

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



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## Autumn newsletter 2015

### Editorial



Welcome to the Autumn newsletter, not as full as the team would like this time but we have all been very busy lately! Dianne has been visiting South Africa and you can read her report on projects there and I have written a piece on my journey to becoming a life long volunteer.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter and I would love to hear some of your volunteer stories, it`s your newsletter so the more stories you can send me the better, it doesn`t just have to be about your volunteer placement.

I would like to hear what led you to want to volunteer and how you felt after your placement, for me it has been a life changing experience and I am sure a lot of you feel the same so please let me know.

### Nigel Pegler

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at [newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## 7th November - LAST CHANCE to attend our volunteer social meeting in Kent ?

It's nearly the end of September ... and a mere 6 weeks until our 2015 'at home' meeting on Saturday 7th November.



Our invitation has already been accepted by volunteers who have worked in South Africa, The Gambia, India, Cambodia, Nepal and Peru ... and Dianne will be here, of course, having recently returned from visiting projects in Swaziland and South Africa ...

We're also hoping that some of our overseas partners may be able to join us, as many of them will be in the UK for the annual World Travel Market in London.

So, if you're thinking about volunteering at some point in the future, or if you're already making plans, this is a great opportunity for you to come along and talk with people who've already "been there, done it ( and not "got the T-shirt"we don't do T- Shirts!) ...

We all LOVE these occasions and can promise you a thoroughly informative and sociable afternoon: find out more about the projects; meet some of our local partners; talk with other volunteers; enjoy the stimulating company of like-minded people – of all ages and from all walks of life; share in some sustaining drinks and nibbles ... oh yes, and [meet the people and places team: Kate, Sallie, Dianne, Nigel and Harold ...](#)

Our Faversham 'at home' meetings are always popular, so please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to come, and if you will be alone or with friends and family!

email [kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk) by 10th October at the latest ... we need to plan our catering!

WHEN: Saturday, 7th November – 1 to 5 p.m.

WHERE: head office – 1 Naboth's Nursery, Canterbury Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8AX (Kate's Home!)

PROGRAMME: this is an informal occasion – at about 1.45pm, we will give a short presentation and then there will be plenty of time to ask questions and socialise.

## Dianne visits projects in Port Elizabeth and a new one at Kruger Park



For my latest trip for *people and places* I've been in South Africa, partly to make a return visit to Paul, our local partner in Port Elizabeth, but mainly to set up a fantastic new project at Hazyview, which is in the north east of the country, right on the edge of Kruger National Park.

First I paid a quick visit to Port Elizabeth. Many of you have volunteered here so you will know that in PE we support a number of schools plus Emmanuel Advice and Community Centre. On my previous trip to PE I had concentrated on the schools so this time I spent all my time at Emmanuel. I had read a lot in volunteer reports about the work the people here are doing to support their very poor township community, particularly those suffering from or affected by HIV/Aids, and I was keen to see it for myself. Although government funding for this project ended in 2014, meaning that the local people who work here are now unpaid and working as volunteers themselves, I was filled with admiration for the untiring work they do to provide pre-school education and home-based care for their community. For any of you who have volunteered here, and anyone who would like to go in future to volunteer at this organisation, you need to know how much the work you do here is appreciated.

Our volunteer contributions are of course invaluable in helping to keep the place running. But more than that, the ladies there told me how much it raises their status in their community that people from over the other side of the world care enough to come and support them. These people are no longer paid a salary, but our volunteers are helping them to raise their skills level through running workshops and working alongside them and believe me, this is highly valued.



I saw this in action as I was there at the same time as a couple of other volunteers – the photo shows one of them, Sonia, running a counselling workshop.

[Click here to learn more about how you could share your skills with Emmanuel Care Centre](#)

However the main purpose of my trip was to visit our new local partners [Good Work Foundation](#), at their Digital Learning Centre at Hazyview. If this project isn't up on our website yet it will be very soon – look out for it! It will be a great place to volunteer. Sallie made the initial contact with GWF when she was in South Africa last year. My job was to find out as much as possible about how the project works and establish, in conjunction with our local partners, exactly what expertise and support they would welcome from our volunteers.

