



Volunteer handbook

So you would like to brave the Geckos?

If you have come this far, chances are, you have had a good look at the Green Gecko website. If not, it would be a perfect time to do so. The most relevant information for you is on the 'Volunteering' page. In addition to the website, we have put together this handbook to prepare you even more. It provides further background information, handy hints, important rules and guidelines, an outline of the centre's routines and ideas for planning activities, all of which will be essential for a positive volunteering experience.

If you are a successful applicant and you decide you are definitely coming, then please print off a copy and bring it with you (or keep handy in your email folders) to refer to as needed. Much of it will become more meaningful and relevant once you arrive.

:: STEPS TO GET YOU THERE

1. Once you have read the **website** and this **Volunteer handbook** and you are still keen to brave the Geckos then,
2. Fill out the attached **Volunteer Application form** and return it to volunteer@greengeckoproject.org.

When you hear back from us as a successful applicant... congratulate yourself, brace yourself and start planning your adventure!

:: PERSONAL THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU COME

We are hesitant to give you a list of must do's as there is ample travel information available on the internet and at travel agencies that is a lot more up-to-date than what we can give you. Besides, every volunteer will have a different personal itinerary, so it is impossible to advise generally on what to bring, financial arrangements, mobile phone usage, health checks, etc. We have mostly found volunteers to be independent, well-informed, resourceful travellers, but if you have a specific question, you can email us and we will endeavour to provide you with an appropriate answer.

Keeping the kids' backgrounds in mind

:: THE KIDS

The sad reality is that these children, as young as 5 years old, have been the primary breadwinners for their families. While they are thankfully off the streets and not begging now, for years they were forced to beg and sleep unaccompanied on the pavement, defenceless to abduction, abuse and disease. Their family living conditions are desperate; extreme poverty, alcoholism, substance, physical, emotional and sexual abuse is high. We have some staggering statistics which we hope will put their backgrounds into perspective. 100% of our kids have older sisters (not at Gecko) who are prostitutes and/or older brothers who have been in jail. Reports indicate that 80% of all Cambodian children have been sexually abused, and being former street children we suspect this percentage may be higher for the Geckos.

Some of the children's parents have died, or are dying, from HIV/AIDS, and for this reason we insist that volunteers take full precautions when treating a child for wounds and illnesses. The truth is that we don't know which child has a transmittable disease of any type, so we adopt safe practices at all times.

When you meet the children now, it is hard to imagine the abuse they have encountered, as the majority of the time they are happy, healthy and thriving with the love and care they now receive. A word of caution; there will be times when the children will suddenly act up and display extreme emotions for no immediately-apparent reason. We are not psychologists but we do know that past traumas can trigger reactions at any time. If you suspect this to be the case, please don't tackle it on your own, let the directors know as soon as you can.

Helpful hints and strategies for interacting with the kids

:: WORKING WITH CHILDREN

By now you have given some thought as to why you are coming to Green Gecko, how much time and energy you have to give and what your expectations are. Now you need to know what expectations they, and we, will have of you. Children need to be in a safe and caring environment to thrive. They need their carers to show them respect, honesty, patience, and understanding ... and a good sense of humour is really important!

Safety - The children's safety is everyone's responsibility. Activities need to be safe. Where there is a risk, think about how you will manage that risk. Your own safety is paramount also.

Honesty - You need to be honest, do not promise things you cannot deliver, doing so will make the children feel unworthy. Be true to yourself: it will give a good example for them to follow.

Understanding - We all need to be shown understanding and these kids are no different. What are they feeling, are they tired, hungry, hurting? Are they confused, distressed or unhappy? Observing each child will help you to pick up on how they are feeling. Take time to make observations and respond to what you see and feel. If a child is sitting alone in the corner, gently approach and share their space for a while, give them a hug and reassurance, try to follow their interests. Remember children go a little step forward, then perhaps a little step back. They may have very little understanding of English. They may be relying totally on your body language to interpret what you want them to do. Give them time and keep calm. If you feel you are losing your patience and you start to feel stressed (it happens!), give yourself some space. Tell the other carers/volunteers and take a little break.

