for anyone who is not familiar with developmental psychology. If you have further questions or interests, there is a wealth of information on child development available in books, magazines, or the internet.

The far right hand column lists example themes and activities that can be particularly helpful. Think about what types of arts & crafts, games, and other activities that you can organize based on these themes, and how you can vary them by age and ability. Preparing “beginner” and “advanced” versions of an activity can pay off in fewer frustrated or disinterested children. Keep in mind that some cultural translation may be needed to explain certain activities.

Volunteer experiences will greatly depend on specific placements. There are countless cultural differences between countries, and also structural differences in how organizations are run. Read on for information about how volunteer placements with infants and children can differ:

Structured vs. Unstructured Placements

This could be the biggest difference among placements working with Infants and Children. Some placements are very informal: for example, a home in the community that serves as a daycare center so that community parents can find employment during the day. These types of placements may have no set curriculum or even daily schedule. With an unstructured placement, volunteers need to create their own structure and activities, take a lot of initiative, as there is a lot of flexibility during the day.

Some placements are more formal: for example, government sponsored preschools. In these placements, there may be set schedules, and your duties may be more defined each day. You may have a set ‘class’ of children or may act as an aide to a specific worker.

“Do not put too much pressure on yourselves to perform. Volunteering is not about performance; it is about sharing, connecting, and giving to a community or group of people.”

–Daniel, CCS Volunteer in India

Volunteer Placement Types:

• Teaching Children
• Caring for Infants and Children
Large vs. Small Placements

It may seem obvious, but it is worth stating: the number of children the placement serves can impact on the type of activities that are effective. The physical space of the Partner Program may also limit the types or activities that volunteers can do.

For example, if your placement has only six children, activities will have to be suitable for a wide age range, and most likely a smaller space. If the placement has over 100 children, there will be “classes” of different ages and abilities, so a prepared activity can cater to a specific age group. If you are dealing with many children at once, you will have to make sure that the activity planned does not require more supervision than you can provide.

Age Level

In general, the placements we have working with young children are for those aged 0-7 years of age. This is quite a wide range. At some placements you may be working with the entire range, and at others you may be assigned to a specific age range.

Working with infants requires less preparation and most days will consist of the same basic activities. Volunteers generally provide one-on-one attention needed for developmental growth, and an additional pair of hands that can help the staff with daily chores. Older children will have a high level of energy and short attention spans, so volunteers should be prepared to switch between activities quickly. Games that require physical activity as well as imagination are ideal.

Individual Placement Policies

Each partner organization where we send volunteers operates under its own structure and rules. It is vital that volunteers understand and follow these policies as they pertain to the volunteer work.

For example, at some placements volunteers are asked to refrain from picking up the children. The children will learn to expect it from the staff workers, who are spread too thin to be able to pick up all the kids themselves. Creating these false expectations can create behavioral patterns that the Partner Program would like to avoid.

At other placements, you might find staff and volunteers carrying one or two children at a time, as this is not an issue. The Program Manager or CCS In-Country Staff will inform you of any special policies at the placements closer to your departure date.

What Volunteers Can Expect

Whether working at a daycare center, orphanage, pre-school, or community center, with infants and children you should always be prepared to for a high energy placement with excitement abound.

Because working with infants and children is general more activity based than some of the other placements, you will find that there is less information in this specific chapter than some of the other chapters; this is because the most useful section of this guide in terms of working with infants and children is the Activity Bank, which contains lots of ideas that have been ‘field tested’ in our Partner Programs by volunteers before you. Feel free to take, adapt, and use whatever works for you.

Because kids are so energetic and enthusiastic, it is especially important to be prepared for your placement each and every day. Being ready to start an impromptu game or song at any moment to maintain control of the kids is an important skill to have, along with preparing arts and crafts or other daily activities. In these placements especially, it is important that you arrive prepared with a few planned activities that you can use at any point. Take the advice of one of our alumni volunteers: Any unstructured time can quickly turn into chaos with 50 young kids!
Developmental Stages in Children:

Here are some general guidelines that may help you understand developmental growth stages when thinking about activities to implement. Keep in mind that every child develops at their own rate!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Typical Developmental Growth</th>
<th>Example themes for activities</th>
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|     | Babies aged 0-6 months old can begin to relate what they feel with what they see. They can also imitate certain sounds. They have very limited movement but can recognize familiar objects and people. | Building trust  
Physical movement  
Imitation |
|     | Between 8-12 months, babies learn to form more coherent sounds such as "mama" and "dada," and learn to stand without support. | Repetition  
Textures, Shapes, Colors  
Sounds and Rhymes |
| 1   | 1- and 2-year-olds are able to crawl and run unsteadily, as well as clumsily push and pull toys, dance, and climb. They are often able to speak single words and experiment with simple word combinations, although pronunciation is quite difficult. They are able to understand common phrases and simple directions used in routine situations. | Memory  
Song, Dance, and Art  
Letters |
| 2   | Children ages 2-3 enjoy using their senses and motor skills to explore the world, are highly curious, and are laying the groundwork for reading and writing. They explore all forms of movement from rolling and crawling to jumping and climbing. They begin to play with other children and show new emotions. They are gaining control over their voices and can sing the A-B-C song, but will not understand the relationship between the letter names and symbols. | Movement  
Story-telling  
Social interaction |
| 3   | 3- and 4-year-olds are building on their abilities in terms of language, motor skills, social skills, and concentration. They have improved ability to run and climb, and may begin learning to ride a bicycle, throw and catch a ball, and do other large-muscle activities. Language skills improve vastly for children ages 3 and 4. They have better pronunciation, a larger vocabulary, and begin to initiate conversations. | Pretend Play  
Reading, Writing  
Numbers, Basic Math |
| 4   | Children ages 4 to 6 want to have new experiences and are eager to learn to be more independent decision-makers. They engage in more complex and imaginative pretend play, and can move about seamlessly. They can recognize written numerals, count to ten, and begin to learn simple addition and subtraction problems. They know months and seasons, but cannot tell time. At age four, children can communicate in complex compound sentences, expand their vocabularies rapidly, and have fewer pronunciation errors. | Skill Building  
Simple Math Problems  
Simple Reading  
Sports, Music, Arts/Crafts |
| 5   | Children ages 6 to 8 have refined their motor skills enough to perform in sports activities, play musical instruments, etc. They are learning teamwork, while also gaining more confidence in their own skills. Six-year-olds may use increasingly more sophisticated methods to solve addition and subtraction problems. At this stage, most children begin formal schooling and learn to read aloud with fluency, accuracy and understanding to enjoy simple texts. |  |
| 6   | Children ages 8 to 12 are capable of engaging in more complex conversations and can concentrate on specific tasks for longer periods of time. They are becoming more creative and proactive in their problem solving abilities. Within this age range, children begin to use their own resources while also feeling comfortable seeking out peers or adults for assistance. Their reading, writing and mathematics skills are more refined and improve greatly with practice and formal education as they become eager to learn more and build on their various skill sets. |  |

Volunteering in the Classroom:

“You will get out what you put in. If you stand in the corner and say, ’I don’t know how to do x or how to explain y,’ you will lose out on the experience. Be willing to give EVERYTHING a try, even if it means just holding a child’s hand on a walk around the playground.”

–Jennifer, CCS Volunteer in Russia

Volunteer Placement Types:

- Teaching Conversational English
- Teaching Children

Above: A class in Ghana surrounds their volunteer teacher.

Expectations

Volunteering in the Classroom could mean being a teacher’s assistant to a class of 8 year olds, tutoring high school students who are trying to learn English or a variety of other educational settings. You could literally be in a classroom of a school, or your “classroom” might be an outdoor marketplace. In this section, you’ll find advice and tips from past volunteers for any setting, including how to manage a “classroom,” effectively plan and present a new lesson, and dress appropriately in front of a class. You can also find useful information in the Activity Bank, such as tips for “Livening up the Classroom” and “Practicing Conversational English.”

As you prepare to volunteer in a classroom abroad, consider how each classroom may differ from school to school and country to country. Here are some aspects of a classroom to consider:

What Volunteers Can Expect

Most importantly, know that perhaps the most powerful role you play as a volunteer is as a role model: the students in your class (and the students that you don’t teach) and even the teachers will be watching how you interact with people and handle situations. Whether or not you think of yourself as a teacher you will be viewed as one, so take your role seriously. Consider what is appropriate for a teacher to discuss or do with their students. Make sure you create professional boundaries, especially with older students who may try to push the limits of a student/teacher relationship.

Whether you can feel it or not, you create a buzz of excitement when you volunteer at the school, and children will mimic everything you do, whether it is how you dress or how you write letters on the chalkboard. Let this dictate everything you do, and be a positive role model in the community!

Role as Instructor vs. Teacher’s Aide

Volunteers interested in educational placements should always mentally prepare to lead the classroom themselves. Some schools may have volunteers instruct their own class period in order to give more structure and individual attention to the students. These schools may be generally less structured and more informal, requiring a lot of flexibility and creativity. At other schools, volunteers may work as a teacher’s aide along with another teacher. These schools may be more structured, and the work you do may be more formal. In both cases, volunteers should be ready to step in wherever needed.
Language of Instruction

The language of instruction in a classroom will have a great effect on the type of work you can do. Subject matter, activities and their presentation, and even your role within the school can depend on if the instruction is in English or another language. In some of the program sites, English is an official language, so most instruction will occur in English. Other schools may not have a formal English teacher, and everything will be taught in another language. In many cases, the school might have an English teacher with limited fluency who will greatly benefit from speaking with a fluent English speaker.

However, just because a classroom is run in a different language does not mean that you will need to be fluent in order to teach. The staff at the Partner Program will know your level of proficiency in the local language, and the volunteer placement will be structured accordingly.

Age Level

The ages of the students you’re volunteering with will affect your teaching methods. Younger children will have high energy and short attention spans, so volunteers should be prepared to switch between activities quickly. Games that require physical activity as well as imagination are ideal, and visual aides are typically well received. Older pupils and teenagers will better understand the concepts of traveling from another country, speaking another language, and cultural differences. They will be curious to know what your life is like, and cultural exchange is a big part of these placements. Drama and role playing have also been very successful with these groups.

Individual Placement Policies

Each partner organization we work with operates under its own structure and rules, and it’s vital for volunteers to adhere to these rules. Keep in mind your Program Manager or CCS in-country staff will always inform you of any special policies at placements before you arrive.