So what does the project entail? Good Work Foundation, led by their CEO Kate Groch, have set up Digital Learning Centres in four different rural communities, with a fifth due to open next year. They believe that traditional education methods are failing people in rural communities, largely due to enormous class sizes and overcrowded, poorly resourced schools. Their aim is to set up 'Centres of Excellence' for these rural communities, leapfrogging traditional teaching methods and jumping straight into the digital age. Their digital learning centres provide education through computers, laptops, tablets, data projectors and interactive whiteboards, and more importantly teach how to use this technology, with the aim that their learners will be able, like everyone else in more privileged communities across the world, to access the enormous body of knowledge and expertise which is now so easily available to us all online.



They work with two groups of learners. At Hazyview, their main centre and the place where our volunteers are likely to be based, about 1500 grade 4 children (aged about 10) come to the Centre for about an hour every week. They really look forward to coming – it was a pleasure to see children running to get to class. Through the use of carefully selected apps they learn English, Maths and some Science (focused on conservation), as well as learning how to use the computers. All teaching at the centre is in English, and this is also

important as up to grade 3 children are taught in their own local language (in this area siSwati or Xitsonga) but in grade 4 teaching of all subjects goes into English, so this is a year where many children struggle and any additional exposure to English really helps them to manage at school.

The Centre has only been open for three years but the first school to send children to them has already recorded a massive 35% improvement in English scores in national tests. Their second group of learners is young adults. Many of them have completed grade 12 at school, but have little idea of what options are available to them next or of how they could go about achieving any ambitions they do have. At the Centre in a bridging year course they teach what they define as the 'languages of access – digital and English'. Students study for the International Computer Driving Licence, an internationally recognised computer course which covers, among other things, the use of all branches of Microsoft Office. Their English studies follow a recognised South African adult learning course and focus on oral work as well as written. Within this course they learn skills such as how to present yourself at interview and how to write a good CV. They receive Careers guidance, both through formal lessons and on an individual basis, and at the end of the year, if they wish, they can continue to study at the Centre on courses specifically designed to provide employment opportunities in their local area. Tourism is one of the main employers, so there are courses in Hospitality, Media, Music, advanced IT and Conservation. I was privileged to attend one of their graduation ceremonies, as Sallie was last year, where about 60 students received their certificates and celebrated the successful completion of their courses. Their pride in their achievement, and their families' pride in them, was palpable and the staff at the Centre were rightly proud of what they had achieved, giving these students not only internationally recognised qualifications but a belief in themselves and their ability to achieve whatever targets they set themselves in life.

Before I went I had researched GWF and my fear was that they are so well organised that they would have little need of any skills or expertise that we might offer. This is not the case – there's lots we can contribute, ranging from people with teaching experience to help the facilitators develop their teaching skills (GWF 'grow their own' staff and few of them have formal teaching qualifications), to careers advisors, to people with business skills to help adult learners find possible areas for employment, and lots of other areas too – check out our website for specific details of what is needed here.

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to GWF, both for the project itself but also because it was such a comfortable experience and set in such a lovely part of South Africa, the country recently voted the most beautiful in the world. Our local partners could not have been more welcoming and helpful, and they have a lovely house they rent for use of volunteers, so I loved having my own home for the two weeks I was there. Hazyview is within 10 minutes drive of a gateway into Kruger National Park. I went in twice, once with a group of school children as part of their conservation work (and although they live so close none



of these children had been into the Park before), and once as a tourist at the weekend. Our local partners were able to get me a cheap seat with an established game drive company, so for just the cost of entry to the Park (about £15) I had a 6 hour game drive with an experienced guide, and we were lucky enough to see 15 different species of animals, including all the Big Five, on the one drive. Those of you who know me well know how much I love cats, so it was wonderful to have a really good view of a leopard sheltering in the shade of a rock and a lion so chilled out it was more or less sleeping in the road. Do think about offering your skills and expertise to volunteer on this project – they would be delighted to have you and I know the right volunteers could do a lot to help them move forward on this really worthwhile project – and you would have a great time as well.

**Dianne Ashman - volunteer programme advisor**



## 'ubuntu' - the mutual rewards of volunteering !

It's really important to us that each volunteer placement is a good match between what the project needs and what the volunteer brings ... that's the starting point for people to gain mutual rewards from their time together.



Volunteers Eileen and Larry made their first volunteer trip to A.V.Bukani School in 2008 ... and have just returned from their FIFTH volunteer trip in [this rural South African school](#).

Eileen and Larry's original placements focussed on improving literacy for learners through skills-share with local educators ... bit by bit and little by little, things have developed ... music, a school and community library, parent-teacher meetings, home-support for learners ...



