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Cover photo: VSO Celina Fernandes working as a business teacher in Eritrea ©VSO/Gary Parker
This page: VSO speech therapist, Orna Otto, Namibia ©VSO/Jon Spaull. We have credited all photographers where possible. Thank you to all others we were unable to identify.
You can make a difference

In the 21st century, a quarter of the world’s population still lives in extreme poverty. VSO aims to help empower people and communities to fight disadvantage and fulfil their potential. We see disadvantage as a lack of access to:

• an education
• a livelihood
• health care
• a safe environment
• a say in the future
• equal opportunity.

Volunteering can be an unforgettable experience

As a VSO volunteer you’ll live and work within a developing-country community for an extended period of time. You’ll receive a salary and accommodation comparable to local colleagues. Many volunteers find this opportunity to integrate into a local community an inspiring and unforgettable personal experience.

VSO Pamela Palma with colleague Conrad Pieters working as a Participatory Methodology Specialist in Namibia

Call the Returned Volunteer Hotline on 0845 603 0027 between 6pm and 9pm on a weekday. (Your call will be charged as a local call.)
‘My placement here has enabled me to get to know Mozambicans socially and professionally. The fact that I have received a Mozambican teacher’s wage means that I find it easier to fit in with my colleagues at school. The same is true socially as I live in a building where only Mozambicans live. This makes socialising with local people easier as I can become involved in areas of everyday life. By living and working like this I have learned a lot about Mozambique and its people and feel that I have experienced, and not just observed, a lot.’
Graham Chapman, provincial English support officer, Mozambique

‘My time in Kampong Cham has been full of variety and experiences I couldn’t have imagined, from the shock of being given a chicken egg with a foetus in for lunch to the beautiful temples, the dancing, the food and the conversations. I have had a rare opportunity to look through the door at a culture so different to my own. In doing so I have been able to see some of its strengths and weaknesses and look more clearly at the strengths and weaknesses of my own culture. The best thing has been the people: my friends and colleagues at work, my language teacher and my landlord’s family. These people have all welcomed me and shown me kindness beyond the norm. My immediate colleagues have been a brilliant example of patience and how to smile when things aren’t going your way.’
Sarah Williams, midwife tutor, Cambodia

Ninety per cent of VSO volunteers make a commitment to live and work in a developing country for two years. A limited number of shorter placements are available, where VSO believes that volunteers can do a useful job in a shorter time. These last from one to two years.

Two years may seem a long time. But, as any former volunteer will tell you, time goes very quickly when you’re experiencing a totally different way of life. In two years you’ll be able to deepen your cultural awareness well beyond that of a passing traveller. You’ll forge lasting friendships while establishing yourself as a useful and valued member of the community. In fact, 20 per cent of volunteers choose to stay longer than two years.

‘Two years go quickly. My advice is to use your time as best you can to get the most out of your work and the social life. Take every opportunity that comes along to make an impression on the people you work with and fulfil your potential. It’s better to burn out than fade away!’
Mark Bannister, water engineer, South Africa

VSO water engineer, Mark Bannister, with a local family near a community tap, South Africa
You’ll have time to find collaborative solutions that will last

Many developing countries have succeeded in training large numbers of educated and professional people. Yet there are still shortages of skilled people in areas where they are most needed. We’re looking for skilled professionals who can help address these shortages. However, the position of a volunteer in a community offers many opportunities beyond sharing practical skills. Living and working alongside colleagues builds mutual trust between the volunteer and the community. Tackling disadvantage then becomes a shared goal. Together you’ll work creatively to find new solutions.

‘I have taken great joy in watching my counterparts develop and in building relationships with the staff at school, cluster, district and provincial level, as well as those working in the other two EQIP [Education Quality Improvement Project] provinces. We have achieved a great deal together but there is still much to be done. The Secretary of State for Education, Mr Im Sethy, told EQIP staff at the Annual Animator Training in July 2002 that the government would use the lessons from EQIP as a basis for their nationwide initiatives for improving education quality. I am proud to have worked with people who have worked so hard to make it happen.’