At some program sites, it’s very important that volunteers dress according to the cultural norms for a teacher. Displaying tattoos, piercings, or even wearing sandals could send cultural messages that the school and the CCS staff wish to avoid. It could also tarnish the Partner Program’s local reputation.

Some placements may have more strict photography guidelines than others. Some public schools have large governing structures, and if proper permission for taking photos or videos isn’t granted, it could severely strain the relationship between volunteers, the school, and the community.

Finally, some schools may use discipline techniques that can be shocking to a volunteer. Keep in mind that in some countries, it may be lawful to use corporal punishment. Volunteers should be ready to discuss this with in-country staff and realize that this is a reality in some schools. While you won’t be expected to participate, you may come in contact with the situation. For more information on how to handle challenging situations, refer to the Volunteer Placement Problem Solving section.

Cultural Differences and Issues

Many volunteers expect schools to be similar to their own educational experience since that is their only frame of reference. However, there may be significant differences in cultural attitudes within schools and toward education in the program site you visit including:

- *Punctuality and adhering to a schedule* – Schedules can be looser than you’re used to, and even the teachers may not show up on time. This requires patience.
- *Teacher presence and supervision* – Teachers may leave a classroom unattended, with students expected to behave with no supervision. This may be different from your experience.
- *School holidays* – Schools may close for holidays with little or no warning. Our in-country staff and even students themselves, may not be aware until it happens. Be patient; this is normal.
- *Religion* – The separation of church and state may not exist, so you may be at a school with institutionalized prayers or hymns. Respect that this is part of the culture, but don’t feel obligated to participate if it is against your personal views.
Classroom Management

If your volunteer placement is within a school, you may be asked to teach in front of a class. We’ve compiled a list of helpful tips for working in a classroom from our volunteers and Partner Programs.

Tips for How to be Successful in Front of the Class

- Speak clearly and loudly!
- Learn the names of your students.
- Make eye contact.
- Act professionally! To the students you are a representative of your home country and culture. Take your role seriously and students will, too.
- Don’t be TOO serious! Make class interesting with games/activities to stimulate the students. Your role is to get them excited about learning.
- Don’t show favoritism. Treat all students fairly, and be consistent with rules.
- Think about what you are going to teach before you enter the classroom, have a back-up plan, and expect the unexpected.
- Consider cultural differences when planning lessons; make sure the topics are appropriate.
- Consult the teachers and administrators at your school. They may have great ideas.
- Ask your students for feedback - they might have good suggestions for classroom activities.
- Have fun! If you have fun in the classroom, your students will too!
- Respect the local culture’s way of teaching, and trust that their methods work. Your role is not to restructure their educational system.
- Before starting a lesson, tell your students why you are having them do something. It will help them to understand your teaching methods.
- Keep an open mind. Don’t get flustered if a student walks in late, or leaves without asking. In many countries, the classroom is not as formal as you may be used to.

Lesson Planning

If you are placed in a school setting, the school will know of your professional background, experience, and skills and interests before you arrive so don’t worry if you don’t have teaching experience. The school will not expect you to be a highly trained educator, unless you actually are one. However, they will expect you to put some time and thought into preparing for each day in the classroom.

You will find that even a very basic structure for the day’s activities will make you more confident entering the classroom. This goes for the first day as well: without a doubt, you will probably be nervous and uncertain as you meet the students and teachers with whom you’ll be working. Past volunteers and CCS In-Country Staff suggest having an activity that will help break the ice, which you can use if you are called on to take over the classroom. One volunteer had this idea:

Before I started at my placement teaching mathematics at a school in Ghana, I thought up a game to play to learn names, and introduced myself to the students: I drew a map on the board, and showed the students where I came from, and described what my school was like. As a result, we had built a rapport before I began teaching the mathematics material, since the first day I didn’t know the curriculum.

This very basic planning helped the volunteer to step in front of the class the first day ready to contribute. Lesson planning doesn’t need to be formal, and of course, should allow for some flexibility since you should always be prepared for anything! Another benefit of lesson planning is that you can have an overall objective for the entire week, and each day will build off of the previous day’s material.

After the first day, when you meet with the staff at the Partner Program and observe the school, you can begin planning out activities for the classroom. At the end of this section, you’ll find a chart to help you plan out your lessons, a sample lesson plan, and a blank lesson plan template you can use. Also refer to the “Practicing Conversational English” section for some sample lesson themes.

Using Visual Aids

Visual aids help to take the focus off of you, which is nice, especially if you are still getting comfortable in front of the classroom. The old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words,” is especially true when there is a language gap: consider using visual aids if you are having trouble communicating with the students in their first language.
Cultural Exchange
As a volunteer, you will only be in the classroom for a small percentage of the school year. It’s important to make sure your expectations for your impact and productivity are realistic.

The primary impact that volunteers will have on the community is through cultural exchange. Just by being there, you will create an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation for school in the students. While you may not notice the difference, the schools often note that attendance at the schools is higher while a volunteer is there assisting, and that continues even after the volunteer leaves.

Take every opportunity to incorporate cultural aspects into your lessons, regardless of the subject matter. The students will be particularly interested in you and your life: your favorite foods, where you live, your family, your school, etc. Consider bringing photos, a CD or tape of your favorite music, or anything else that could help teach the students who you are. Finally, remember cultural exchange is a two-way street, so be ready to learn and grow from the experience!

Teaching Teachers
One impact our volunteers have in the schools that is more informal yet important is on the teachers. Some teachers may seek out volunteers to practice their conversational English or to discuss current events with someone with a different perspective. Many teachers have also said that a volunteer’s presence helps to refresh and energize them to try different teaching techniques.

Don’t be surprised if the English teacher at your school doesn’t speak English perfectly. This is probably the result of not having speaking it with a fluent speaker on a regular basis, and it doesn’t mean that they can’t teach grammatical and conversational English to students. Stay patient and help with pronunciation and speaking confidence, and you’ll be doing them, and their students, a great service.

Get to know the teachers at your school and offer to help in whatever way possible. The cultural exchange is rewarding, and you’ll do a service to the community by helping to educate the educators.

Appropriate Attire in Schools
While dress code always varies by country and volunteer placement, there is one consistency throughout all of our program sites: schools are often the most particular about what is acceptable for volunteers wear because the volunteers are serving as role models for the children in the community and working alongside of professional educators.

While it may be acceptable for volunteers working in daycare centers with infants and young children to wear a t-shirt and jeans, volunteers working in schools should project a professional image. You don’t need to wear business attire, but a pair of khaki slacks and a collared shirt will help you feel more confident in your role as a teacher or teacher’s assistant. Keep the following points in mind:

- Women should wear long pants or skirts that fall below the knee; Men should wear long pants
- Tank tops are generally not acceptable
- Keep tattoos covered
- Be prepared to remove or cover any piercings
- Have appropriate footwear (in some places, sandals may not be appropriate)

Many volunteers will have “placement outfits” that they wear only during their working hours while wearing more relaxed clothing during their free time. This way, they can have two to three pairs of slacks and a few shirts that can be rotated, instead of having to bring a full wardrobe or do lots of laundry.

Keep in mind, in many countries looking sharp and clean is more important than the actual type of clothes that you are wearing. Old tattered clothing, stained clothing, or excessive wrinkles should be avoided.
Creating a Lesson Plan

*Coming up with an idea for a lesson can sometimes be more intimidating and challenging than standing in front of a classroom...*

Thinking through this helpful step-by-step process will make it easier for first time teachers to prepare:

1. **What am I going to teach?**
   - Choose your subject matter
   - Example: *Clothing and colors*

2. **Who am I teaching?**
   - Consider your student population
   - The class is comprised of older middle school students, with some English experience

3. **What do I hope to accomplish?**
   - Review your lesson objectives
   - Have the students learn different articles of clothing in English, and review colors learned previously

4. **How will I teach this subject matter?**
   - Brainstorm techniques and materials
   - Dress-up in different clothing and use a paper cut-out doll display many different types of clothing then translate the names of the clothing into English

5. **How will I know if the students have learned?**
   - Create a technique for assessment
   - End class playing ‘Simon Says’ using many different questions about clothing and colors

**Still Stuck? Try these Brainstorming questions:**

- Am I teaching a skill or knowledge?
  - Is the subject matter appropriate? Have I discussed it with the staff at the school?
  - Have the students already reviewed this lesson, or is it new material?

- Am I teaching a group of students or tutoring one-on-one?
  - What is the age group?
  - How well do the students understand English?

- At the end of the lesson, what do I hope the students will take from it?
  - What are some small, tangible results?
  - Do I plan on reviewing the lesson later?

- What games, or songs can I use?
  - Do I need any extra materials for my lesson? How can I incorporate visuals?
  - Do other volunteers have any ideas?

- What were my objectives for the lesson?
  - How can I make sure that the students understand the concept behind the lesson, and aren’t simply repeating the words I say?
**Class:** Conversational English Class, period 4  **School:** ESCUELA EJEMPLA

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<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have the students learn the names of different articles of clothing, and review last week’s lesson on colors.</td>
<td>Improve the students’ ability to converse in English, and make them excited about learning English with their teacher, Sra. Hernandez.</td>
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**ASSESSMENT**

The class will play ‘Simon Says’ with questions regarding clothing and colors at the end of the class period.

**ADDITIONAL NOTES**

Dress in brightly colored clothing, with as many articles of clothing as you can. The more ridiculous looking, the better!

**TEACH (check off as you complete each part)**

1. What are some common articles of clothing? Have students name what each article of clothing is in Spanish as you use the visual representation.
2. Put the clothing cut-outs on the chalkboard/wall of the classroom, and have the student who correctly supplied the answer in Spanish write the name underneath.

**MATERIALS**

- Large paper doll of a gender neutral person, with cut out clothing shapes.
- Tape/magnets

**ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT**

3. Provide each student with a photo-copied handout of a simple drawing of people with arrows pointing to different articles of clothing
4. Write the name of each article of clothing underneath the cut-out on the board. Have each student label their handout paper.