The following two quotes give you an idea the mutual rewards involved:

***"I am the product of what you have brought here since 2008 ... you taught me the strategies I needed so I could learn."*** a Grade 7 student to volunteers Eileen & Larry

**"This ... opened our eyes to the impact our work has had. And inspired us to continue. Yes, there are still challenges and we need to take the long view. But we can revel in a celebration of what these students have gained in confidence, knowledge, and skills. We could not be prouder of them."** volunteers Eileen & Larry as their 5th placements ended



[And you can read the full story of Eileen & Larry's 2015 placements here.](#)

**"Ubuntu - I am what I am because of who we all are"**

## Nigel's journey to becoming a life long volunteer

*Nigel has been volunteering with us, using his practical skills, for 8 years! Here is his story ... by him ...*

*and yes you may have spotted ...*

*Nigel is also editor of our volunteer newsletter*



### South Africa 2007

I first volunteered with **people and places** in Mapoch a rural village in South Africa during August 2007 where I helped set up a bicycle project.

This was the first time I had volunteered abroad; I read about **people and places** in a newspaper article and thought I would give them a try. After speaking to Kate Stefanko the placement director I was very impressed with the way **people and places** went about their business, all of my questions were answered and I felt confident that Mapoch was the right place for me to volunteer.

I was especially impressed by fact that I knew where my money would be going, that I would have a say in what my project donation would be used for and that I didn't have to pay any money up front until my placement was confirmed, none of this "oh well if you make a deposit of £130 we can reserve you a place on the project, as it is filling up quickly" and trust me I have heard this from other companies!

***"The secret of volunteering is to find the right company, ask loads of questions such as where my money goes. Does the local community want me there and am I doing what they want, am I doing a job that could be done by a local (no point being there if it could) and any responsible company will insist on a DBS check as in most circumstances you will come into contact with children, I need it in my job as a school site manager in England so why wouldn't I need it abroad!"***

To say I was nervous about going to South Africa on my own is an understatement! But it all worked out OK and we managed to introduce bicycles in to an economically poor community with little access to their own transport. I helped build a prototype cycle trailer with village elder Peter which a villager David started to use for his delivery business, we turned Peter`s veggie shop into a cycle sales and repair shop and we eventually had a container of 321 second-hand bicycles shipped from Re-Cycle in England to Mapoch.



The container shipment was paid for by another **people and places** volunteer who was at Mapoch during my stay and we then raised enough money to buy the container as a store and workshop.



**Pastor Peter**



**Peter and Nigel**

It's fair to say that volunteering changed my life, I left Mapoch with a heavy heart but a feeling of self worth and a belief in what I could achieve, when I went to Mapoch I was Caretaker of a High school, now I am Site manager of the High school as well as a Primary school. To say I achieved this solely because of my volunteering experience would be stretching it but it certainly helped!

### **The Gambia 2011**

I was bitten by the volunteering bug and in 2011 I volunteered in The Gambia on a farm project , we also relocated three chicken sheds with GIG (Gambia Is Good), the politics of working in the Gambia were difficult and things did not always go as planned but hey that's volunteering, rarely ever does it go as planned!

Whilst there part of my project donation paid for a local lad called Musa to help me with work on the farm. With the help of the local community we built a bio gas installation to turn rotting mangos into gas for the kitchen cooker and we cleaned up and tiled the kitchen floor and work surfaces, and the three chicken sheds were placed on a purpose built termite proof base.

One of the most touching things I heard was repeated to me by Kaddy the farm secretary. She told me that her mother said "It`s nice to have a white man working here as it shows he cares" so maybe the local community got to see a Toubab (white man) as something other than just a tourist.

I was beginning to learn that a volunteer can do more than pass on their skills and life experiences, maybe by working with the local communities we can show how much we care and learn so much in return.



**Awa enjoys the rain**



**Farm workers**



**Kaddy farm secretary**



## Peru 2014

So my next adventure and it was an adventure! I spent a month working on a conservation project in the Amazon rainforest in Peru, getting there entailed an epic journey of 35 hours from Norwich to Cusco and after 2 days in Cusco the best part of a day on a mini bus traveling along dirt roads up through the mountains to spend the night staying at a lodge in the cloud forest.

The next day was an early start at 6am along dirt roads again to finally reach the Madre de Rios River and then a three hour journey to finally arrive at the Manu learning centre in the heart of the rainforest, a more spectacular place it would be hard to find.