Lynn Dudley, education development officer, Cambodia

Cross-cultural team working takes time. Your role as a volunteer will evolve slowly. You’ll need time to test your ideas and adapt them to different circumstances and demands. Many volunteers reflect that they only began to have an impact in the second year of their placement. We believe that innovative solutions conceived in partnership are much more likely to last long after you come home.

‘My best ideas and most productive times were during my second year. By then I could appreciate how important it was to “tailor” change to suit their culture and their situation rather than try to impose something that is a good idea or works well in the UK.’

Janet Bartlett, diabetes nurse trainer, Russia

We’ll make your contribution worthwhile

You’ll want your time as a VSO volunteer to be worthwhile. For the contributions of individual volunteers to be most effective, they must be part of an overall strategy. In each country, local VSO staff and volunteers work towards achieving three or four specific goals. These goals could be in education, HIV and AIDS, disability, health and social well-being, secure livelihoods, and participation and governance.

VSO staff in-country develop partnerships with key organisations with whom we can realise these goals. The organisations may be clustered in a district where particularly disadvantaged communities live or they may share a common theme, such as improving the quality of education.

The design of a VSO volunteer placement begins with a request from a local partner. We’ll assess whether it fits with our geographic or thematic focus in that country. If so, we work with the partner to identify and develop an appropriate role that a volunteer can play. Only then do we recruit a person with the skills and experience suited to that role.
Four ways you can tackle disadvantage

VSO believes there are four types of role that volunteers may play in tackling disadvantage:

1. Improving service quality and availability

Many VSO volunteers support the improvement or availability of basic services and systems in areas such as:
- health
- education
- communication networks.

We’ll only work to improve the delivery of services where this can be clearly linked to initiatives that tackle the causes of disadvantage.

A volunteer concerned with service delivery will be working close to the grass roots of a community. There are many ways of building on this proximity to achieve greater impact, for example by:
- adding secondary roles, such as raising gender or HIV and AIDS awareness
- supporting people at grass roots in making their voices heard by policy-makers.

‘The culture and tradition of Ethiopian society totally amazed me. [There are] so many restrictions upon females and expected behaviours at all levels of society and in all regions. Every day I learnt more about attitudes held by both men and women that I found incredible. The lethargic and passive approach of the girls was determined by their expectation of failure and belief in their subordinate role to males, and in their (justified) fear of the consequences of being assertive. My story of gender activities progressed from arranging tutorials for girls to being asked to form a Gender Committee, organising three workshops for the students, publishing articles and lobbying the college management. I used every opportunity to raise awareness about gender issues… If some of the students have experienced new possibilities, then a new attitude may be passed on to their students in schools and to their families. If some of the instructors give girls that extra consideration, change may be sustained.’

Christine Foord, teacher trainer, Ethiopia

2. Improving the skills and confidence of colleagues and the community

By helping their colleagues and local community to increase their capabilities, VSO volunteers can:
- improve the quality or availability of services
- strengthen systems within organisations.

The people benefiting from this experience are most often at grass roots, community level. They might be:
- teachers
- health workers
- craft workers
- construction professionals
- farmers
- social workers
- and many other individuals in the community.

Individuals at this level have very few opportunities for personal development and cross-cultural sharing of skills and experiences. Such opportunities can affect the attitudes, behaviour, approaches, values, aspirations and self-esteem of partners (as well as those of volunteers).

‘As a volunteer, I have learnt probably the most important lesson is that I can’t change governments, legislation or the minds of people, but I can lead by example to make people question and think in small areas of their lives, which will one day lead to a bigger change.’

Emma Jane Andrucci, coastal resource management specialist and environmental educator, Philippines
3. Having the time and commitment to strengthen organisations long term

We can also go beyond this to strengthen an organisation’s ability to develop and maintain effective systems. Such systems will empower the organisation to deal with future change. Many interventions fail because insufficient time and effort are invested in working with the people involved. With VSO, you can work alongside people to understand an organisation and the context it is working in. You can develop ideas for longer-term change with the organisation’s staff in a creative way. Together you can achieve improvements in areas including:

• management capacity
• financial systems
• IT capabilities
• fundraising capacity
• strategic planning.

