

# Volunteer Information Kit



equal  health

India 2019 February 1 – 17

# Volunteer Information Kit

## India 2019

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## Equal Health

Equal Health is an Australian not for profit, secular volunteer organisation that delivers free multi-disciplinary health care to people in need in developing countries, who would generally not have access to such services.

Equal Health provides opportunities for short term volunteer travel experiences for Australian health professionals who give their skills and services, to improve the health and lives of people living in overseas communities in need. We conduct annual aid camps over a two to three week period and provide:

- eye tests
- new spectacles
- dental care
- general medical help
- podiatry care
- health education
- postural and mobility aids and equipment prescriptions
- development and implementation of allied health programs
- cataract surgery

## History

In January 1997 the Australasian Dispensing Opticians Association (ADOA) conducted a fact-finding spectacle aid camp in the village areas of Tamil Nadu, India. It followed a request from the Director of a Western Australian sponsored orphanage to supply spectacle relief for underprivileged people in the region of his work. The initiative was named the *Spectacle Aid to India Program*. It was installed at a General Meeting of the ADOA in Hobart, on 23 February 1997.

On 17 April 1999, a new organisation called Equal Health was created for the purpose of including a diverse number of health disciplines to the program. Since the first camp in January 1997, annual camps have been conducted in India, East Timor, several in Indonesia, one in Zimbabwe, one in Thailand and several in South Africa. Equal Health has also provided free spectacles for displaced Kosovars and East Timorese in camps around Australia and financially supported the repatriation of Balinese bomb victims. Aid is provided to people free of any cost.

## Equal Health Mission Statement

To facilitate Australian volunteers in the provision of free health care for communities in need, regardless of political or religious affiliation; with professionalism, integrity and cultural sensitivity.

## Equal Health Values

In the provision of free health care for communities in need, Equal Health values:

- Professionalism
- Integrity
- Cultural sensitivity
- Ethical practice
- Honesty

## Equal Health in its operations also values:

- Good governance
- Transparency and accountability
- Commitment
- Inclusivity

## Overseas Volunteer Positions

Equal Health appoints volunteers in various locations around India, and dental volunteers in East Timor. Placements are short-term and span a two to three week period. Placements are available to qualified health professionals and teachers:

- General medical practitioners
- Medical nurses
- Optometrists
- Ophthalmologists
- Optical Dispensers
- Dentists
- Dental Nurses/Assistants
- Dental Hygienists/Therapists
- Occupational Therapists with experience in paediatrics, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, autism, mental health and/or soft tissue
- Physiotherapists with experience in paediatrics, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, musculo-skeletal and/or mental health
- Podiatrists
- Psychologists
- Speech Pathologists with experience in paediatrics, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, expressive language disorders and autism
- Mental Health Nurses
- Teachers – special education, primary school and/or pre-school teachers
- Dieticians

Working conditions for volunteers can be challenging in the village locations, as the 'surgery' is usually a local hall, a room in someone's house or even the shade of a big tree. Crowds are large, the noise is overwhelming and it is impossible for everyone to be seen. It can also be frustrating at times as some conditions that present cannot be treated or need long term care, which the patient does not have access to, for either geographical or financial reasons.

Despite all of the challenges faced by the volunteers, the communities are very appreciative and the work rewarding.

## India Projects

Equal Health has possible placements available in the following Indian locations:

- [Katwa, West Bengal](#) – Anandaniketan, Society for Mental Health Care – allied health, mental health, education, optical, dental and medical.
- [Trichy, Tamil Nadu](#) – SEVAI, Mobile outreach multi-disciplinary health clinics – optical, dental, medical podiatry and musculoskeletal physiotherapy.
- [Kolkata, West Bengal](#) – Shisur Sevay – allied health.



### **Anandaniketan – allied health, mental health, education, optical, dental and medical**

Located near Katwa in West Bengal, the Equal Health team of health professionals work along side the management, staff and residents of Anandaniketan to:

- Foster positive relationships with Anandaniketan staff and residents.
- Promote knowledge and skills development of the Anandaniketan staff.
- Promote the psychological, physical and social wellbeing of residents by enhancing independent functioning, self worth, dignity and respect and improvement of quality of life.