Sense of humour - Being in a playful mood is the basis of all play. Any game or interaction depends on our inner mood. You can play with a child without any props if you have a good imagination and you are feeling playful. If an adult is too serious, a child will pick up on this and it will worry them. Children live in the present and they love to play. They learn well through play because it is a happy time without fear or stress to block their learning ability. Adults can live in the past or the future and they forget how to relax and live in the moment and feel playful. So bring yourself into the moment.

Building self esteem and self reliance - Self esteem in children is built from being given opportunities to attempt something new, to learn, and thus to achieve, in an encouraging environment free of fear or ridicule. Unfortunately most of our kids do not get any support at home, little encouragement and not much praise. So at Green Gecko we constantly go into raptures of 'well done' and 'that's fantastic' to the kids, even if they just drew a couple of lines on a piece of paper. In our positive environment, we have watched their fear and mistrust dissolve, replaced by the confidence and self reliance they need to open their minds, take in new information and tackle new experiences with courage and joy.

Things we can do to build children's self esteem:

- Show respect, kindness and trust.
- Be attentive and listen - difficult when they are all vying for your attention!

- Call them by their name - it will take a while!
- Appreciate them just the way they are, enjoy their individuality - these kids certainly have spirit!
- Give your time to them - the precious gift is you giving them your attention.
- Give clear uncomplicated messages - not easy when their English is not fluent.
- Use open body language - open arms, smiling face, eye contact, face to face listening, a gentle hug, or a pat on the shoulder, all send an open interested message.
- Don't tower over them - coming down to their level works wonders; we are a lot bigger than them and generally so were those that have abused them.
- Help them achieve and praise their efforts - like all kids, they thrive on it and have had little of it.
- Help the children to practice what they know and take a chance by trying the unknown - we need to give them positive support to take that chance. What does it matter if the attempt is not perfect? The outcome should be that they feel good about what they did achieve so they will be happy to attempt it again tomorrow.

:: GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

When guiding children's behaviour it is important to give positive guidance. So instead of saying, "Don't do that" say "Do this please." In other words tell them or physically show them what you do want them to do; often because of the language barriers communication might be difficult. If you want them to drink some water, take them to the water and drink some yourself, put a cup in their hand. Lead by example.

- Use short instructions, one thing at a time. Have realistic attitudes to what you expect of them.
- Praise is a fabulous tool. Find the child who is behaving appropriately and praise that child, make a fuss of that child. Remember they are learning and they respond best to being noticed when they are doing well.
- Noisy and very appealing children tend to get a lot of attention (only the squeaky wheel gets oiled). It is your responsibility to draw the quiet children to you. It's not easy to avoid favoritism .
- Remember play is exciting, noisy and busy, and can sometimes look like out-of-control chaos. Don't panic about the loudness if all else is going according to plan.
- Be consistent. If you say "No", mean no. If you say "No, no - yes", you are giving a confused message.
- Be calm but firm. Children who are disruptive or rude or physically too rough with other children should be told a strong no and if they persist they should be asked to leave the activity. Do not put up with bad behaviour, especially from the older children.
- Never hit or shout at a child. Such behaviour is abuse and something they experience far too much at home. Once you are here we will provide you with guidelines on how to conduct discipline, and the directors and staff will be there to help.

:: GROUPS

Because the majority of children have not come from a stable and caring family environment, we have created smaller family environments for them to belong to. They have their own coloured t-shirts and bandanas that let you know where they belong: Singing Snakes (red), Mighty Monkeys (blue), Buzzing Bees (yellow), Cool Crocodiles (pink), Fabulous Frogs (green) and Energetic Elephants (purple). The groups sit together for lunch, do their chores together and work as teams when they have carnivals or sports. They also do their activities together, two groups to each activity.