‘The most significant change… was hearing people now argue for the need for hygiene behaviour information, as when I started it was purely about how many people were at a meeting and how many latrines had been installed. For me this was so important, as it focused on what the beneficiaries are doing as a response to the project and the sustainable difference rather than what VERC [Village Education Resource Centre] were doing. If field staff concentrate on the beneficiaries, then it makes it easier to use methodologies that are participatory and beneficiary centred, as they are the ones that bring about sustainable change.’

Elaine Richardson, water sanitation and hygiene education development adviser, Bangladesh

4. Building networks and influencing policy

Volunteers can also play an effective role in supporting change beyond the boundaries of a single organisation. They can:

• support partners to network with other organisations to share learning and work more constructively together.
• build local capacity to implement legislation or public sector reforms.

‘In order to raise the Centre for Civic Cooperation’s profile still further, and as part of the fundraising strategy, I produced the organisation’s first annual report, together with the codirectors… I disseminated our annual report widely within the country and beyond, to embassies, international organisations, international non-government organisations, and to representatives of cantonal and municipal authorities. The report has proved to be a useful tool for raising the profile of the organisation and in demonstrating accountability and transparency. …One embassy invited us to submit a project proposal as a result of receiving a copy of the report.’

Alison Sopp, fundraiser, Bosnia-Herzegovina

In many placements, individual volunteers may contribute to more than one of these goals, either simultaneously or during the life of a placement.
We work in the poorest countries where we can make a difference

We work in over 30 countries. They are:

• among the poorest in the world
• potentially countries where volunteer professionals can make a significant difference
• safe for us to have programmes.

By region, they include:

**North and east Africa:** Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda

**West and central Africa:** Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Gambia

**Southern Africa:** Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia

**East Asia:** China, Mongolia

**South Asia:** Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

**South-east Asia:** Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam

**Pacific:** Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu

**Eastern Europe:** Kazakhstan

**Caribbean:** Guyana.

Disadvantage is widespread in developing countries. Here our work is likely to benefit a wide range of the population. In more developed countries, VSO’s efforts are more tightly focused to benefit the most disadvantaged people in that society.

Experience has shown that effective interventions need local ownership and participation. They also require a policy framework that supports efforts to reduce poverty. Where such frameworks exist, development agencies and donors need to work in partnership with government, community organisations and the private sector.

> ‘I have gained a more realistic understanding of development. My stay here in The Gambia has given reality to what I had learnt theoretically – that development must be a two-way process if it is to work.’

Julia Sander, curriculum developer, The Gambia

Our partners ask for volunteers with specific skills

VSO’s partners range from government ministries to community-level women’s groups; from small enterprises to local, national and international non-government organisations. We seek partners who are committed to change. They also need to provide the organisational structure and resources required for volunteers to be effective. For this reason, VSO is rarely able to work directly with the very poorest individuals in society. Instead, we place volunteers in partner organisations working with or for the benefit of disadvantaged people.

VSO offers volunteering opportunities to people with skills from many professions, including: fundraisers, management advisers, agricultural teachers, marine biologists, health educators, social and community workers, carpenters, speech therapists, teachers and many more.
If you meet the basic criteria, the opportunity to be a VSO volunteer depends on the skills currently in demand. There are times when we’re unable to find placements for very able people. Current requests may not include a placement that matches your skills. This is no reflection of the excellence of your abilities.

The specific requirements for qualifications and experience are set by our partners – the employers in-country. In most cases, these qualifications are mandatory to obtain a work permit, so the majority of placements call for a recognised qualification. For some roles, however, practical experience is given equal recognition.

To find out what qualifications and/or experience are currently in demand, visit www.vso.org.uk/volunteering or call 020 8780 7500.

The volunteer – what we look for in you

There are some basic criteria that all VSO volunteers must meet. You need to be:

• aged 20–75. We do place older volunteers successfully, but after 55, the number of opportunities become fewer with age. There are additional VSO youth programmes open to 17–25 year olds
• an experienced professional with a recognised qualification, or a recent graduate for some secondary teaching placements
• able to demonstrate the personal qualities essential to successful volunteering
• committed to a long-term project in a developing country
• willing to work for a modest local salary and to live in conditions similar to those of local colleagues
• prepared to invest in self-briefing and training before going to your placement.

