THE LOVE YOU GIVE

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR GAP YEAR PROVIDERS



BETTER CARE NETWORK

has created a campaign aimed at gap year volunteers and short-term missionaries (& their influencers), with the objective of reducing orphanage volunteering. This Conversation Guide has been produced by the Better Care Network to support gap year and school travel providers to talk about the issue of volunteering overseas in an orphanage or residential care institution with prospective volunteers. As key gatekeepers to prospective volunteers, gap year providers and travel companies have a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the harm that this type of overseas volunteering can cause.

This Guide aims to help young people make the best decision possible when it comes to how they want to volunteer.

This Guide will provide you with the knowledge to begin a conversation with prospective volunteers about the issue of orphanage volunteering, explaining why it is so harmful and providing answers to some of the most commonly asked questions.

THE LOVE YOU GIVE OUICK FACTS

Below you can see a handy list of some of the top-line facts about orphanage care and orphanage tourism, which are good to have to hand when discussing the issue with prospective volunteers.

- More than 8 million children live in residential care across the world.
- Around 80% of children living in orphanages have one or both living parents.

- Over 60 years of research has shown that growing up in an orphanage has an extremely negative effect on a child's health, development and life chances.
- Young adults raised in orphanages are 10 times more likely to fall into sex work, 40 times more likely to have a criminal record and 500 times more likely to take their own lives than their peers.
- The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, endorsed by the United Nations in 2009, states that governments should, wherever possible, promote family-based care and prevent children being separated from their parents.
- Orphanage tourism and volunteering is helping to financially sustain the orphanage industry worldwide.



THE LOVE YOU GIVE CONVERSATION STARTER

When beginning a conversation with a potential volunteer about orphanage volunteering, it is important to remember a few key things.

- That this can be a very sensitive topic and one which some young people may be uncomfortable discussing.
 It is important to be mindful that the young person you are speaking with may have had their own experiences of living in alternative care or with child protection services.
- Try to stick to the points listed in this Guide and always defer to a teacher or carer for the young person, should additional support be required.
- The issue of orphanage volunteering can be extremely controversial, especially if the individual you are speaking with has volunteered in an orphanage in the past already, or someone close to them has.
- It is important to explain why we believe that orphanage volunteering is causing harm, referring to the extensive research completed over the last few decades.

- Although sometimes a challenging topic to discuss, the majority of people are receptive to the issue and are keen to learn about other ways they can support children overseas.
- There are certain key arguments we know to be most effective when talking to young people about orphanage volunteering. These are outlined in the conversation starter on the following page.



THE LOVE YOU GIVE CONVERSATION STARTER

Here are two example conversation starters, which include some of the key arguments which we know to be effective when talking to young people about orphanage volunteering:

STARTER 1

"We don't run or support volunteering placements in orphanages because we know that growing up in residential care is really harmful to children. Most children who end up in orphanages have parents or other family members who could care for them. They are there because of poverty and we don't believe this is a good enough reason to see a child separated from their family. Instead of supporting orphanages, we support volunteering programmes which work to strengthen family-based care or help to tackle the complex reasons for poverty."

STARTER 2

"We don't offer or support volunteering placements in orphanages. Despite the best intentions of volunteers, volunteering in orphanages can do more harm than good for the children concerned. Children who live in orphanages are quick to form attachments to volunteers as they arrive, only to feel abandoned when they leave. It's also extremely dangerous, as it allows easy access to vulnerable children to people who may wish to hurt them. We believe that we should move away from relying on orphanages and instead ensure that family support and community is strengthened, so that children can grow up with their family instead."



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CONVERSATION TIPS AND TRICKS

Here are some handy tips on ways to engage a prospective volunteer in a conversation about orphanage volunteering:

- Ask the volunteer why they want to volunteer in an orphanage and talk to them about the reasons why orphanage volunteering may not be the best way for them to achieve their objectives
- Ask them what skills they have to bring as a volunteer and discuss with them potential alternative programmes
- Refer to the fact that orphanages are considered an out of date model of care across countries in the Global North because we know they're not the best option for children. Why do children in the Global South deserve any less?
- Talk to them about how they can talk to others about the issue and support the move away from orphanages.



THE LOVE YOU GIVE QUESTION & ANSWER

Often, when talking about orphanage volunteering, you will find that people have a lot of very legitimate questions about the issue. As well as being able to confidently start the conversation, it is extremely important that advocates can also answer some of these questions and know where to point prospective volunteers should they require more information.

Below you can see a list of the five most commonly asked questions and their suggested answers.