**River trip**



**MLC**

Most of my time was spent slogging through a jungle collecting data on types and numbers of animals that were present in regenerated rainforest to see what impact logging had on the environment and how well it can recover.

I also spent some time working with other volunteers on building bio gardens in the nearest town of Salvacion, the Peruvian diet is not the best in the world and if they can be helped to grow their own fruit and vegetables it can only help their diet and allow them to grow food more cheaply.

We also did some work on the bio garden at the MLC and since I left I understand that research is being done on the best way to grow plants, under cover, as in Salvacion, without a cover, with various types of fertiliser etc. and this will help inform the community the best way to grow plants.

Sometime was also spent staying at Shipetairi doing animal research in a different part of the jungle and one day we all played a football match against the local community which was a great way of introducing ourselves and building a rapport with the community as they are working towards introducing some tourism in the area.

When I first volunteered I thought I would try to help people who had less than I did, I have since discovered that they helped me as well and I left South Africa , The Gambia and Peru with a lot more than I went with.

I think that volunteering is a wonderful way to see the world and understand the problems that people have to deal with, much better than lying on a beach getting a sun tan, although I did a bit of that in The Gambia!

The secret of volunteering is to find the right company, ask loads of questions such as where my money goes. Does the local community want me there and am I doing what they want, am I doing a job that could be done by a local (no point being there if it could) and any responsible company will insist on a DBS check as in most circumstances you will come into contact with children, I need it in my job as a school site manager in England so why wouldn't I need it abroad!

When time and funds permit I will volunteer again, in fact I will continue to do so until they stick me in a wooden box!

Nigel Pegler

## calling all volunteers - could you be one of the lucky winners?

Travelocity has re-launched its [Travel For Good programme of grants](#), offering 3 lucky winners the opportunity to travel and volunteer, also promising to donate an amazing \$10,000 to a charity of the winners' choice ...



Just think what could be achieved for you, your project and your chosen charity ...

"We're sending three inspiring people on their dream voluntourism trips of a lifetime, and donating \$10,000 to the charity of their choice."

And YOU could be one of those lucky winners - give it a go !

We will do all we can to help you win if you volunteer with us!

## farewell to volunteer Robin

Sometimes life throws a real curve ball at us.

No rhyme or reason - and certainly no fairness.

We have recently heard of the sudden death ( due to a lightening strike) of Robin Meakings

A few years ago we met Robin and Jane - his partner - they had recently met and were planning an adventure together. Both had taken sabbaticals from their work Robin as a teacher, Jane a businesswoman- they were going on a grand trip - but wanted to give something back as they travelled - thats how we met them.



Robin and Jane volunteered with us at [AV Bukani school in South Africa](#)

here are a couple of links to video interviews that Robin and Jane did for us

[Robin and Jane talk about search for good volunteer organisations](#)

Thankyou Robin ( and Jane ) for your work

"We worked mainly in the computer suite at the school, with the aim of helping the teachers, and therefore the learners too, get more out of the educational software (CAMI). This involved training sessions with the teachers (a model lesson using the software, and a session on obtain reports on learners' progress). We also corrected the learner database to allow each teacher to get accurate reports about the progress of the learners in their class. In addition three database administrators were given training on how to administer the database, to keep it correct and up to date. We also gave training sessions, both formal and informal, covering Microsoft Word, for example creating classroom resources, and Excel, for example creating marking sheets to calculate percentage scores and grade for each student.

Robin also helped the grade 4 Technology teacher create a scheme of work for the Systems and Control module, and delivered some of the lessons with her. (This involved creating and racing cardboard buggies, a practical activity which the children much enjoyed.)

this is a quote that Jane read at Robin's recent funeral

"As long as we can love each other, and remember the feeling of love we had, we can die without ever really going away. All the love you created is still there. All the memories are still there. You live on - in the memories of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here... Death ends a life, not a relationship."

**farewell and travel well Robin - all of us at people and places calabash and AV**

If you haven't already spotted our YouTube channel it's worth a look. There are video interviews from volunteers and if you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done – we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering – please send them to us so we can share them.

**click the logo**



**meet the *people and places* team [here](#)**



[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

If you like beautiful pictures and funny visuals we are also on [pinterest – follow us here](#)

and finally we are tweeting too – [follow us here](#)