‘I’m 58 and out here with my husband, a VSO metalworker – plus our recently acquired cat, Kes! We live in a family compound close to our “adopted” Gambian families, so there’s always support when you need it. We relate quite well to what has become “our compound family”, which is very multi-cultural. It’s heartening to have friendly, honest and helpful neighbours and friends, although our privacy is respected and you never feel pressurised to join in all of the compound’s activities.

Workwise, my role is primarily that of departmental representative, standing back to see the full picture rather than becoming involved in presented cases. One thing I have had to accept is that appointments made are not necessarily kept. It’s down to me to make them happen, although being sensitive to the reasons for a missed appointment goes a long way towards ensuring harmonious relationships with colleagues and potential contacts.

It really is all about being flexible. You just have to take it in your stride when training sessions are cancelled at short notice, transport for assessment visits is postponed because of lack of fuel, or the telephone is disconnected. It’s easy to feel frustrated, but the secret is to persevere by pursuing other options.’

Venus Stewart, community social worker, The Gambia

VSO recruits volunteers from Europe, North America, Kenya, Uganda and the Philippines

In the UK, we recruit volunteers of any nationality who are living in the European Economic Area (the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). We can also recruit citizens of European Economic Area (EEA) countries who are living
outside the EEA and are willing to cover the costs of about four visits to the UK. If you have a permanent address in Belgium, Denmark, Germany or the Netherlands, please apply to VSO Netherlands. See ‘Contact us’ on the back of this booklet for details of how to get in touch.

Diverse volunteers make for greater sharing of skills and learning

Our aim is to bring together people from different cultures and backgrounds, enabling them to share skills and learning. A wide diversity of volunteers helps us to achieve this aim, so we welcome applications from all sections of the community.

You’ll take away skills employers value

As a volunteer you’ll acquire valuable skills you can apply back home. You’ll find yourself taking on new and demanding roles in a very different setting. Evidence of global inequalities will be very visible. All of this can prompt deep personal reflection. You may find yourself:

• questioning your assumptions
• developing new levels of awareness of yourself and others
• achieving a degree of objectivity and detachment.

Having to work with few resources demands creativity and innovation. You’ll have opportunities to take on greater responsibility. So you’ll be able to develop your skills in:

• leadership
• planning
• monitoring and evaluation
• negotiation
• liaison
• training and professional development of others (sometimes senior professional colleagues).

Working collaboratively will strengthen your skills in team working and team building. Volunteers working as advisers and trainers develop expertise and confidence in working with colleagues. This can be in a range of institutional and community settings. They can also find themselves participating in a local or national political arena. Those whose roles are not directly political can gain skills, attitudes and understanding that enhance their ability to effect change. Employers value all of these skills highly.

‘The experience Thomas acquired as a VSO researcher has been invaluable to the company, where he has demonstrated his ability to undertake projects independently in areas that challenge capabilities. Thomas has taken the lead for us in partnership building on many occasions. In addition, making the best use of limited resources is one of the key aspects he has learned from overseas work and this applies equally to the UK.’

Michael Martin, sales manager, Steppingstones (Europe) Ltd, talking about former VSO Thomas Odamten, marketing and project development executive
Making the first move

If you’re ready to volunteer with VSO within the next 12 months, please fill in a Volunteer Placement Application Form. You can do this online at www.vso.org.uk/volunteering/applicationform.htm or you can request a paper copy (see ‘Contact us’ on the back page of this booklet).

It usually takes between four months and a year from your initial application to getting on the plane to go to your placement country.

When we receive your application form we’ll assess:
• whether a local partner is likely to ask for your skills
• your readiness to live and work in a developing country.

If we think you may fit the bill we’ll take up personal and professional references and invite you to an Assessment Day.

Personal qualities you need to meet the challenge

The Assessment Day includes a variety of group activities and an individual interview. Together, these elements enable us to look for the qualities needed to meet the challenge of living and working in another country:
• self-assurance
• flexibility and adaptability
• a flair for solving problems
• ability to work in a team
• sensitivity to the needs of others
• a desire to learn and help others learn
• a positive and realistic commitment to volunteering.

Think about times and situations when you have used these qualities. We’ll want you to give examples at the Assessment Day. Over 70 per cent of candidates are selected at assessments, so we’re not looking for super-humans!

