

QUEST OVERSEAS FTV REVIEW REPORT

INTRODUCTION

An organization evaluation was carried out on the 15th, 16th and 19th of September 2011 at Quest Overseas Ltd by Makie Magayu. This evaluation is part of a procedure for organizations that would like to get certified for membership into Fair Trade Volunteering. The review criteria were carried out using the standards that are provided by Fair Trade Volunteering (www.fairtradevolunteering.com).

Aims and Objectives:

The main aim of this evaluation was to establish Quest Overseas' eligibility to become a member of Fair Trade Volunteering.

Objectives:

1. To identify the company's main aim/objectives and working ethos
2. To identify how the organization meets the criteria that has been set by Fair Trade Volunteering

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was carried out largely by conducting face to face interviews with staff at Quest Overseas and telephone interviews with 1 local community project manager representative as well as 1 project leader. There were three interviews conducted separately with Quest staff that were selected on basis of their 'relevance'/job description and were best suited to give comprehensive information as per the reviewer's requirements. At Quest Overseas, those interviewed included:

1. **Jon** who oversees the South American projects. Being one of the Organization owners, Jon was able to give an overview of the company's ethos, company and charity structure and the internal and external processes of the volunteer programs, the partner projects and how they are operated in general. Jon also described the volunteer application process and gave a comprehensive analysis of the volunteer programs from the time the volunteer applies, what happens during their project/on site until the time they return. Jon, who is also a project leader, was able to give an analysis of the role of project leaders.
2. **Simon** who oversees the African projects as well as project leaders training. Simon gave an overview of the African Projects that he co-ordinates and gave an in depth description of some of them, their operations and management as well as how volunteers are affiliated. Simon also gave analysis of the role of project leaders.
3. **Rose** who is in charge of fundraising and deals with the company's charity contributions/donations as well as volunteer applications and interviews. Rose gave an overview and breakdown of how volunteer payment and donor contribution is

spent on partner projects.

4. **Ben (Project Leader)** was also briefly interviewed on his role as project leader. This was a coincidental interview as the project leader happened to be present for a debrief meeting at the time when the reviewer was carrying out the interview.

RESULTS

Background

Quest Overseas was established as Gap year specialist organization in 1996, which combines a model of language training, voluntary work and expeditions. Quest operates as two 'entities'; the company that is known as *Quest Overseas Ltd*, and as a charity known as *Quest4Change*. Quest Overseas deals with the non-project related activities which include the UK office support, overseas staff, training and orientation and all UK expenses. Quest4Change deals with the project related activities and fundraises for the projects. All contributions made by volunteers, donors and well-wishers are paid directly into the Quest4Change accounts and the charity is then able to give the money directly to the projects. The main aim of Quest4Change since its establishment has been to fight poverty and environmental destruction, concentrating on 8 projects; 4 in Africa and 4 in South America.

Africa:

Malawi orphans project
Swaziland Game Reserve
Kenya water relief
Tanzania community development

South America:

Bolivia animal sanctuary
Peru children project
Rio Carnival and community
Manu conservation – (latest project, volunteers not yet dispatched)

At Quest overseas, the two co-owners of the company manage the projects and are in charge of identifying projects and running with them in partnership with the local communities. There is no 'specific' way of identifying projects. All the projects have been 'discovered' either by being approached by partner UK charities or local charities with the aim of partnering with them, or simply by introductions to projects by friends. However, the initiative of every project comes from the local communities. The UK project overseers take time to get to know the community, build a rapport with them and establish their needs as well as study the community dynamics such as the political atmosphere and community way of life. They therefore hold extensive meetings and stay with the communities for a while discussing the kind of projects that are of most value to the community. They ensure that the community is involved in the initial planning, discussions as well as decision making as they are the ones who eventually will run the projects.

One of the major challenges that Quest undergoes is continuous motivation among the local communities. The initial phase of the project usually receives a lot of local support, but it is difficult to get people who will continue with the same momentum throughout to see the projects running especially after the volunteers and sponsors have left. However, Rose Simon and Jon visit the local projects often to check in, as well as accompany the volunteers.

This evaluation concentrated on two projects chosen at random: Kenya Water Relief Project and the Villa Maria project in Peru.

Kenya Water Relief project

This project began in 2004 in partnership with a local charity in Kenya; Excellent Development and the Akamba self-help groups in Machakos and Makueni in rural Eastern Kenya. This project mainly focuses on building of sand dams in order to increase the availability of water for the local communities in the semi-arid area caused by poor climatic conditions. Local villagers usually organize themselves into self-help groups. With volunteer contributions, the community is able to purchase material for building the sand dams. The volunteers also assist in the actual building of the sand dams and terracing.

The volunteers are integrated into the communities through the actual working together when building the sand dams. In addition, Quest usually organizes home stays with the local communities during one of the last weekends of their placement. The volunteers are also encouraged to participate in local activities within the community such as going to church cooking meals, local sporting activities among others. Volunteering in this project takes 6 weeks.

Villa Maria Project in Peru

This project has been on-going for 14 years improving the lives of children affected by poverty, crime and drug abuse by providing recreation and sports workshops. This project has been valuable in the region considering the high rate of crime and drug abuse in the area, as well as the low level of poverty that the children and residents there struggle to live by. These activities that Quest provides prevent the children from being victims of poverty and drug abuse. So far the organization has constructed a pre-school serving over 1000 kids, and has built over 25 new homes for single parent families.