:: GROUP FRIEND

You will be a Group Friend. Each volunteer will be assigned a group to be a special friend to (this will change each week or so). You will wear the appropriately coloured bandana, sit with them at lunch, check out their jobs when they are finished, write in their journals and be there as a mentor. The idea is that you will get to know the kids better and they will have someone to turn to if they need help.

:: CHILDREN'S DAILY JOURNALS

Each child has a journal in which volunteers make short notations of 'special' events or observations. A black eye, bruising, out of character despondency or tears, ear infection, overly physical, more than usual disobedience or disruption, fabulous behaviour, outstanding helpfulness in class, activities or their chores, are all eligible entries. Anything you think could be valuable to pass on to the next Group Friend, so they can read your entry and gain helpful information, will assist with continuity of care. If you notice something about a child that is not in your group, it's good to follow up on your observation by mentioning it to the relevant Group Friend.

:: SONGS WHICH HELP THE DAILY ROUTINES BECOME ENJOYABLE

To encourage the children to do the little tasks that come with hygiene and good health practices, we are in the process of creating some simple encouraging songs. When you hear these, join in and make the 'boring' parts of their day more fun. Ask some of the longer term volunteers for some ideas.

:: CODE OF ETHICS

We follow the Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics for working with each other and with the children. Please go into their web site and read the Code of Ethics. www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

:: BEING PROFESSIONAL

Taking a professional approach to your volunteering is vitally important. Some past volunteers have taken a more relaxed approach to their service simply because they weren't getting paid for it. Obviously it is in the best interests of the kids to be as ordered and consistent as we can (which is not always easy). We hope you will feel a great sense of achievement from taking a professional approach to your work with us.

Rules of conduct with the children

These rules may seem harsh and unnecessary at first, but please be assured we have very serious reasons behind them. If you would like to learn more about the darker side of these children's life and the reasons why we are so protective, please don't hesitate to ask management.

- PLEASE DO NOT SOCIALISE WITH THE CHILDREN OUTSIDE GECKO UNLESS IT HAS BEEN APPROVED AND ARRANGED BY THE DIRECTORS.
- PLEASE DO NOT BUY/GIVE INDIVIDUAL PRESENTS TO THE CHILDREN (favoritism causes jealousy and self esteem issues).
- NO ADULT IS TO BE ALONE WITH A CHILD AT ANYTIME (for your protection as well the child's, we ask you to be with another adult or be in clear view of another adult).
- PLEASE DO NOT TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE CHILDREN WHILE THEY ARE SHOWERING OR IN A STATE OF UNDRESS (this is to protect their privacy and you from allegations).

We understand that our volunteers have the best intentions, but to go against these practices could make the children vulnerable to people who are not as trustworthy as you. The children's long term safety and wellbeing are our highest priority. We are sure you can understand our position.

Time Table

The Green Gecko Centre is a 24 hour/365 day operation. The main hours for volunteers are Monday to Friday 8:45am to 3:30pm, although there may be some special outings or events outside these hours. Saturday is a free day; it's just like hanging at home. All of the kids also go to formal Khmer School, the older kids go in the morning and the younger ones in the afternoon, so the day is broken into 2 sessions. Because the timetable is ever evolving, the best way to keep up to date is by the website http://www.GreenGeckoproject.org/flex/the_Green_Gecko_project_our_daily_routine/119/1

:: MONDAY TO FRIDAY

MORNING SESSION

- Older kids go to Khmer School from 7am - 10.30am Monday to Friday.
- Younger kids are at Gecko for activity and English Class.

AFTERNOON SESSION

- Younger kids go to Khmer School from 2pm - 4:30pm Monday to Friday.
- Older kids are at Gecko for activity and English Class.

What to do during the following events:

Shower and hair washing: The Khmer staff will organise the showers but if you see some kids running away from the shower block, a little redirection would certainly be appreciated. The children wash in the open with a traditional 'krama' (checked scarf) wrapped around them like a sarong. Volunteers are not encouraged to be in the wash area at this time.