‘There were 11 other people on my Assessment Day and, to my surprise, I actually enjoyed several of the activities.
It was also nice to meet other applicants and chat about their reasons for applying and what they hoped to do. Although it was a day that changed the rest of my life, it was much less daunting than I expected.’

Jo Kelly, biology teacher, Ghana
Volunteers for placements, not placements for volunteers

If your assessment is successful you’ll be allocated a placement adviser. This person will be your main point of contact with VSO until you leave for your placement. Their job is to help find the right placement for you and work with you through the administrative process.

Most volunteers go away within three to eight months of being selected. If a suitable placement is available, it can happen quickly – just as soon as you can arrange your personal affairs and attend identified training courses. We recruit most volunteers against projected rather than confirmed placements. This improves the response time to employers, but it can mean you have to wait until the anticipated request for your skills arrives.

Your departure and placement will be conditional on medical clearance from VSO and criminal records checks.

In matching you with a placement we’ll try to accommodate any personal preferences you may have. However, VSO seeks to align the needs of partners and employers with your professional and personal skills. A successful match often depends on flexibility from all sides.

The number of placements for which you might be considered will depend on:
• your qualifications and experience
• the number of requests for your skills VSO receives
• the number of volunteers with skills similar to yours.

Taking all these factors into account, your choice may be limited. If your placement adviser is able to match you with a placement, they will show you a description. You’re unlikely to be coming to a ready-made role, and circumstances inevitably change, so the description of the placement will only be an outline. You’ll find that your role is likely to evolve during your placement. You and your employer will need to explore what you bring and how that can be adapted to any context and opportunities. To make your placement a success, you need to be both open and flexible on a personal and professional level.

“We soon discovered that the objectives, organisational structure, goals and evaluation procedure had not been worked out, neither had our and the coordinator’s roles. So that was our first task for the first six weeks, writing/compiling a 60-page project proposal.”

VSO horticulturalist, The Gambia

We’re committed to thinking flexibly about placements for disabled volunteers

VSO welcomes applications from disabled people. Throughout the application and pre-departure processes, we can provide information in different formats (for example, Braille, large print and audiocassette). Our application forms are also available in large print.

You can contact us via our Minicom on 020 8780 7440.
VSO is committed to exploring with our local partners what reasonable adjustments it is possible to make in your accommodation and workplace to meet your needs. Once you make an application, a VSO placement adviser will work closely with you. He or she will identify placements that could be made suitable before you’re invited to an Assessment Day. Some of the environments in which VSO works are challenging, and as a charity we have limited funds for adjustments. It may occasionally be difficult, or even impossible, to make an appropriate professional and personal placement match. We’re committed to investigating all possible options and to thinking flexibly to tackle and limit such occurrences.

‘I’m a wheelchair user, so it took about ten months to get the job that could both accommodate my special needs and allow me to offer my best. From my own point of view, the horror stories you hear about South Africa have been totally unfounded. It’s worked out far better than I envisaged. Initially, my brief was to work as an engineer at Mvula’s Head Office in Johannesburg, developing pilot schemes for solar power pumping systems and dealing with cost recovery and trickle-feed infrastructures. As part of my induction, I was posted to the Pietersburg Regional Office for two weeks, where there was a desperate need for engineers. I was offered and accepted a position, since the work was more community based and the engineering more hands on. Head Office simultaneously wanted me to develop the pilot schemes, so now my time is shared between the two. This adds to the variety and the challenges I face are constant.’

Mark Bannister, water engineer, South Africa

Placing couples and families has advantages but can be difficult

VSO appreciates that many potential volunteers have partners and children. We recognise the benefits of their accompanying you on your placement. However, the realities of the development context and the terms and conditions of a VSO placement make it more difficult to place couples and families.

Only some VSO placements occur in geographical clusters. The number in each cluster is usually small, and each placement requires particular professional skills. There are therefore very few opportunities for placing volunteering couples. For some couples, given their combination of skills, there may be none at all.

Your prospects are much better if one of you goes as a volunteer and the other accompanies as a non-volunteering partner. As a charity, we have to prioritise our limited resources, so we do not offer financial support for partners of VSO volunteers who are not volunteers. We do however provide health insurance and medical support.