**LINK TO PAST LESSON**

5. Quiz the students on your articles of clothing. Start with just the names, and then add colors. Give each student who answers correctly that article of clothing to wear if it can be removed (hats, gloves, scarves, ties, etc)

**INDEPENDENT WORK TIME**

6. Have each student draw a picture of him/her on the back of the handout, wearing fanciful clothing.

**SHARE**

7. Have each introduce their picture to the class, saying “My name is ____, I am wearing….”

**ASSESSMENT**

8. End the class playing ‘Simon Says’. Start with simple articles of clothing, and then add colors as well. Utilize the students with the accessories you handed out (i.e. “Simon says point to someone wearing a hat”) if everyone is in uniform.
# Lesson Plan Template

| Teacher: | Lesson Plan Date: |

Class:           School:  

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Volunteering with the Elderly:

“Don’t be intimidated by age – many of the residents are still very vital and playful, and the less able still have sharp minds and want to engage.”

–Denise, CCS Volunteer in Costa Rica

Volunteer Placement Types:

• Caring for the Elderly

Expectations

By offering smiles, affection, and attention to elderly members of the community, volunteers play an important role in making the last stage of their lives healthy, happy, and positive. Volunteer presence in elderly centers creates a brighter atmosphere for the staff, and raises awareness in the local community, often causing a rise in community involvement. Antonio Palomino Quispe, a director of one of our volunteer placements in Peru, said this about CCS Volunteer presence:

For our clients, knowing that people come from so far away to spend time with them makes them feel very special, because they have been abandoned by their own families and have been isolated for so many years.

Often, the strongest and most lasting action that a volunteer can do is simply showing attention to the elderly. In many communities, these elderly people may not have anyone giving them personal attention. Volunteers have the opportunity to change a life simply by listening, dancing, or laughing with someone. Make an effort to remember names and facts about each senior, it really makes a difference and shows them that you care.

Try to dispel any preconceived notions or stereotypes you may have about working with the elderly to fully embrace the opportunity. Volunteers are often surprised at how vibrant and high-energy these placements can be. At the end of this section you’ll find useful materials on “How the Body Responds to Aging” and “Being Empathetic to the Emotional Transitions of Aging” that will help you to understand some of the physical and emotional aspects of aging.
Energetic Activities

Working with the elderly can be one of the Volunteer Placements with the most variation in day-to-day duties. One way to keep people mentally and physically sharp is by preparing energetic activities to keep people moving! Read on for some ideas of energetic activities for use at an Elderly Center. For more ideas and activities, look in the Activity Bank chapter.

Encouraging Exercise

One important way you can have a positive effect on the lives of the seniors at elderly centers is by incorporating a bit of healthy exercise into their daily routine. This could include:

- Scheduling time to go for short walks
- Creating an aerobics session each morning
- Doing stretches and simple calisthenics

Here are some simple calisthenics you can do to get everyone warmed up:

- **Arm circles**: Have everyone put their arms straight out from their sides. Slowly make small circles, increasing the size of the circles until they are as large as you can go for 15 counts. For the last 5 counts, slowly decrease circles to starting size. Then do it in reverse.
- **Reaches**: Have everyone stand or sit as straight as possible and reach straight up for the sky. Encourage everyone to reach as far as they can, from their toes to their fingertips.
- **Marching in place**: Have everyone practice marching in place for 20 seconds. Have less mobile volunteers march in their chairs, pump their feet, or even “march” with their arms.
- **Head and neck circles**: Have everyone turn their head to the left, then right as far as they can and hold for 5 seconds. Finally, have everyone roll their heads in a circle.
- **Pass the ball**: Hold a ball in your hands with your arms straight out in front of you. Rotate your torso without moving your arms and pass the ball to the person to your right. They will need to rotate to the left to receive the ball, and then to the right to pass it to the next person in the circle. Continue until you go all the way around the circle.

Always encourage people to go at their own pace and know their limits. These exercises should be easy, and discontinued if they cause any pain. Some placements may have on-site physical therapists to guide you. Others will be much less formal. In these cases, think of some other non-traditional ways to get people at your placement moving around and having fun!

Music and Dance

Dancing is a great way to encourage people to be active, socialize, and get some exercise. The health benefits of low impact, weight-bearing activities like dancing are well documented and include:

- Strengthening bones and muscles without hurting joints
- Improving posture and balance
- Increasing stamina and flexibility
- Reducing stress and tension
- Building confidence
- Warding off illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, and depression

Source: [http://www.aarp.org/health/fitness/get_motivated/lets_dance_to_health.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/fitness/get_motivated/lets_dance_to_health.html)

Dancing is easy to vary the level of physical exertion, so everyone can participate at their own level. Another fun variation is doing karaoke with a microphone; don’t be afraid to get the ball rolling!

Keep in mind that cultural differences in how gender and age are viewed may make the seniors hesitant to join you on their own, so be welcoming and offer everyone an invitation if culturally appropriate. You may just be surprised at some of the dance moves you’ll see!
Building Relationships

Energetic activity is very important when working with the elderly, but so is building meaningful relationships. The seniors want to get to know you and why you have come to volunteer with them. Here are a few examples of what you can do. There are more ideas in the Activity Bank.

Show and Tell Activities
One photo can lead to conversations about family, cultural differences in clothing, what your home looks like, and more. Show and tell items, whether they are photos or small representations of your culture, are a great way to break the ice.

Memoirs and Memory Books
If you focus on each senior’s history and story, you’ll learn a lot and the seniors will enjoy passing along their knowledge and wisdom. You can work together to create individual memoirs or memory books that record events in their lifetime, special moments, and their favorite things. In addition to words, memory books can also include photos and drawings, or any other keepsakes that the person would like to include by making them into scrapbooks.

Sitting and Listening
Some volunteers find that the most important thing they can do is to just sit and talk with the seniors. Depending on your language level, this could mean conversing or just listening. Keep in mind that even if you don’t understand a word that is said, you are still playing a very important role. You can be an active listener without understanding if you make eye contact, read body language and smile and laugh with the story teller. Just having someone there to listen is something that most seniors in these placements don’t have, and the fact that you came from far away to do it is even more important. The staff at the Elderly Centers where our volunteers work note that having someone listen helps improve self-esteem, which is critical to those who may have been abandoned.

Try to spend a little time each day sitting next to some of the less active seniors and initiating conversation or practicing some of the language. If you make the conscious effort to reach those that can’t participate in every activity, you’ll be sure to spread your attention around more evenly.

Respecting and Learning from Our Elders
As mentioned before, many volunteers are shocked to see how vibrant and optimistic some of the seniors they work with can be. Hopefully after reading this chapter you can see that the elderly are a very special portion of the population in the program sites where we work. It is truly an honor to be able to spend time with the elders of the community.

The variety in the types of activities you can do with the seniors is huge, and similarly, the range of interests and abilities of the seniors at the elderly centers and homes will be just as wide. There are no limits, aside from cultural sensitivities, to how far you can go with your own creativity and ideas. Whatever you end up doing, you’ll find that people are genuinely excited and happy to see you every day.

It’s important that you honor and give respect to the seniors at the elderly centers. This means that you should be extra flexible and listen to their needs and desires, instead of bringing your own agenda to the volunteer placement. Preparing activities to do each day is great, but be ready to postpone or modify them if you find that the seniors have other priorities. It’s also important to be very welcoming and friendly, but never make participation obligatory as you might with grade school children.

Many of the seniors with whom you will work have not felt the honor or respect from their own families or communities that they have earned, and instead feel like a burden on the people around them. You can change this perception, and in return, you will learn much more than you can imagine. The populations at elderly centers carry a wealth of wisdom and life experience, and our volunteers constantly report how much they learned from the seniors — even if they don’t speak the same language.
How The Body Responds to Aging

Aging is a natural process for everyone; in fact, scientists have noticed the first signs of physical aging in humans as soon as we reach physical maturity in our early 20’s. Aging is a natural, lifelong process in all of us, and it is certainly not something that begins at old-age.

There are certain processes that become more prevalent as our bodies grow older. Listed below are some common physical changes that come at varying life stages. As we age, these afflictions affect us increasingly: the hearing loss that a resident experiences may have began in their 30s. (Source: http://www.myseniorthemcare.com)

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<th>Age:</th>
<th>20's</th>
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As we reach physical maturity our metabolism begins slowing, and skin starts slowly losing elasticity, creating wrinkles.

Hearing begins to deteriorate from years of exposure to loud noises. Cholesterol increases, and kidney functions decrease. Hair begins turning grey.

The immune system begins to slowly weaken. Blood vessels may start to lose elasticity.

The body begins losing muscle mass and bone density.

Tendons and ligaments in the body lose elasticity and cartilage continues to deteriorate.

The eyes' lenses begin to harden and lose the ability to accommodate different ranges and the pupils become smaller.

Here is a summary of how our body’s systems are affected by these changes:

**Muscular System:** As our bodies grow older, we lose muscle mass, strength, and endurance. We also lose flexibility. As our tendons and ligaments lose some elasticity, motion becomes more restricted and sometimes painful. This can be alleviated by exercise.

**Skeletal System:** Bones lose strength and density as we grow older. With inactivity, they can become weak and brittle. The cartilage in our joints wears down after a lifetime of use, which causes inflammation and arthritis. This can be alleviated by exercise.

**Sensory Systems:** Hearing loss, which begins as early as age 30 from exposure to loud noises, increases in the later stages of life, when it may be difficult to hear some high pitched sounds especially. It helps to speak slowly, enunciate, and speak in a lower tone if needed.

The eyes' lenses begin losing their ability to accommodate different ranges, and the pupils become smaller. This makes it becomes more difficult to focus in lower light areas. The perception of color is also sometimes affected, as colors become more muted. Smells and tastes may also become more muted. If you have bright colors in your wardrobe, wear them!

**Respiratory and Cardiovascular Systems:** The lungs and blood vessels lose their elasticity over time, which can result being more prone to fatigue and shortness of breath. This can be alleviated by exercise.

The good news is that almost all of these symptoms are alleviated and the processes are slowed with proper **physical and mental exercise**:

Physical exercise can counteract the loss of muscle mass and bone density, and has positive effects on the Respiratory and Cardiovascular Systems, as well as the Immune System and other bodily functions. In general, it can help reverse some of the signs of aging. Try to get the people at your placement moving, as a sedentary lifestyle will only make their symptoms worse.
Being Empathetic to the Emotional Transitions of Aging

Many of our volunteers say that they have a hard time understanding what the Seniors at their Volunteer Placement are thinking or going through. Being knowledgeable of the life changes that they may be experiencing can help you to be more empathetic to their situation. The graphic below shows three common transitions that professionals have noted many face as they age.