Assembly: Children sit for assembly, please encourage them to sit down and calm down. Please do NOT chat with other volunteers at this time, as you will see any little thing is the greatest distraction to these children. During assembly time we meditate, introduce new volunteers and sadly say goodbye to the ones who are leaving, present awards or have a sing song. Assembly is also a general housekeeping and information time. Volunteers are welcome to raise any issues they feel is important at this time.

Children's Lunchtime: All Group Friends are invited to sit and chat with their Group for lunch. Please remember to wear your coloured bandana so they know you are one of them.

Chore Time: All of the kids are responsible for keeping the Green Gecko Centre clean, emptying garbage, watering the garden, cleaning the playground. There is a schedule of cleaning that the kids follow, with their elected Group Leader (one of the Geckos), and the volunteers are there to check that the Group Leader has supervised the chores properly.

English Classes: The English lessons are broken up into 5 classes based on ability. If you are a volunteer teacher, you will be expected to co-teach at least one English class per day with a Khmer Teacher. Each day you will take part in lesson planning.

Activity Time: There are 5 activity subjects per week. You will be scheduled to plan and lead one per day. They are: Me and My Planet (General Studies), Library (to get an appreciation of books and reading), Arts and Crafts (to get as creative as possible), Performing Arts (to boost self esteem) and Numbers and Logic (to enhance their problem-solving skills). The most important thing is to relax and have fun, all we want to do is broaden the kids' horizons and expose them to subjects, knowledge and interests they would not get otherwise.

The Traffic Light System: English Class and Activity Time both begin with a one minute traffic light system; the children are to start with one minute at RED, during which they are silent and clear their thoughts, before going to GREEN and starting the lesson or activity.

:: SATURDAYS

Saturday is home time. We encourage you to visit a couple hours between 10am and 2pm every second Saturday just to share hanging out time with them... it's personally our favourite time of the week.

Planning Activities

At Green Gecko we want to make sure that as a volunteer you give 100% of your energy 100% of the time at the Centre so that both you AND the kids make the most of your visit. Preparation is the key to less stress and more fun. Below are a few planning hints, and a couple of sample activities to give you an idea of how simple they can be.

Things to remember when planning an activity

- Firstly, is it safe? If not, what are the risks and can you manage them?
- Keep it simple and go with the flow.
- Most activity groups will have 8-12 children in them (2-10 year olds in the morning and 11-17 year olds in the afternoon)
- Is it an outdoor or indoor activity?
- How will you manage it with children who have little English? Think about wholistic communication; your body language is a valuable tool.
- Is it a 'one off' activity or a 'continuous' activity? Example - 'one off' may be a game of marbles, a ball game, and a craft activity like painting, drawing, which can be played on any day but ends on that day. A 'continuous' activity may be putting together a little play or dance or song or building something. This activity can be worked on each day until you are ready to do a performance or you have a finished item.
- What materials will you need for this activity? Remember you can buy things here and they are mostly very reasonably priced. Green Gecko does have some materials but if you think your activity needs certain items that you can easily gather and bring from home then please do so. Being flexible and resourceful is the key, improvisation is often required.
- Don't underestimate the power of creative play as a learning tool.
- Will it be fun for you? If you enjoy it they will too, so choose things you enjoy doing.
- Don't get stressed-out about your activities, it's not about being perfect or achieving outcomes. It's about the journey, so make the process happy and relaxed for you as well as the kids.
- If the plan is not working, make some changes and go with the flow... or ditch it altogether and start something new.
- Remember to trust the children to take ownership of an activity. They are normally enthusiastic, but sometimes not. If they lose interest gather them back and give them more of a role to play; make them important to the activity.