While it can be beneficial for a volunteer and their children to go away together, there are some countries and some placements where we cannot send volunteers with dependent children. Even where it is possible, there can be many practical difficulties:

- education is often expensive
- access to medical facilities and quality of health care may not be comparable to that available for children in a developed country
- there are health concerns about giving young children anti-malarial prophylactic drugs.

VSO does not provide financial support for
dependent children. We do provide health insurance and medical support.

Deciding whether partners or children should accompany you is complex. Everyone’s circumstances are different, and there are many variables that influence whether or not it’s the right thing to do. Please contact us if you’d like any further guidance.

‘Working in a developing country was something I had wanted to do for many years and in coming with my family we were perhaps making a bigger commitment and taking a bigger risk than most...There have been frustrations and problems – some days were rollercoasters of emotion – but the nature of the work, the relationships I built with colleagues and the response of patients have all made it hugely rewarding.’
Paul Ewing, medical officer, Papua New Guinea

Accept a placement only when you’re happy with it
Before accepting a placement you’ll be able to:
• ask your placement adviser about anything that is unclear or that concerns you
• think about your personal and professional learning needs in relation to the placement
• use a VSO information or learning centre to look at briefing material
• talk to returned volunteers.
We don’t expect you to accept a placement unless you’re happy with it.

We’ll help you assess your training and learning needs
We’re committed to helping you prepare as fully as possible for your placement. Training for living and working in your placement takes place both before your departure and after your arrival in-country. Pre-departure training takes 7–16 days.

The elements of pre-departure training are:
• Preparing for Change (2–3 days)
You need to attend this course unless you have recently worked in a developing country in a role similar to a VSO volunteer.

• Volunteers and Development (2–3 days)
You need to attend this course unless you have an excellent working knowledge of development.

• Health and Security workshop (2–4 hours)
This compulsory workshop covers personal health, well-being and safety while you’re in your placement.

• Work-focused training (3–10 days)
VSO training staff and your placement adviser will help you assess your work-focused training and learning needs. The aim is to prepare you for working in a development context in a different country. You may need to acquire new skills and adapt existing ones. Once your programme has been agreed, attendance of work-focused training courses is compulsory.

• Self-briefing
Self-briefing is invaluable. You’ll need to find out about the country context you’re going to. This will make it easier for you to settle in. You’ll also need to prepare yourself personally and professionally for your placement. VSO provides assistance through our information and learning centres and each of our in-country offices produces a Country Briefing Pack.
- **Language training**
You’ll also receive some language and cultural awareness training when you arrive in your placement country. This can last from a few days to three months, depending on the importance of the local language to your placement.

**Will you take up the fundraising opportunity?**
Fundraising is vital for VSO. Without it we would not be able to continue sending volunteers to work in over 30 of the world’s most disadvantaged countries.

All VSO volunteers are asked to get involved in fundraising before they depart to help us cover our costs. It’s not obligatory, but if you’re selected to volunteer we would appreciate any help you can give.

Sharing your volunteering plans with your family, friends, colleagues and the wider community is an ideal opportunity to ask for support for VSO. You may gain new skills and confidence before you go which will be valuable in your placement. Most volunteers find that they become involved in some kind of fundraising when they go away, and the same basic principles apply to fundraising wherever you are.

We’ll give you lots of help, ideas and resources along the way if you want take to take up the challenge.
We provide:

• a return flight to your placement country
• a grant of up to £500 to help you buy materials you may need to take to your placement
• up to £357 after your first 12 months of service to help pay for a holiday
• a grant, calculated according to the length of your placement, to help you re-establish yourself on your return (currently about £1,900 after two years of volunteering)

• National Insurance contributions to maintain entitlement to UK social security benefits
• medical expenses and personal accident insurance policies.

It’s not usually possible for you to contribute to a pension scheme during your time as a volunteer. As a measure of compensation, VSO offers a Pension Contribution Payment for volunteers from the UK. You can apply for this when you return

VSO provides a comprehensive package of assistance
As a VSO volunteer, you can look forward to a package of practical assistance drawing on over 45 years’ experience.
home. It’s calculated at £40 for each month of your placement. If you’re a member of the NHS pension scheme, VSO can pay contributions on your behalf while you’re volunteering.