Retirement is often the first big transition in the life of Seniors. It can be an especially difficult change, as it signals the end of their role as a provider or income earner. It also means that they must reevaluate their purpose and find another activity to fill the free time in their day to day life. Finally, it can signal a loss of independence, as they may no longer be self-sufficient on their own income.

Experiencing loneliness and loss is something that people go through in all stages of life, but becomes especially powerful as you get older and friends and loved ones pass away. Lifelong companions are impossible to replace and many find it difficult to form new relationships after losing someone close to them. Additionally, many of the Seniors at the Partner Programs are there because they have been abandoned by their families and communities. This leads to feeling alone and unloved.

The relocation to another home is another transition with which residents at Elderly Centers must come to terms. This can be extremely traumatic, as it can often mean leaving their neighborhood or community, friends, and old way of life. At an Elderly Home they will lose privacy, freedom, and independence. They will also need to re-socialize with other residents, which can be difficult. Many tend to view their new home as "temporary," but to have a healthy transition, residents need to feel connected and have a sense of belonging to their surroundings.

These factors all underscore two big fears in many as they grow older: uncertainty about what the future will bring, and the increase in dependency on others. These two often perpetuate each other. For example, as anxiety over uncertainties about health increase, a resident loses a certain amount of independence because they need to rely on a doctor. This feels like a loss of control, when one feels like they are not in control, the future is never certain.

Many volunteers find it helpful to know that the uncertainty about the future and fear of dependence, that many Seniors face are the same fears that people of all ages have. This realization can lead to a better understanding of the people with whom you are working.
Volunteering with People with Disabilities:

“Look carefully and notice the small victories happening in the placement on a daily basis.”

–Sarah, CCS Volunteer in China

Volunteer Placement Types:

- Caring for People with Disabilities
- Assisting Teachers of Special Education

Expectations

Our Partner Programs that serve people with disabilities are truly inspiring for everyone involved. Volunteers, staff members, community members, and the population served all benefit greatly from the cultural exchange, attention, and experience that CCS volunteers provide. Come with an open heart and mind, and you'll leave with more than you ever expected.

Volunteers working with people with disabilities should prepare to experience things that they never have before — encountering different types of disabilities, working conditions, and cultural attitudes. The facilities may be crowded, understaffed, and under-resourced; this is why your volunteer work can be so effective. Volunteers provide the individual attention and respect that every person deserves.

Regardless of how experienced they are, our volunteers always note that there is an emotional adjustment period when they start at their volunteer placement. At first, some volunteers find that conditions in some placements may be upsetting. It is natural to feel a range of emotions such as embarrassment, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, sadness, and guilt. Recognizing these emotions as a part of culture shock is good. Often, people with all types of disabilities are grouped together in one big room, and there may be little stimulation or interaction with the residents. Sarah, who volunteered at a school for children with disabilities in Ghana, said,

For me the most challenging aspect of my placement was seeing the lack of teacher involvement and resources...I had to pull myself together, and I realized that this is the reality for these children and that my role was to make any difference I could while I was there.

Sarah is a perfect example of a volunteer who was initially emotionally overwhelmed by her placement, but because she quickly adapted, she was able to identify community needs and see where she could help. Ultimately, her role was to give personal attention and joy to the kids at the school, and she realized that the conditions did not impact her ability to do so; in fact, they only served to increase the importance of her role making the kids feel valued.

Remember that our in-country staff members are always available for questions, guidance, and insight into your placement. Though it can feel like you’re starting from nothing, you’re continuing the work of volunteers before you. Many ideas in the Activity Bank can be tailored for use with people with disabilities.
Volunteer Impact
Volunteers who work with people with disabilities are often amazed at the personal impact that they can have on the people at their placement. At these placements especially, the impact is felt in the tiny steps taken each day. The more you can measure your impact by the personal relationships you build, the more you will be able to understand the true impact you have at the Partner Program.

Many of the organizations we work with are trying to create a culture of inclusion and independence for the people with disabilities that they serve. When asked how volunteers could better prepare for their experience, former CCS Program Director Irving Perez said:

Understanding in their hearts that regardless of the disabilities that people may be living with, they deserve exactly the same things that we do. Sometimes volunteers try very hard to accommodate or to change the world for them, and the truth is that we only have one world...all we have to do is include them.

Our in-country staff around the world has often said that having international volunteers that show respect and attention to people with disabilities raises awareness in the local community. These populations may be hidden away or forgotten in some places, but when volunteers come from around world to spend time with them, the increased visibility helps to break down stereotypes.

The Social Model of Disability

CCS is built on the values of integrity, shared humanity, and respect. We strive to use “People First Language” when describing people with disabilities. While this is not about being politically correct, putting the emphasis on the person instead of the disability/diagnosis, shows respect. You can become more familiar with this language by reviewing the examples in the chart below.

This type of language is connected with the Social Model of Disability which you can find at the end of this section. The general idea is that everyone has physical, intellectual, and psychological differences that may vary from the statistical “average,” however, these difference don’t necessarily lead to “disability.” Instead, societal attitudes — not differences themselves — create disabilities.

We have compiled insight and feedback from our in-country staff and volunteers to provide ideas that can be effective at your placement, regardless of the types of you may be working with. Some activities may not be appropriate for everyone, but don’t count anyone out based on your perceptions of their limitations.

People-Centered Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say:</th>
<th>Instead of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities.</td>
<td>The handicapped or disabled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a cognitive disability (diagnosis).</td>
<td>He’s mentally retarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has autism (or an autism diagnosis).</td>
<td>She’s autistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a physical disability (diagnosis).</td>
<td>He’s a quadriplegic/crippled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a mental health diagnosis.</td>
<td>He’s emotionally disturbed/mentally ill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.</td>
<td>She’s confined/wheelchair bound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He receives special education services.</td>
<td>He’s in Special Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids without disabilities.</td>
<td>Normal or healthy kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congenital disability</td>
<td>Birth defect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.</td>
<td>Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information is available at [http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/)
Cultural Differences and Views on Disabilities

The Social Model of Disability approaches disabilities from the perspective that cultural attitudes toward difference create the social structures that define disabilities. Along with cultural attitudes, the definition and treatment of people with disabilities can change from one culture to the next.

In some places, cultural attitudes toward people with disabilities may not match your own. For example, religious beliefs may result in people with disabilities being seen as “cursed” or “possessed.” These attitudes can create constricting social structures, and limit access to community resources for people with disabilities. Since this can be frustrating or emotional for many volunteers, keep the following in mind.

First, it’s important to identify cultural differences and discuss them. Our in-country staff can provide invaluable insight on cultural attitudes in their community, and how they are changing. Don’t feel like you need to change your own beliefs to fit those of the community. Instead, acknowledge the differences, and recognize that “different” doesn’t mean “wrong.” By showing love and compassion to the people with whom you are working, you may increase the community awareness and challenge some preconceived notions, but as a visitor to another culture, it is not your role to impose your beliefs on others.

Also, note that regardless of the prevailing cultural belief, not everyone you meet may have the same view. There are many community organizations working within the local societal structures to provide access to services for people with disabilities. Though you might take a different approach in some situations, these organizations know best how to go about effecting change in their own culture. Remember that the effort to increase the visibility and rights of people with disabilities is happening all over the world. Try not to get frustrated with attitudes or lacking resources as you work at your placement.

Volunteering in Special Education Schools

Volunteering in a special education school is very similar to working in any other classroom, so advice, tips, and activities in the Volunteering in the Classroom and Activity Bank sections will be very helpful. However, there are some unique aspects of these types of placements to explain.

Many special education classrooms will have students with varying types of disabilities and different educational needs. In many special education placements, volunteers work as teacher’s aides. In these cases, you will support the teacher and your duties will be defined by the staff at the Partner Program. Don’t be alarmed if the school where you’re volunteering is more informal than you expected. Often the main goals of these schools may be to provide support and care for the students, rather than teaching a rigid curriculum. In many cases, without the school, students might be otherwise isolated or abandoned.

Special education schools for students with disabilities are a relatively new concept in some places, so access to training and resources may be limited. The staff at these schools may not be specially trained to work with students with different disabilities. However, they have chosen to work or volunteer at the school, and whether or not they are trained, they are committed to the goals of the school.

In any case, there will likely be some cultural differences to become accustomed to at your placement. Volunteers will need to remain flexible and open to new and different ways of doing things. Cultural differences may cause processes to move more slowly, but trust that the schools are working in the best way that they can in the community. It’s very important to focus on small advancements at these placements. The organizations we work with and our in-country staff emphasize that volunteers should be process-driven and not goal oriented, or they may become frustrated very quickly.
The Social Model of Disability

How is a disability defined?

The Medical Model of Disability states that a disability is the result of a physical condition which differentiates the person from "normalcy." A person's diagnosis creates their disability.

The Social Model of Disability instead looks to societal structures and attitudes as the factors defining who has a disability and who does not. The chart below helps to explain this model.

Societal Structures and Attitudes:

- Segregation
  - Segregated services
  - Lack of Education
- Cultural & Religious Beliefs
  - Medicalization
  - Fear
- Social Prejudice
  - Ignorance
  - Stigma
  - Lack of a Social Network
- Inaccessibility
  - Underestimation
  - Inflexible employment
  - Inaccessible Facilities
  - Inaccessible transportation

The last level shows the manifestations of societal structures and attitudes that serve to create disabilities, such as Lack of Education, Inaccessible Transportation systems, or Stigma. The Social Model of Disability recognizes that while some people may have differences from the statistical mean of the population, whether they be physical, intellectual, psychological, or any other, these do not have to lead to disability unless society fails to accommodate and include them in the way it would those who are 'normal'.

For example, if a man who is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair is unable to enter a building because there are several stairs leading to the entrance, than he has a disability. However, if the societal structure of inaccessibility is removed and the building is outfitted with a ramp, then that man is no longer considered to have a disability because that person is empowered to enter and exit the building at his own will, as if he was not in a wheelchair.

In other words, the defining factor in the two situations that differentiates whether or not the man in the wheelchair has a disability is not his diagnosis of muscular dystrophy, but instead the societal structure of inaccessibility that was removed in the second scenario.