Q1. SURELY NOT ALL ORPHANAGES CAN BE BAD! CAN'T I VOLUNTEER AT A GOOD ORPHANAGE?

A1. Orphanages may sound like a guick fix solution for caring for children, but years of research into child development shows that even the very best run institutions cannot match the care provided by a family. In short, there are no 'good' orphanages. Instead of supporting orphanages, the solution lies in helping to strengthen families by resourcing the provision of local services that some families struggle to access - such as schools, health centres and day care facilities for children.

Q2. WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO DON'T HAVE FAMILIES OR HOMES TO RETURN TO?

A2. In the few cases where children do not have families to return to, shelters or other shortterm child protection centres which provide immediate support for highly vulnerable children are available. Their role is highly specialised and should only ever be a short-term solution. It is never appropriate for international volunteers to work at a shelter. When a child can not be reunited with their immediate or wider family, alternative family-based care, such as foster care, will be identified. Where this is not possible or in the best interests of the child, care in a small group home may be provided instead.



THE LOVE YOU GIVE QUESTION & ANSWER

O3. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHILDREN IN THE ORPHANAGES IF THEY CLOSE DOWN?

A3. Local charities and organisations work with orphanages and local authorities to find out why the children are there in the first place and will set out to make sure the children are reunited with their families or extended family, with the appropriate support available to prevent future family separation.

Q4. IN SOME ORPHANAGES, THE ONLY INTERACTION CHILDREN GET IS FROM VOLUNTEERS. SURELY THIS IS BETTER THAN NOTHING?

A4. Sadly, no. First, children in orphanages are vulnerable and require specialist care, which should only be provided by qualified and trained professionals. Consider this in the context of the UK - children with special needs would never be cared for by unqualified members of staff or volunteers. Secondly, children should be cared for by local people, not international volunteers, as they are more likely to speak the same language as the child and be able to support them for a sustained period of time.

Q5. IF ORPHANAGE VOLUNTEERING IS WRONG, WHY DO SO MANY ORGANISATIONS STILL DO IT?

A5. Lots of travel and volunteering organisations are increasingly recognising the problems with orphanage and orphanage volunteering. Many have never run orphanage volunteering programmes, and a growing number are removing orphanage volunteering or tourist trips from their websites. Always volunteer with an organisation who has taken this stance. You can see a list of some organisations who do not offer volunteering in orphanages on the ReThink Orphanages website.



THE LOVE YOU GIVE QUESTION & ANSWER

Q6. IF I SHOULDN'T VOLUNTEER IN AN ORPHANAGE WHAT SHOULD I DO INSTEAD?

A6. Volunteering overseas can provide you a brilliant experience, but the main purpose of volunteering should always be to contribute something meaningful to a community or project. You should give some thought to the skills you have and where these could be best used. When it comes to volunteering with children, it is important to remember that children need stable, individual and often specialist attention, which is difficult for volunteers to provide. As appealing as it may sound to volunteer with children, unless properly qualified you should never find yourself in a position where you are responsible for teaching or caring for children overseas. Look for volunteer programmes which benefit the whole community and create lasting change for people living in poverty. Check out the 10-point volunteering checklist on the ReThink Orphanages website for guidance on how to choose a placement overseas.

O7. IF I CAN'T VOLUNTEER IN AN ORPHANAGE DIRECTLY, CAN I DO A FUNDRAISER TO SUPPORT INSTEAD?

A7. Governments across the world have agreed to move away from orphanage care in the knowledge that it is not the best option for children. However, these reform efforts are being undermined by the continued support from well-intentioned Westerners namely through volunteering and donations. People are more likely to give to an orphanage than to family-based care initiatives, which only perpetuates the cycle of children being separated from their families unnecessarily and placed in orphanages.

Some orphanage owners even exploit the children in their care by deliberately keeping them hungry and sick in order to elicit more donations. Volunteering and donating are both great things to do, but make sure you're supporting an organisation who is working to strengthen family-based care and not orphanages.

If you ever feel unsure about answering a question, point volunteers in the direction of one of the brilliant websites below that are packed with lots of useful content!

RETHINK ORPHANAGES rethinkorphanages.org

THE LOVE YOU GIVE loveyougive.org

LEARNING SERVICE learningservice.info



THE LOVE YOU GIVE FURTHER INFORMATION

Should you require any further support with the content listed in this Guide, please contact <u>rethink@bettercarenetwork.org</u>

<u>The ReThink Orphanages</u> website also has additional content which you may find useful, including a link to <u>The Love You Give</u> campaign film.