Your primary relationship will be with your in-country employer

Your in-country employer is responsible for providing simple accommodation (including your own bedroom) with basic hard furnishings. In reality, accommodation can vary from a mud-floored room to an air-conditioned house. If employers are unable to provide housing, VSO will do so instead.

You’ll receive a modest living allowance during your placement. It’s intended to cover your daily needs. The allowance is calculated separately for each country and is the same for all volunteers in each country. In most cases, your employer in-country will pay all or part of your monthly allowance.

You and your employer will need to establish your terms and conditions of employment. These will include hours of work and leave entitlement. However, VSO specifies a minimum of three working weeks’ paid leave per year. Or the same allocation as local colleagues if this is greater.

During your placement you’ll work for your in-country employer. The success of your relationship requires effort from both sides, but as the newcomer, there is greater onus on you to adapt and learn.

VSO encourages you and your employer to take responsibility for planning and monitoring your placement. You’ll be involved in reviewing your work at relevant times during the course of your placement.

Your local VSO office will provide appropriate support

While your working relationship will be first and foremost with your employer, your local VSO office will provide a range of support where appropriate.

For example, your local VSO office will:

- meet you on arrival
- organise your in-country training
- complement the professional support and guidance provided by your employer with conferences, workshops and distance learning
- help with major personal, medical or security problems.

Ideally you should aim to resolve any differences of opinion or other problems directly with your employer and your colleagues. If this does not work out, you can ask VSO staff to arbitrate.

VSO closely monitors security risks

Your personal safety is of fundamental importance to VSO. We make an independent judgement that security risks are at acceptable levels before placing any volunteers. You’ll be largely responsible for your own day-to-day security management, but in the event of any emergency, your local VSO office will evacuate you to a place of safety or repatriate you to your recruitment country. Similarly, if you experience a medical emergency the local VSO office will evacuate you to a place where you can receive appropriate treatment.
We’ll support you when you’re returning home

Just as you’ll spend time preparing to go away, it’ll be equally important to prepare to come home.

To support you, VSO will provide:

• a Leavers’ Pack, including a Jobhunters’ Guide
• online support, including careers advice and networking with other volunteers
• a fortnightly Jobslist of UK vacancies in development, the public sector, etc
• in-country leavers’ workshops, wherever possible.

On your return, we’ll offer you:

• an invitation to a Returned Volunteer weekend, where you can share your experiences, feed back to us and explore ways to stay involved with VSO and development
• careers advice days or one-to-one careers advice
• debriefings and counselling support on request
• VSO’s network of 70 Local Groups across the UK and Ireland and a growing network in Canada
• support and encouragement to get involved in global education and advocacy activities in the UK. Teachers returning to the classroom in the UK can join our Teachers’ Network. This supports Returned Volunteers in developing the global dimension of the curriculum in their classrooms and schools.

‘I take home with me experiences, friendship and a sense of responsibility. I will continue to be involved in development from the UK and my goal is to support education in Zambia as a source of skills and confidence to give them the opportunity to transform their country.’

Mark Braithwaite, accountant, Zambia
VSO isn’t just about working in another country. If the time isn’t right for you to volunteer, you can still help us in our endeavour to build a fairer world. We’re always looking for people whose values match our own to support our work in a variety of ways. You can:

• get involved in our **advocacy campaigns** on global issues – call 020 8780 7263 or visit www.vso.org.uk/advocacy

• subscribe to **Orbit**, VSO’s magazine presenting voices from the developing world – call 020 8780 7325 or visit www.vso.org.uk/orbit

• meet like-minded people at one of our **Local Groups** in the UK and Ireland – call 020 8780 7250 or visit www.vso.org.uk/localgroups

• take part in one of our many **fundraising events**, including quiz evenings, concerts, treks and sports challenges – call 020 8780 7361 or visit www.vso.org.uk/fundraising/events

• **make a donation** – call 020 8780 7287, visit www.vso.org.uk/fundraising or contact VSO Fundraising, 317 Putney Bridge Road, London, SW15 2PN.
VSO is an international development charity that promotes volunteering to fight global poverty and disadvantage.