When you are volunteering, try to keep this Social Model of Disability in mind. You can work side-by-side with local community members to affect positive change by addressing these social manifestations and reaffirm our sense of shared humanity!

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Volunteering with Adults in Community Organizations

Expectations

There is considerable variation in the different kinds of volunteer placements that involve working with adults. However, though the missions and goals of each organization are vastly different, the ideal volunteer mindset and the types of activities that our volunteers can do to support them are very similar.

Volunteer Impact

Your goals as a volunteer should always be process-driven, and not outcome-driven. These processes can include providing moral support, exchanging ideas and cultural differences, lending a hand, creating friendships, and transferring knowledge and skills. The organizations that we work with agree that it is ultimately through these actions that volunteers can provide the biggest impact of all.

Additionally, your impact should not be in changing how the organization is structured or operates. There may be times when you are frustrated at the slow pace of change. While it may be tempting, and well intentioned, to try to re-structure the entire organization, please remember that this is not your role. You can share and compare how you would do things in your culture, but ultimately, it is their community and their decision on how to best approach its needs.

You may see the immediate benefits of doing things your way, but like a monetary donation, these benefits are not sustainable, nor do they always produce the intended results. The best way to have an impact is to work side-by-side with the community members, sharing ideas and perspectives, and lending helping hands wherever they can be used.

Observing & Assisting Local Health Professionals

In health placements especially, there is potential for volunteers to have misconceptions about what they can do, and what it means to be an international volunteering in a healthcare setting. The goal of this section is to set expectations and better describe the types of activities that may be involved when volunteering in a health placement, as well as the practical and ethical considerations involved.
What is the Role of a Health Volunteer?

One of the best ways to prepare yourself to be an effective volunteer in the field of health is to recognize the many ways in which you can promote health in a community abroad, both medically and holistically. Here are some examples of what CCS volunteers do to promote health:

- Caring for elderly persons in a residential or day facility
- Assisting with physical therapy for disabled children or adults
- Helping to prepare healthy meals for children or adults at a community center
- Cleaning floors and walls at a health care facility to improve sanitation and hygiene
- Teaching English to doctors and nurses to help improve their ability to communicate with medical professionals around the world
- Exchanging ideas about healthcare from different cultural perspectives

Guatemala Country Director, Virginia Burmester, had this advice for volunteers interested in health:

*We need to introduce the importance of the human touch. Even in the waiting room there is so much to do: talk with the kids, play with them, reassure parents that they will be seen soon, and support the patient. There is not enough staff for individual attention and the human touch. People want to know someone cares….Forget about the technical side of medicine and focus on the human touch that is so needed.*

One of the key pieces of CCS programs is cultural exchange. As a volunteer, you’ll spend the majority of your time talking to local people about your life, while learning about their lives. CCS volunteers very rarely participate in direct care, and are more likely to work in social/observational roles, such as the examples outlined above. You may be asked to take patient histories and attendance records, sort supplies, clean, or talk with patients and their families being served by the organization.

It’s important to understand that without medical credentials and licensing within the country where you’ll be volunteering, it may not only be unethical, but also against the law to practice hands-on medicine, even as a volunteer. Also, without fluency in the local language, it may be difficult to assist medical professionals. A good way to set expectations is to consider what types of roles and tasks you would have as a health volunteer in your home country.

Adapting to Cultural Differences & Examining Stereotypes

All international volunteers are faced with challenging cultural differences that require flexibility and a willingness to adapt. Even with extensive medical experience, you may feel out of your element in a medical setting abroad. Equipment, procedures, resources, and the pace of work could be significantly different from what you’re accustomed to, and you may have to improvise to achieve your goals.

At the same time, you may be surprised at how the ideas that you arrived with differ from the reality of life in the country in where you’re volunteering. Doctors and nurses abroad have studies medicine in their home countries and/or abroad, and are highly qualified. Equipment and procedures may be comparable to what you have experienced in your home country, and you may not feel as needed as you expected. Our Partner Programs request volunteers because they appreciate the volunteer contribution and effort. You will be more successful if you respond to the requested needs of the local people rather than contributing what you assume is needed.

Patience, understanding, and an open mind will be your best tools, regardless of the task at hand. We encourage you to listen and learn from the people with whom you are working; exchange ideas, build relationships and engage in achieving CCS’ mission to bring people together to work side-by-side while sharing perspectives and fostering cultural understanding.
Working with People Affected by HIV/AIDS

CCS works with many different types of placements that support people affected by HIV/AIDS, including individuals who are infected with the virus/disease, as well as their families and friends. As in others, flexibility, open-mindedness, and pro-activeness are important in these placements.

Another important and unique consideration within these placements is the community’s approach to HIV/AIDS, which can vary greatly from country to country and culture to culture. Here are three different examples from our countries:

- **In Costa Rica** the culture and government is strictly Roman Catholic. This has profound effects on where and how HIV/AIDS education can occur, as the use of contraceptives is not supported by the Catholic Church in Costa Rica. Volunteers working in HIV placements will primarily assist with the daily duties at hospice centers and provide companionship.

- **In South Africa** there are thousands of international organizations that address the soaring HIV infection rate, including initiatives of the UN, CARE, and other large aid organizations. Volunteers don’t often participate in education and outreach as there are cultural, ethical, and language barriers that prevent it. Volunteers focus on providing an extra set of hands at various community organizations — day care centers, women’s groups etc. for those affected by the virus.

- **In Thailand** the government and culture is very open and proactive about discussing HIV prevention. Volunteers have been able to shadow nurses in HIV clinics, or translate and do HIV education work for reproductive health centers if there for a longer period of time.

These examples are *not* representative of every type of HIV/AIDS placement in those countries or the world. But they do represent the differences in cultural views and how CCS volunteers can be of assistance in different communities. CCS volunteers do not engage in hands-on medical treatment of patients with HIV or AIDS due to ethical and legal considerations. CCS volunteers work in increasing visibility in the community (which can reducing negative and harmful stigma), improving the quality of life for those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, and supporting local organizations that strive to address the negative impact of the virus on their community.

Lastly, it’s a good idea to re-examine your own cultural and personal views on HIV/AIDS before arriving at your placement. Do your best to educate yourself on the virus, and consider how it is viewed in your community. For many volunteers, working in these types of placements will be the first time they are personally affected by HIV/AIDS, and this can create more questions. Be open and honest with CCS in-country staff when questions arise, and do your best to be a positive, supportive volunteer.

Sharing Your Professional Skills/Experience

CCS volunteers sometimes have volunteer placements supporting a small business or micro-finance initiative. These organizations are usually part of a larger movement. For example, you support local artisans to help continue their craft, or support single mothers in obtaining financial independence. Try to focus on what you can provide to the people with whom you are working, and not necessarily what you can provide to the bottom line of their business. Sometimes, practicing conversational English with the staff at the organization is the biggest support you can provide.

The in-country staff place volunteers in a small business setting because of their backgrounds, skills, and interests. Don’t be intimidated if you do not have a business background — the organization may need someone to help with small administrative tasks or other unrelated activities. Similarly, if you do have an extensive background in business, keep in mind that it’s based in your culture, and best business practices may differ in your new country. Be flexible and open about how you may be able to assist the Partner Program! At small business placements, the impact can measured in a tangible way — financially — however it is critical that volunteers do not gauge their success on this factor alone. Always try to keep the Mission, Vision, and Values of CCS in mind.
As always, it is important that you respect the experience of the Partner Program staff without trying to change things to fit your own views on organization and structure. With these placements particularly, it is imperative that you take time to assess the situation and don’t bring your own preconceived ideas about how you can help. If necessary, conduct an informal needs assessment: see how you, as an international volunteer, can fit in by meeting all of the stakeholders in the organization. Don’t be afraid to use some of the activities in the Activity Bank to break the ice!

Working Toward Women’s Empowerment

One of the volunteer opportunities offered by CCS is working toward women’s empowerment. By definition these placements promote the self-actualization or influence of women in the local community. To give a better idea of what that means in context, here are just a few examples of what our volunteers are doing at the moment:

- Working with a women’s group focused on education and literacy in Morocco
- Creating craft projects with the inmates and their families in a women’s prison in Peru
- Assisting with a micro-credit lending project in Tanzania
- Teaching computers and technology to members of a community organization dedicated to increasing the social and political voice of women in Guatemala
- Helping to pick-up, sort, and recycle materials with a women’s income generation group in Costa Rica
- Working with children in the day care center of an organization for victims of domestic abuse in South Africa

Of course, these are just a few examples, and are by no means representative of all women’s empowerment placements in those countries, or all of the organizations we work with around the world. But they can give you a sense of the different types of organizations and missions of the groups; you may be sorting glass bottles or creating a website, or something not even mentioned.

Despite the differences, there are some commonalities in these placements. In many of them, the women are interested in having volunteers in order to learn to speak English better. It may not be the main mission of the organization, but teaching conversational English is often a part of these placements. For this reason you should make sure to read the “Practicing Conversational English” section, located in the Activity Bank. Second, in all of these placements you can be sure that you are helping the local initiative to better serve the community’s women. Whether you are sweeping floors or creating a webpage, you are enabling that organization to better fulfill its commitment to empowering women in the community.

Remember that the activities that you do at your placement will depend on your skills, you interests, and the initiative you take into your placement. Like anything else, the more time and effort you put in, the more everyone will get out of your experience there. As you use this resource and prepare for your placement, try to remain flexible and ready to offer help in any way you can.

Perhaps the best way to prepare for such a placement, aside from brushing up on some ice breaking or team building activities listed in the Activity Bank, is to do some research on women’s issues in your community. What are some of the concerns of women’s groups in your area? Having background knowledge of how women’s empowerment works in your culture can lead to some fascinating conversations and comparisons, and at the very least, will help you to contextualize some of the issues that are important to the women with whom you are volunteering.
Activity Bank

“Music, dancing, and laughter can help bridge language and cultural differences. Once the people at your placement are used to your presence... ¡Fiesta!”

—Joe, CCS Volunteer in Costa Rica

Many volunteers, like this one in Thailand, find that prepared activities are great way to fill unexpected downtime at their placement.

