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Volunteer Handbook

Firstly, thanks for your interest in volunteering with us. This is an information pack to let you know more about us, what you can expect if you come here, and what we expect in return. If you're not sure about anything – just ask!

Basic Information

We always have at least 2 volunteers staying with us, as well as other staff, and up to 14 adult students all in our very big English Steps house. Because we have a lot of people using shared spaces, we ask you to be kind and responsible all the time you're in the house. We have a really good atmosphere here, and everyone is friendly - so as long as you like to socialise with people from around the world, you will be fine.

Your Tasks:

Lunches

Alongside the other volunteer(s), you will need to help prepare lunches for the students. These do not need to be anything special (pizza and chips is fine once a week for example!) but we have a fully stocked kitchen in case you want to get creative. The lunch needs to be ready by 1pm (when students finish their lessons). Some volunteers prefer to cook lunches together, others prefer to take it in turns (one day on, one day off) - we let you decide.

Activities

This is where we really need your help. Every day there will be at least one activity we will require you to lead. This could be taking students out to a nearby town, assisting them with their voluntary work, or just playing some board games with them in the evening. The activity will be either in the afternoon (2-5pm ish), or in the evening (8-11pm ish).

It's important again just to be patient and accepting of all the students' needs, and also just to get them speaking English as much as possible. While on trips, try to pick out some key vocabulary (things that you think will be useful for them in general), talk to them about what the words mean, and write it down in your phone (or piece of paper). Later, on the train back for example, test them to see if they remember, or play a short game of Pictionary etc.



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'Useful' vocabulary are words you think they will use again and again, think at least once a week – so if you go to the Industrial Museum, 'smelting' might not be useful enough for the students to remember, but 'factories' or 'urban' may be more useful!

We don't expect you to be a tour guide, just to be there for the students to practise their English with.

If there is no activity to lead on a given day, we normally ask our volunteers to help with cleaning the house (this happens just once a week on average).

Different Roles

We normally separate our volunteers here into a kitchen manager (in charge of ordering food and just keeping the kitchen in order) and an activities manager (in charge of our 'Word Wall' and 'Activities Wall').

Meetings

At the beginning or end of each week we will have a quick meeting to discuss the week that has passed, and what activities and things we will do for the following week. An activities timetable will then be sent out by email to everyone.

The Students

The people that come here vary quite a lot – from young adults just wanting to have a good time and learn a bit of English, to older students who are really focused on passing a particular exam (and everything in between).

Everyone living together and in a new (and English speaking) environment can sometimes be quite difficult though and we're really grateful to have you to help us make things easier for the students. All we ask is that you try to include them conversationally as much as possible, and that you are patient with them as they are all learning how to interact in English.

Big tips are to slow your speaking right down, try to avoid slang, and also check with them during conversations/stories that they are still following you – just saying 'do you understand?' can sometimes make you realise that nothing you have been talking about for the last 5 minutes has been going in – so it's really worth checking.



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There will be a mix of abilities too. Some students you will be able to have a perfectly normal conversation with, whereas others may only be able to speak in more simpler terms – I know it's easy (and more relaxing sometimes) to speak to someone with a good grasp of English, but we really try to include everyone so please spend time speaking with some of the lower level learners too – it can be very rewarding when you start to see improvements day by day!

Other Things

Free Time

Weekends you are free to do whatever you like with your time, and mornings will normally be the same as that is when lessons will be taking place. There is plenty of volunteer opportunities and other things to do round Leeds so just give me a shout if you need any extra information.

For practical things like which buses to take etc check the students' handbook – it should all be in there.

Also – if there is anything you want to learn while here, let me know and we'll see if we can help (I'm thinking mainly teaching English). We're also very open to new suggestions and improvements that can be made to the course in general, and if you want to do something/go somewhere in particular we can try and arrange it as a trip or activity.

Other Meals/Washing Up

Aside from the preparation of lunches, we cook and clean together as an entire house on a rota basis. If you'd like to join this (if not, you can cook and wash your own things without a problem) then all you have to do is 2/3 rota activities per week (one washing up, one cooking for example).

We keep the kitchen well stocked with food and ingredients, and as volunteers here you can always help yourself to food - no need to ask!

Accommodation

Infrequently we will ask you to share with another volunteer, but generally you will have your own room where possible.