Quest Overseas contributes to the development of this project directly, and the Organization's main contact in Peru is Alejandro Mendez. The organization offers Spanish classes for the volunteers in order to be able to blend in well with the culture.

(A comprehensive report on all Quest projects and breakdown of volunteer payment can be found in hard copy in the Quest4Change Impact Report, 2010 (Find attached) as well as in Quest4change website: www.quest4change.org).

Local Financial Investment

Volunteers usually make two payments; one to the Quest Overseas Ltd, and the other to Quest4Change charity. For the project, 40% covers the expenses that the volunteer incurs while on site (e.g. food, accommodation), 30% is to maintain the project work while the UK teams are not there and volunteers are gone, and the other 30% is a long term investment in the project (land purchase for project or building of local infrastructure). **(Please find attached a detailed breakdown).**

For instance, for the Kenya Water Relief Project, when payment is made, part of it goes to the company Quest Overseas and the other to Quest4Change charity which then donates the money to their partner company charity in Kenya; Excellent Development. Excellent Development is then able to purchase and distribute the money to cater for the local project needs **(See attachment for more detailed breakdown).**

Volunteer Selection and Preparation

The organization conducts an in depth interview with the volunteers on their application. Usually, for application, the prospective volunteers fill in an application form that is basically a procedure that is used to garner information on their back ground. The applicants are then invited for a one on one interview where the interviewer seeks to know more about their personality and explain to them the about the project and what is expected of them as well as answer any questions that the volunteers may have. The organization does not really look for skilled volunteers as the volunteers are usually 16-25 year old unskilled teenagers seeking experience and cultural exposure. However, apart from their financial contribution, which goes a long way into assisting the local projects, the volunteers' main contribution is motivation and zeal. They are the energy and driving force behind the projects.

Additionally, the volunteers do not take over the jobs of the local community seeing that they are unskilled; rather they assist the locals in the construction and project activities that are scheduled to take place.

The overseas applicants are given an extensive telephone or Skype interview.

The quest placements usually take place between 4 weeks to three months. This length of period is ample enough to make an impact in the communities that the volunteers are working in and with. The volunteers always travel in groups of approximately 15, a number that is large enough to carry out the work that is set out for them and finish it within the allocated period of time.

The volunteers usually travel with qualified and experienced project leaders from the UK, who are able to understand the volunteer's needs and support them. The project leaders are normally previous volunteers and have undergone training in 'wilderness training' as well as in First Aid. They apply for jobs as project leaders and are selected on basis of their leadership qualities, personality, skills such as in safe and healthy, wilderness training, and their experience.

Depending on the size of the group, there are usually two project leaders per volunteer group; one who travels with the volunteers to the host country and one who travels to the host country/project ahead of the volunteers' arrival. The latter project leader goes ahead to ensure that the local communities are well aware of the volunteers arrival, to prepare for

their accommodation and transport as well as purchase any material that will be required for the project development work. The project leaders are with the volunteers during their entire placement period and help to solve any issues that may arise with the volunteers as well as motivate them. They are also the 'bridge' between the volunteers, the UK office and the local project partners.

Upon their return to their country of origin, the volunteers are sent a feedback form in order to give feedback on their experience at the project. The project leaders also hold a debrief session where they give feedback on each project that they led.

During this evaluation process, the assessor found an on-going interview for a prospective volunteer as well as a debrief meeting for project leaders who had just returned from Kenya.

Missing Data

Direct contact with the local contacts as well as previous volunteers.

However feedback information from volunteers was provided in the feedback forms.

CONCLUSIONS

This report concludes that Quest Overseas meets the target criteria and standards set out by the Fair Trade Volunteering. The organization was able to prove and give financial verification of its support both financially and moral support to its project partners. The financial breakdown of volunteer expenses also reveals that all volunteer expenses are covered by the placement organization and not the local community. The organization is fully committed to its partner projects ensuring sustainability in the long run. All their projects are generally a concept operated by the local communities, with the assistance of volunteers during gap year and summer breaks. The UK project co-ordinators often visit their projects and keep close contact and constant communication with host project partners.

The volunteers are also well prepared in advance for their placements and are in good hands of qualified and experienced project leaders throughout their placement. Their feedback reveals that they are satisfied with their placement experiences and are aware of how their money was spent. This is also shown by the fact that many ex-volunteers have gone ahead to become project leaders for Quest overseas volunteer programs.

The organization was able to demonstrate its contribution in investment into the projects in the form of finance and resources. All of their projects display a long term commitment of more than 3 years and are all established in joint communication with project partners where the main goal is to have the local communities take over and carry on with management. There are several projects that the organization has worked with and has completed, moving on to other 'needy' projects for instance in the water relief project in Kenya.

LIMITATIONS

Communication barrier with some of the local contacts. In this case, the local contact Alehandro in Villa Maria speaks Spanish alone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Quest:

1. The organization could look into involving locals to be project leaders as well.
2. The organization could look into further training of the local project partners with whom they have a direct relationship with, into capacity building that is sustainable, whereby the local project leader/manager is able to efficiently carry out the management of the project with marketable/competent skills.

For FTV:

1. As FTV grows, there will be a need to look into multilingual assessors local projects worldwide.