Ideas, Games, Activities, and Resources to Use at Your Placement

Once you find out what your placement will be, you can begin thinking about activities to prepare. This chapter is meant to give you ideas of what you can do at your placement in-country. You’ll find activities for children, adults, elderly, and more, but our volunteers often note that many activities are useful with various populations. So, make sure to consider them all, and feel free to tweak activities for the population you’ll be working with. Take this resource with you in-country along — you’ll want to have a few ideas with you on hand at your placement.

Music

Volunteers have found that incorporating music in your placement is a great idea — it’s inclusive, fun, reinforces teaching points, gets people moving, and is a ready-made activity for slower times.

Songs

Here is a short list of common songs that volunteers have used in the past for quick activities:

- Mary had a Little Lamb
- Row, Row, Row your Boat
- London Bridge is Falling Down
- Ring Around the Rosy
- Happy and You Know it
- The Ants go Marching
- The ABCs
- You are my Sunshine
- Kookaburra
- B-I-N-G-O
- The Wheels on the Bus
- Down by the Bay
- Name Game
- I’m a Little Teapot
- It’s a Small World
- Hokey Pokey
- Ba, Ba, Black Sheep
- The Ants go Marching
- Itsy-Bitsy Spider

Don’t worry if you don’t know all of these songs. You can use ones from your own childhood, or you can do an internet search for “Children’s songs” for more ideas or to review the words to the above songs. Children’s songs are great not only for children, but are also good for anyone who is learning or practicing a second language because of the repetition, easy language, and simple structure.

Get creative and write your own verses that incorporate things that people will know, such as local animals, words, or names. For example, one volunteer in Peru sang “Rancho Pancho” to the tune of “Old MacDonald” and used Spanish animal names.
Dance
To add another layer of fun to a lesson plan, add some dancing. For example, “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” is great to do if you are teaching the names of body parts. Other examples are “Hickory Dickory Dock” (to teach time), “Old MacDonald had a Farm” (to teach animal names), and the “Hokey-Pokey” (to teach left and right).

Activities set to music are a great way to get people moving. Encourage everyone to move in their own way, and make sure you let each person set their own limitations — you may be surprised! One great activity is to get in a circle and have everyone dance in place. Then you can call on people by name so they can “solo” in the middle of the circle for a few measures of music. Celebrating personal expression and using first names is a great way to recognize everyone’s individual accomplishments.

Band Practice
If you are musically inclined, consider using your talents at your Partner Program. If you play an instrument that is portable, take it with you to play for the people with whom you are working. You can teach songs or make up new songs as you go. Another fun activity is to start a “band” with everyday objects. You can play your instrument, and others can join you playing kazoos, blowing empty bottles, playing percussion with spoons or tin cans, or anything else you can think of. It gets loud pretty quickly, but if that is acceptable at your Volunteer Placement and is appropriate, it is great fun!

Activities & Games
There are many games that are great for teaching teamwork, social interaction, and simple English phrases. These activities are fun and energetic, which means that they are great to use with children, but can also be useful for other populations! Here are some examples:

- “Simon Says…”
- Musical Chairs
- Charades
- Relay Races
- Bowling
- Hopscotch
- Treasure hunts
- “I Spy”
- Bingo
- Memory
- Tic-Tac-Toe
- “Hot potato”
- Hula Hoops
- Hand clapping games
- “Duck, Duck, Goose”
- “Red Light, Green Light”

Brainstorm other games, or try searching on the internet where you can also find the rules to these games. You can be creative with these games or personalize them. For example, one Tanzania volunteer renamed “Duck, Duck, Goose” to “Rafiki, Rafiki, Simba” (or “Friend, Friend, Lion” in Swahili).

Ball Games
Use balls or other simple materials available in the Home-Base Resource Center for these fun games:

- Volleyball – Play a game of volleyball by using a balloon, which can be safely used indoors.
- Bocce Ball – Take a ball and throw it into a target area. Everyone takes a turn throwing, or rolling their ball toward the target. Whoever comes closest wins a point, and chooses the next target.
- Ball Tag – Use a soft ball to ‘tag’ participants by throwing it back and forth. If a participant is hit with the ball, they are ‘it’. They must then tag another participant with the ball.

Baking
Sharing recipes and preparing them together is a fun way to interact. At elderly centers in particular, the seniors may not have access to a kitchen where they can cook, and many miss this independence. Share your Grandma’s famous chocolate chip cookie or banana bread recipe, and the next week you can make a local favorite. You may learn how to create a great new dish, and some of the best cultural exchange can happen through delicious treats!

With baking, you can mix the batter and ingredients together, and bake it at the Home-Base if you don’t have access to a kitchen at your placement you can bake it at the Home-Base (just make sure to let the staff know your plans!). The next day you can share your treat with everyone at your placement.
Gardening
Gardening is another fun activity that serves multiple purposes. You'll be doing an important service for the Partner Program by helping to maintain or create a garden on their property for added beauty, cultivating the hobby of gardening, or even as a sustainable food source.

A great long-term project is to have each person plant a flower seed in a small paper cup or egg carton. After a few weeks of watering them and measuring the seedling's growth, you can plant the shoots in a garden. Then you can continue to monitor the growth with the residents. Even if they cannot physically water the plants themselves, they will be able to watch their plant grow and bloom.

Go Fly a Kite!
Kite flying can be very therapeutic for all ages. You can also build and decorate your own kites as a great craft idea. Seeing your own creation is especially rewarding, and you can use recycled materials for the body, tail, and other parts of the kite. Keep in mind that on a windy day, participants don't need to be mobile in order to participate.

Beauty Salon
Holding a weekly “Beauty Salon” is another popular way that volunteers have found to interact with seniors, people with disabilities, teenagers, or anyone else. Everyone likes looking and feeling good, and receiving a little attention often does wonders for your mood.

Try brushing or styling hair or giving manicures and pedicures. Often residents no longer have the dexterity to clip their own fingernails. It seems like a small thing to take a couple of minutes to clip fingernails while conversing with a resident at a senior center, but it is universally appreciated. Some of the women will love to have their nails painted. For the men, you can give short hand massages to help circulation or pain in the joints, or polish their shoes.

Picture Day
A great activity to do after the beauty salon is to hold a picture day. Take portraits of everyone looking their best. Make sure you have them printed to give to the people at your placement. Remember how exciting picture day was in primary school? Generate the same level of excitement by advertising the event all week long. Then everyone will know that Friday is picture day and they can wear their best. Just make sure that your placement is OK with photography.

Hygiene and Life Skills
At some of our Partner Programs that work with adults with disabilities, there is an emphasis on promoting certain life skills that establish independence. This could mean anything from making beds to picking up personal belongings to practicing good social etiquette when dining.

It is also good to emphasize good hygiene. One volunteer said that in some places, people with disabilities are not expected to do things like brush their teeth themselves, even though they are perfectly capable. Simple actions, such as brushing teeth with people at your placement can create a sense of commonality between you, and is way of giving personal attention and teaching life skills.

Of course, you should spend some time at your volunteer placement before doing this type of thing, as in some instances it is not appropriate. However, it is always good to think about what ways you can encourage independence in people who may not be given much freedom to do things for themselves.

Show and Tell
Another great cultural exchange activity is to show off pictures of home. Volunteers have found that people are very curious about who you are and where you come from. To take it one step further, show pictures of all different people you know from your community: young children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc. This helps create a sense of shared humanity, and is good for showing that not everyone in your hometown looks just like you.
Arts & Crafts

Arts & crafts are a great way to share ideas and time. They can encourage creativity and imagination, are mentally stimulating, and of course, are fun! When doing a craft project you’ll invariably find many different skill and ability levels. Focus on what each individual is able to do, and allow them to do as much on their own as possible. Here are a few craft ideas from past volunteers:

- Painted pasta necklaces
- Sidewalk chalk murals
- Finger/Hand puppets
- Animal masks from paper plates
- Collages and posters
- Family and self portraits
- Paper maché creations
- Holiday cards or ornaments
- Trace each child on large paper and have them color clothes
- Popsicle stick crafts
- Paint with watercolors
- Assemble tin can phones
- Make hand and foot prints with paint

Don’t allow these ideas to limit you…come up with your own arts & crafts ideas, and share with the other volunteers. You may be surprised at how easily different ideas can be adapted for other placements. Also, read the “Recipes for Fun” page to make your own dough, finger paint, and bubble mix.

Recycling projects

One great way to use local materials is to have “Trash to Treasure” days. Using recycled materials re-enforces the need to take care of our Earth, and it encourages everyone to use their imagination to look at things found in their everyday life from a new perspective. Below are some examples of projects:

- Egg cartons were made into beautiful picture frames (with the help of the Seniors at an Elderly Center), and each participant got to put their own picture inside.
- Sock puppets and a small puppet theater were made out of reused cardboard and old socks. The preschool children put on a puppet show about caring for the environment.
- One volunteer used empty toilet paper rolls and other materials to make rocket ships with the kids at his placement, and they had a “Space Day.”
- Plastic pudding and yogurt containers were painted into bugs with “googly eyes” for the older kids at one volunteer’s placement, and fun stacking toys for the toddlers.

If you have other ideas, talk to the in-country staff. They’ll be excited to hear them and support you!

Ice-Breakers

At many placements it is nice to have a few ice-breaker activities to get to know the people with whom you’ll be working. These may include asking questions, playing games, or doing team-building activities:

- **Two truths and a lie** - Everyone tells the group two truths and one lie about themselves. Everyone else tries to guess which the lie is.
- **The Human Knot** – Stand together in a circle and reach across to shake hands, each hand connecting to a different person. The group then tries to unravel the "human knot" by unthreading their bodies without letting go of each other people's hands. It is possible!
- **COCONUT** - Have everyone stand up. Then everyone spells COCONUT with their body (or any other word), once slowly and once very fast.
- **Water Balloon Name Game** - Use this game to learn names, especially if the group doesn’t know names either. Start with a water balloon, and toss it to someone saying “Here you go (name).” They must catch it, and say “Thank you (name of person who threw it).” Continue until everyone has gone, and then repeat in the same order. Add another balloon each time until one pops!

Support Activities

There will be times when things might be slow at your volunteer placement, but there is always something to do! If you feel like you have some free time, don’t hesitate to volunteer yourself to help the Partner Program in other areas. You may be able to help by:

- Preparing meals in the kitchen
- Helping to serve the residents
- Cleaning
- Doing and folding laundry
- Lending a hand to specialists (like physiotherapists)
Recipes for Fun!

