

Why I implore you to volunteer!

By Alex, former member of St Albans Youth Council



Volunteering abroad and in the UK

For the last two years ICS and their partner charities have been sending UK volunteers around the world to work on projects. The projects run for three months and are all funded by the government. Not only do you not have to pay a penny but also you know it is a reputable project as it is backed by the government, they are the funders. So this summer I am off to Ghana but other volunteers are off to Peru, China, Fiji. It really is all over the world!

Why is this of interest to you?

I honestly think that the ICS programme is one of the best opportunities for young people; you can take your knowledge out to other communities and help them to gain a better standard of living. This knowledge doesn't just have to come from school or home a lot can be gained by interacting with your local community. For me this meant my participation in St. Albans Youth Council (SAYC) but it could be any number of the youth projects that operate across Hertfordshire.

Being a part of SAYC made a big difference to my application process, not only did having the Youth Council on my CV help me get an interview it also helped me during the interview process as I was able to refer to the great achievements that I had accomplished whilst a member of the youth council,

for instance, being Chair of the sub group that created the mental health report. The Youth Council provided other skills too. A major part of the selection process was assessing my ability to work as a team. Now whilst this may seem unconnected to being a member of SAYC one only has to look at the mechanics of the council workings to see how everything the council did was based on team work. There was never one decision that didn't involve co-operation, compromise and communication; these three qualities, although being rather cliché, being incredibly important to life as well as volunteering abroad.

Now if you have read this far you are probably asking yourself why I am telling you this. I am doing so because I implore that you volunteer and help change people's lives whether it is at home or abroad. Whilst volunteering abroad may seem the 'sexy' option I argue that the two go together. If one can't help those in their surrounding community how can one ever hope to help those further afield, in addition as we have seen volunteering at home can give your chances an incredible boost to volunteering abroad. Thus I would suggest that if you want to get a taste of volunteering you look at some of the amazing opportunities we have in Hertfordshire.

Now if you are already volunteering at home on a youth project then you are exactly the sort of people ICS are looking for to help them achieve their goals of giving young people the power to decide their own fate. If you are already volunteering at home then you will know exactly what it takes to help others and that is; determination and a lot of patience. It is also important to note that ICS don't look for any qualifications they simply look for passion and drive in their volunteers. It doesn't matter if you haven't done A-levels or gone to university they want people who will give it their all and learn from the process.

Moreover if you have already volunteered you will also know how rewarding helping people can be so just imagine how rewarding helping people in another country whilst learning their culture will be. So again if you are already volunteering/ working on a youth project I implore you to read on and look at what I am going to be doing and to find out for yourself what you could achieve in 3 months. I guarantee you will not regret it.

<http://www.volunteerics.org/> (This link takes you directly to the ICS home page)

<http://www.channelmogo.org/info-and-advice/volunteering.aspx> (This page has lots of ideas and opportunities listed).

A bit about my project:

I am going to Ghana for 10 weeks over the summer with the charity organisation Latitude to work on a health and education project. Although all my personal costs are covered i.e flights and injections, I still need to raise money for the charity. This money will be then used to directly finance the

project and the work we will be undertaking.

Part of the project will be centred around ensuring that good hygiene rules are followed so that the young people of the village miss less days of school. In particular the focus will be on girls as they are often the ones who lose the most days due to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases as they get older. Moreover because of the length of the project it is not simply flying out there and starting the work straight away there will also be a significant planning phase where we shall be looking at the best way to help these people. The idea of the project is to empower the local people and try and ensure they can learn to help themselves rather than us simply providing everything. A lot of the early work will be to get the Ghanaian people involved in the project, we hope to do this through sport and other events. Sustainability is key for this project.

Another important part of the project is that whilst out in Ghana we as volunteers will be paired up with a national volunteer. This is a Ghanaian national who will be staying with us and also working on the projects alongside us. The idea here being that when we leave the country we are leaving a project that is sustainable and will continue to benefit the community.

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