Sample Activity Plans

:: NUMBERS AND LOGIC ACTIVITY

"Numbers and logic" is an activity to enhance the problem-solving part of the children's brains. Eg: maths riddles, bingo, sudoku, etc

Time:	50 mins
Describe activity:	TELLING THE TIME
The journey process:	Older ones: Clock face drawn on board, ask class for the numbers on the clock and then practice the different times 15, 30, 45 mins past, make teams and have competitions coming up to the board writing the time as you say or write it in words Younger: give them a clock jigsaw
Materials:	Paper, pencils, whiteboard & marker, clock jigsaw

:: ME AND MY PLANET ACTIVITY

A general studies activity to introduce the children to their bodies, their country, their world. Eg: age appropriate lessons on science, geography, animals, human body, cultural differences etc.

Time:	50 mins
Describe activity:	FLAGS OF THE WORLD
The journey process:	Older: To show students the different flags of each country. Starting with Cambodia and the countries of volunteers, get them to point to the countries on the map they know and match it with the flag. Younger: draw the Cambodian flag and let the children colour it in
Materials:	World map, book of flags, paper and coloured pencils

:: ARTS AND CRAFT ACTIVITY

Anything creative and fun! Portrait painting, kite making, jewelry making, sewing etc

Time:	50 mins
Describe activity:	SHADOW DRAWINGS
The journey process:	Older: Use light to draw around the shadow of the children, cut out the silhouette and attach it to straw, make a play using puppets. Younger: Use light to draw around the shadow of the children, cut out the silhouette and colour, drawing their faces, hands and clothes
Materials:	Large sheets of paper, scissors, pencils, glue, straws

:: PERFORMING ARTS ACTIVITY

The self esteem booster. Singing, dance, drama, circus, music etc.

Time:	50 mins
Describe activity:	PLAY SIMPLE SIMON SAYS
The journey process:	Learning body parts in English using song and team play
Materials:	CD player, whiteboard

Final note

From experience, the volunteers who enjoy themselves the most (and we have the most fun with) are independent, flexible, quick thinking, resourceful souls, with an innate ability to go with the flow. We are fundamentally a big raucous home for 60 former street kids in a developing nation. We are not a rigid institution - programs will change at a moment's notice, we will improvise and be spontaneous as need arises. We have no human resources department and times will get tough. There will likely be tantrums, traumatised children and even the odd victim of domestic abuse. The children have head lice and snotty noses. There is seldom poo and vomit, but it does happen. Travelling in a developing country (for those new to the experience) is not a walk in the park and dealing with 60 formerly abused street children makes the path even rougher. BUT in saying that, if you have what it takes and are not faint-hearted, then being a Green Gecko Volunteer can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life.

We will leave you now with a few words from a past (and returning) volunteer:

"We all live our lives day-to-day and in doing so we often don't take time to give thought to the full impact of that which we do. I once read 'Everyone has a past which drives their future' and I believe these few words reflect the Green Gecko Project. Green Gecko provides hope and opportunity where previously there was none and the children there benefit so much from their experiences, education, and care provided them. As these children grow, Green Gecko will be perhaps the most singular influencing experience of their past and I have no doubt in my mind their futures will be so much brighter for the love and the opportunities created for them by Tania and Rem and the staff and volunteers fortunate enough to find themselves at Green Gecko.

I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to spend time with this amazing Organisation. But it's certainly no picnic. You need roll with the punches, think on your feet, change and challenge your ideas at a moments notice. It is physically challenging keeping pace with the children, in what can be very hot uncomfortable conditions at times, and mentally and emotionally challenging because you are only too aware of the very hard/abusive conditions these children suffered prior to arriving at Green Gecko. This manifests daily in the behaviour of individual children as/when something triggers memories of their past. You will work, you will teach, you will tend to cut, scratched and bruised bodies, you will cradle them when they are sick, you will cry, you will hurt deep in your heart, but in a most rewarding way ... if you are up to it. Reward for self and life opportunity for the children of Siem Reap does not come easily, but I for one look forward to returning time and again.

Doug South, Victoria, Australia