One great way to introduce new materials to your placement for activities is to make them yourself! Past volunteers have said that these and other recipes are an easy way to introduce creativity and excitement into the daily activities at the Partner Programs.

If you are having trouble finding the ingredients, try another version. There are lots of different recipes available on the internet.

Check with the In-Country staff about using the stove, and of course, let the staff at your Volunteer Placement know your plans.

Get creative and have fun!

### Play Dough

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon oil
- 1/4 cup salt
- Food Coloring (if desired)

**Directions**
Mix all ingredients together, adding food coloring last. Stir over medium heat until smooth. Remove the mix from the pan and knead until blended smooth. Place in plastic bag or airtight container when cooled.

### Bubble Mix

- 1/2 cup of dishwashing liquid
- 2 cups of water
- 2 teaspoons of sugar

**Directions**
Mix the ingredients together slowly to avoid producing foam, which will pop bubbles. Have the children try experimenting with a variety of homemade bubble wands, like pipe cleaners bent into interesting shapes. For a giant bubble wand, try using a coat hanger. Make sure that all parts of the wand are coated in bubble mix.

### Finger Paint

- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 3 Tbsp. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 cups cold water
- Food coloring

**Directions**
Mix all the ingredients together in a pan to make the finger paint. Cook the mixture over low heat 10-15 minutes. Stir the finger paint mixture continuously until it is smooth and thick. When it has begun to thicken, take the pan off the stove and let the mixture cool.

After cooling, divide the finger paint into storage containers depending on how many colors you would like, and add a few drops of food coloring to each container to get the desired color. Cover tightly when storing.
Practicing Conversational English

One of the biggest impacts our volunteers can have on people at their placement is through speaking English with the staff and beneficiaries of the Partner Program. Though the contribution is often overlooked by the volunteers themselves, simply informally practicing English with people at your placement can provide a great service.

In some placements, your main goal will be to help people learn English, while in others, teaching English may be a more informal, secondary goal. In either case, short term volunteers don’t need a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification to be an effective teacher; your role will be to encourage participation and speaking, rather than teaching specific points of grammar. Many native speakers of English still speak with grammatical errors, so don’t get too caught up with correcting minute details. What is most important is that people are comfortable speaking and that they have the opportunity to speak with a fluent English speaker.

If you’ve ever learned a foreign language, you know that it takes a long time, so it’s unrealistic to expect to fully teach the English language in a short period of time. Your volunteer work is a part of a sustained presence of CCS volunteers, and it is practicing with fluent speakers over a long period of time that creates impact. Throughout your service, you and your students will learn about each other; sharing perspectives and fostering cultural understanding is one of the key aspects of the CCS program.

Over the following pages we’ll discuss some goals, tools, approaches, activities, and lesson themes that you can adapt to get started practicing English at your placement.

Communicative Language Teaching Goals

To learn a foreign language, there are many different kinds of teaching methods from complete immersion where the student never hears or reads anything in their native language to a grammatical approach where speaking is de-emphasized. The approach that best fits our model is the Communicative approach which puts the emphasis on learning how to use language to accomplish a certain function such as asking for directions, or leading a tour. Keep the following points in mind when practicing English at your placement and in the community. Improvement in any of these areas is a great accomplishment!

1. **Participation.** Make sure that topics are appropriate, and that it is a comfortable environment by being constructive — it’s important that everyone feels comfortable speaking with you.
2. **Interaction.** Learners should speak with you and each other. The more practice, the better.
3. **Fluency.** Fluency in this case means that the learner can speak their mind, without long pauses or giving up. It is less important to be grammatically perfect than to carry a conversation.
4. **Confidence.** It does not matter how well the learner can understand and speak English, if they are not confident in doing so. Build confidence by encouraging participation.
5. **Communication.** Help students understand others ways to communicate — using gestures, asking for clarification or repetition, and knowing how to describe things without exact words.

Helpful Tools and Props for Teaching English

It is always great to bring something tangible with you as when you are just starting out at your placement. Besides, it can make teaching and learning more fun! Here are a few ideas to incorporate:

1. **Pictures.** Using pictures or illustrations from local materials is a great way to start a discussion. Consider using photos from local newspapers or magazines, illustrations from books, etc.
2. **Photos.** Bring your own photos from home, and use them as a way to exchange ideas and information about your own culture. People will be interested to know where you come from, so photos of family, friends, pets, your house, your home town, or anything else important in your life is a great opportunity to promote cultural exchange.
3. **Realia.** Realia is a term for “everyday objects.” These are effective as tools for teaching (for example, using different types of fruit available in the market to make comparisons about color, shape, size, etc.), and are useful for showing how the lesson can be applicable to everyday life.
Ten Lesson Themes

Where should you begin? Here are 10 sample themes to help you build lessons:

1. **Greetings and common phrases.** Look in your Participant Handbook for the language section. There will be a list of common greetings and phrases, translated into the local language of your Program Site. Try teaching these terms to your students in English.

2. **Colors, numbers, and days of the week.** These concepts may be covered separately, or used to build off of one another within lessons.

3. **Food.** You can use food to teach many different lessons, including tastes, types of food, colors, how to order a meal, and more.

4. **Descriptions of objects and people.** Good for interaction, you can talk about colors, sizes, hair types (curly, straight, long, short, bald, etc), personalities, types of clothing, and more.

5. **Weather.** Discuss words, seasons, and appropriate clothing for different types of weather.

6. **Directions.** Talk about how to ask and give directions, how to read a map in English, the names of places and buildings (library, bus station, church, etc), travel, etc.

7. **Health.** Discuss visiting a doctor, or teach body parts, common ailments, and solutions.

8. **Popular Music/Film.** What kinds of music or movies do people enjoy? Having a discussion about movies or music is a great way to use new vocabulary.

9. **Family.** Teach names of different family members (brother, sister, uncle, etc) and use these terms to get to know each other.

10. **World Cultures.** Show a map of the world. You can provide the English names of the countries, and discuss how your country may be similar and different.

As you can see, many of these themes overlap with other themes which means that your students will be able to continue repeating information that you have already covered. Whether you are setting up structured lesson plans, or using these ideas to for discussions, try to review and utilize past vocabulary.

Think of other themes that you could use to build your conversations around, and remember that the point is to get your students speaking! If you are with a group of teenagers who love sports, try to tailor your lesson to sports vocabulary. Let the interests of you and your learners dictate your lessons/discussions.

Approaches to Teaching English

There are many resources available on the internet and at your local library on approaches to practicing conversational English with a non-native speaker. An internet search will return a variety of fun activities about teaching English as a second language (TESL) or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Here are some ideas to help get your learners speaking English. Each can be modified for different skill levels and interests:

- Role play and dialogue
  - Practice greetings and small talk, how to order a meal, ask for directions, etc.
- Read newspapers, magazines or books together and discuss the news
- Songs
  - Make handouts with popular song lyrics and some words missing. Listen to the song together, and have them fill in the blanks.
- Map exercises
  - Draw a map of the neighborhood together with key landmarks and points of interest, and give directions between them
- Story time
  - Tell a story, and stop at the climax of the plot. Let each person make up their own ending.
- Discuss local proverbs
  - Offer some proverbs from your own culture (“A penny saved is a penny earned”, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”) and explain them. Ask them to explain proverbs in their culture.
Resources for Volunteers In-Country

This Placement Guide is just one of the many resources available to you in-country to help with success and productivity at your placement. If you find yourself in a challenging situation, try these resources:

Logbooks
As part of a chain of volunteers, it is important to see what previous volunteers have done at your volunteer placement. To facilitate this transfer of knowledge, you will find placement Logbooks at the Home-Base. The Logbooks are a written record of the volunteer placement and the work of former volunteers. Volunteers are asked to write their observations and thoughts about their placement as well as any ideas, unfinished projects, successful activities, and any suggestions for future volunteers.

Make sure to read the Logbook before going to your placement, but also remember to check it again after your first week. Details that you may have missed upon your first time reading them will make more sense after getting to know the people with whom you are volunteering. Actively using them to generate ideas and continue projects is a great way to improve productivity and make yourself most useful to the Partner Program.

Lastly, make sure you do your part to continue the Logbooks. The more you do to strengthen the link between past volunteers, yourself, and the volunteers to come, the more beneficial your work will be!

Resource Center
Each Home-Base has a CCS Resource Center that provides useful materials and ideas that volunteers can incorporate at their placements. A typical resource center will include educational and recreational materials from the local community, as well as helpful resources such as the Logbooks. Some volunteers leave directions to run activities which they found particularly successful. Make yourself familiar with the contents of the Resource Center, and feel free to use and improve it.

In-Country Staff
The in-country staff is an incredible resource for volunteers. They are the experts on their community and the Partner Programs within it. Feel free to discuss any ideas, problems, questions, or anything else about your volunteer program with them. They probably have dealt with the questions and issues before, and have a great perspective on how short term volunteering works in their community.

Partner Program
The staff at the Partner Program has requested your presence, and they know the impact that volunteers can have on the population that their organization serves. Be sure to use your first week to ascertain what their expectations for you are.

Volunteers should always feel comfortable using the staff at their volunteer placement as a valuable resource. Clear communication with the Partner Program staff is vital to having a successful volunteer experience. The CCS in-country staff holds periodic meetings to hear what the Partner Program’s needs are, but as a volunteer, you are the direct link, so take advantage of these learning opportunities whenever possible. If you have difficulty speaking with the Partner Program staff because of language differences, feel free to ask the CCS in-country staff for assistance.

Population Served by the Volunteer Placement
It may seem obvious, but the population served by your volunteer placement is another valuable resource for you. Ask people what they have enjoyed doing with other volunteers and you may hear some creative ideas that haven’t even been thought of by anyone else! Also ask them about themselves and their lives. The more you can get them to open up to you, the more you will learn about them, the issues they face, and how you can better serve them as a volunteer.

Other Volunteers
Lastly, be sure to utilize your fellow volunteers. One of the most common pieces of feedback we hear from volunteers is that they really appreciate the brainstorming they did with other volunteers, as well as the support they received. Share ideas, share challenges, and most importantly, share successes with your fellow volunteers!
Materials for Use at Your Placement

Many of the activities listed in the previous sections require some materials to implement. Often, volunteers are under the assumption that they are responsible to bring their own materials they need to use. Volunteers are NOT expected to bring any materials; the CCS Donations and Gift Giving Policy prohibits it.

Your Program Manager will review the policy and the reasons behind it during your pre-departure process, and additionally you can always reread it in your small handbook as you are preparing and packing. In short the policy states,

The CCS gift giving and donations policy prohibits volunteers from:

- Giving money, gifts (including candies, pens and toys) or materials to Partner Programs, the individuals they serve and individuals in the community. This applies to volunteers even after their program has ended.
- Bringing supplies from home, unless specifically requested. All CCS Home-Bases have a Resource Center that holds many different supplies and tools that can be used by volunteers at their placements.

The second point pertains to your work at your placement, and is discussed in detail below.

You are not responsible for bringing supplies from home, you don’t need to worry about shopping for materials before you leave, or carrying them with you on your flight. As noted, there is a Resource Center in every Home-Base, which is fully stocked with all sorts of arts and crafts materials, sports and recreation equipment, recycled projects materials, and additional books and resources. If you would like to see a typical inventory, please request this from your Program Manager.

Materials like scissors, glue, paper, crayons, story books, or any other materials are all available, and will have been purchased locally by our staff. Purchasing materials locally serves several purposes:

1. It shows people that they can have fun with materials available in their everyday life, not just items that are brought from afar by volunteers
2. It ensures that project materials are available to the Partner Program, and therefore the project can be sustainable if the staff desires to repeat the activity after you leave
3. It gives support to community businesses when using materials purchased locally

Best of all, you can rest assured that the materials you are using are culturally appropriate since they are purchased by community members. If you have additional ideas for materials that are not in the Resource Center, we encourage you to share them with the in-country staff and you can discuss if they are appropriate additions.

The three things that CCS suggests that volunteers bring include:

- Photos of your home, family, pets, and other “show and tell” items
- Your journal to write your observations, ideas that occur to you while at your placement, translations, and questions.
- A translation dictionary

Please contact your Program Manager if you have any questions.
Volunteer Placement Problem Solving

There are many challenging and frustrations that may arise at your placement. Some volunteers say that volunteering is one of the most difficult things they have ever done, but in turn, the most rewarding. Just know that you will always have a strong support system to help you in any occasion! Here are some common hurdles that our alumni and in-country have experienced in all different types of placements, and how they overcome them.

- **Lack of structure or expectations**

  Many times volunteers comment that when they arrive they are unsure of what they can do or how they should begin. In these cases there is usually not a strong schedule for the day, and volunteers may be unsure of what they are expected to contribute.

  If there is no daily schedule in place at your Volunteer Placement when you arrive, make one! In the past, volunteers have taken the initiative to create daily schedules that outline when activities will take place. One went so far as to create a weekly schedule and brought it to the placement so she could remind herself each day. When the next volunteer arrived, he found that the staff at the Partner Program had kept the schedule because they liked the structure, and he was able to jump right in the first day. There is always something to be done!

- **Lack of resources available elsewhere**

  Many volunteers are challenged by the fact that some Partner Programs are under resourced or understaffed, and may not have materials that would be common in similar facilities in their home countries.

  It is important to recognize differences, but it is also important to assess your role as a volunteer. For example, you cannot, and should not, try to provide the Partner Program with a brand new office computer, a printer/fax machine, or school supplies for an entire class. What you can provide is one-on-one attention and cultural exchange opportunities to the people at your volunteer placement. Do not underestimate the value of this contribution to the people you work with, and to the community.

- **The absence of Partner Program staff**

  Some times volunteers note that it is challenging when the Partner Program staff isn't as visible as they had expected. For volunteers who are uncertain of their role, this can be very challenging. Some volunteers even interpret the absence of the Staff as displeasure.

  The staff has asked for your assistance because they are very busy. When you arrive, they finally have a chance to do everything else that needs to get done. The more they feel comfortable leaving you, the more efficient and productive you are being, so don’t take it personally if you don’t see them all of the time. If you have questions about your role or the expectations of your role, feel free to speak with the in-country staff, and refer to the suggestions in the paragraph above.

- **The language differences**

  The most frequent challenge voiced by volunteers by far is the communication obstacles that they face at their placement.

  First, refer back to the language section of this guide, and the language section in your Participant Handbook. Don’t be afraid to bring a dictionary to your placement, but don’t rely on it too much or it will only hinder communication. Ask the in-country staff if you need help speaking with the Partner Program staff, and take advantage of the language lessons to learn useful phrases. Never underestimate the effectiveness of non-verbal communication!

  Even if the staff with whom you are working don’t speak English well, you can still have a great working relationship with them. Be open to expressing your ideas in other ways.

- **Spreading your attention evenly**

  Many volunteers say that they have a hard time making sure that they give everyone equal attention, when a few people at their placement steal their hearts immediately. Naturally, it is much easier to interact with the most engaging of the people, but it is important to give equal attention.

  Regardless of your placement, there may be some people (staff included) who will want to spend lots of time with you and others who will be less interested; this is OK. However, be aware that the people who are more shy and less vocal may also look forward to spending time with you. For this reason, try to make sure you
don’t allow one person to monopolize your time. One easy way to accomplish this is to vary the types and ability levels of the different activities, and naturally you will be interacting with different people each day.

- **Entertaining and educating a wide range of ages and abilities**

  As noted in a few of the chapters, Volunteers may be asked to help with children who could range in age from 0 to 8 years old, or older, or people with different disabilities. Because of different maturity levels and abilities, it can be challenging to work with everyone at once.

  Volunteers found that the more they planned in advance, the easier this became. Many learning activities can be divided to have different levels of difficulty that will challenge every age group. For example, the shape of an old shoe box could be fascinating in itself to a 1-year-old, while a 3-year-old would probably enjoy building “sky-scrapers” and knocking them down. A 7-year-old would bore of that quickly, but may enjoy using their imagination to create a diorama or decorating the boxes to be pretend houses with doors and windows.

- **Disciplinary problems**

  When working with children, negative behavior can be common. Many volunteers say that they are uncomfortable and unsure what steps to take when a child is misbehaving.

  When this occurs, consider the desires of the staff at the Partner Program because you don’t want to undermine their practices. Use the opportunity to ask them what is best. Don’t be afraid to show you disapprove of the actions of the student, but don’t give so much attention that will encourage more negative behavior patterns. Be firm, consistent, and don’t forget to give positive re-enforcement for good behavior!

  If you witness a student being disciplined with corporal punishment, you may have a strong instinctual reaction. Do your best to not show your emotions in front of the students, as it can undermine authority figures and will do nothing to curb the practice. Use your support systems of the in-country staff and other volunteers to discuss your reactions, and at a later point, try to have a dialogue with the teacher about why they use corporal punishment, what they think of it, and what other methods are available. Share your reactions and what disciplinary techniques you know. If you have an open dialogue without passing judgment, you will learn more about the culture, and you will be able to express your viewpoint in a sensitive manner.

- **Feeling uncomfortable doing something new**

  Many volunteers who have never taught before say that it is often difficult to know how to start instructing because they feel like they are not qualified to teach anything. Similarly, it is common for people with no experience with infants, the elderly, or people with disabilities to struggle at first.

  The most important thing to remember is that the Partner Program has asked for you to be there, with full knowledge of your background and skills. They are confident that you will have a positive impact on the community, so take that to heart.

  If you are nervous about speaking in front of the class, try to think of as many ways to get the students involved as possible. Have them speak to each other, engage in conversations, and create fun educational games. This takes the focus off of you, and it makes the education more interactive for your pupils. Similarly, the more you plan ahead with activities for the day, and read the experiences of the volunteers before you in the logbooks, the more confident you will feel. You will probably find some entries from volunteers who, like you, were uncomfortable at first too.

So what happens if you have read the above concerns, and are still having trouble finding where or how you can be useful? Here are some questions for you to ask yourself:

- Have you re-read your placement description? What are the goals of the placement?
- Have you spoken with the in-country staff?
- Have you verbalized your problem with your fellow volunteers? Often they have experienced the same things and they will have some good tips for you.
- Visit the Resource Center and read the Log Books. What have past volunteers done?
- Re-assess your goals and expectations on what you can achieve. Are they realistic?
- What special skills and interests do you have? Is there any way you can utilize those into something that your placement would appreciate?
- Are there any special holidays or events (either in their culture or yours) that are coming up that you could celebrate with the people at your placement?
- Have you brought up your concerns at the Feedback meetings? Often group sessions centered on these issues can be more beneficial than individual meetings.
Conclusion: Enjoy the Experience of a Lifetime

The ultimate goal of this Placement Guide resource is two-fold. First, we hope that it has inspired some ideas, raised some questions, set expectations, and ultimately given you more confidence to arrive at your placement on the first day and feel ready. Additionally, by preparing you better for what is to come, we are also improving the quality of the volunteers that our Partner Programs receive, and therefore increasing the productivity and positive impact that we make in the community.

As you embark on this amazing experience, take time to reflect on what prompted you to take this step. Remember your motivations for choosing to volunteer internationally. While you are participating as a Cross-Cultural Solutions volunteer, also remember that you are an individual, and it is your program. Make it your own! You can personally make a difference in the lives of others, so take initiative and responsibility to get the most out of your volunteer program as you possibly can. Keep in mind that your impact may not always be in the way that you imagine:

It is often in the engagement and process that one is able to touch someone's life in a meaningful way - it is not always through the delivery of a product or making a big bang! The emphasis should be placed on developing relationships and engaging, learning and being open to realizing that a volunteer experience is reciprocal: volunteers too can learn from the experience.

– Luann Hatane, Country Director, South Africa

At CCS, we are very excited you have chosen to volunteer internationally: with every person who volunteers abroad, we get that much closer to achieving a shared vision of a world where people value cultures different from their own, are aware of global issues and are empowered to effect positive change. In-country you will be working with local staff; however, you will be working side-by-side in a larger sense with staff members, volunteers, and alumni around the world as part of the CCS global family.

Throughout your volunteer experience keep a good perspective about your accomplishments, no matter how small they may seem. It won’t always be easy, but no matter what you are showing you care just by being there. Stay positive, be strong, and know that you aren’t alone.

“You don’t notice a young tree growing in a week, even a month, but you will be surprised to see it in a year. This is also the way our volunteers have impact...”

– Jerome Dong, Country Director, China