Anandaniketan is situated four to five kilometres outside the village of Katwa in West Bengal. It was established in 1988 and is a not for profit organisation that provides residential care to 350 children, adolescents and adults. The residents mostly have intellectual and/or physical disabilities, and mental illness and many of the residents are orphans. Anandaniketan also has a school that provides schooling for children with special needs, a cancer detection and management centre and a training institute offering diploma and degree studies in intellectual disability.

Equal Health's mobile multi-disciplinary outreach health clinics visit rural and remote village locations, which are coordinated by local Indian partners. Different villages are visited on a daily basis where outreach services are provided. As such the nature of these mobile health clinics is predominately service delivery with health education provided wherever possible.

The Anandaniketan services include allied health, mental health, and education, optical, dental and general medical. Please visit our website [www.equalhealth.org.au](http://www.equalhealth.org.au) for more information on the programs.

#### **SEVAI– allied health, optical, ophthalmology, dental, medical, podiatry.**

Located just outside Trichy in Tamil Nadu, the Equal Health team of health professionals work along side the management and staff of SEVAI to:

- Foster positive relationships with SEVAI's staff.
- Promote knowledge and skills development of the SEVAI staff.
- Assist SEVAI in providing health care for the people in the catchment of the existing SEVAI program.

Society for Education, Village Action and Improvement (SEVAI) works for the integrated development of the rural poor in the villages and slums of Trichy and the coastal Nagapptinam area. Their programs aim at developing sustainable communities and they have been working towards this since 1975.

Some of SEVAI's program activities include: education and promotion of women self help groups through micro credit initiatives, cost effective housing construction using locally made materials, day care centres, primary schools and secondary schools, vocational training, life skills promotion for employment generation for young women, health, hygiene and sanitation promotion in rural slums, provision of safe drinking water and vegetable cultivation, and promotion of community kitchen garden plots.

The Equal Health Trichy team will undertake a six-hour bus journey heading south from Chennai to reach Trichy, where we will be based in a small rural village called Amore. We will be accommodated in chalet type rooms in a very peaceful surrounding.

Tanjore Farm — Several members of the Trichy team will be selected to spend part of their time during the camp at a farm near a town called Tanjore, situated an hour east of Trichy.

The farm was once used for housing health professionals from the US who provided free health care at a small hospital for the nearby villages. It has been many years since the US group has worked at the farm, which is run by an inspirational elderly lady named Lakshmi and her family.

The Trichy outreach services include optical, ophthalmology, dental, physiotherapy, podiatry and general medical. Please visit our website [www.equalhealth.org.au](http://www.equalhealth.org.au) for more information on the programs.

#### **Shishur Sevay – Allied health**

Located in an inner Kolkata suburb, the Equal Health team of health professionals work along side the director staff and residents of Shishur Sevay to:

- Foster positive relationships with Shishur Sevay staff and residents.
- Promote knowledge and skills development of the Shishur Sevay staff.
- Promote physical and social wellbeing of residents by enhancing independent functioning, self worth, dignity and respect and improvement of quality of life.

Shishur Sevay is a small organisation that is a home for children with disabilities in suburban Kolkata and run by an expat New Yorker named Dr Michelle Harrison. Equal Health sends a smaller team of allied health professionals to work at Shishur Sevay during the annual India placement.

## Our Volunteers



“One of the standout memories from this trip was the change on the face of a young Down's Syndrome boy, Shiva, when I put on his first pair of glasses – in a few moments he went from having a glazed, inanimate expression to a shy smile and wide-eyed look! Shiva was extremely short sighted, and so for the first time he would have been able to see smiles on faces and leaves on trees! Hopefully he will now have a better chance of seeing his books and the boards in class. And the huge hug he gave me was priceless.”

*Optometrist volunteer – Sue*

“A young girl with spastic diplegia who usually mobilises around the day. Her wheelchair looked like it was fall apart! Prior to leaving Australia we out of recycled bicycle parts, one of her. The look on her face when she time was just priceless. It was just the with a simple piece of equipment (that she was able to independently move herself to school every day. It was such



lives within the girls' shelter compound on her bottom and school in her wheelchair every 100 years old, and was about to were donated wheelchairs made which we issued and fitted to propelled herself for the first most amazing feeling to see that is readily available in Australia) within the compound and take a touching moment for me.

*Occupational therapist volunteer – Amy*

Full stories from our volunteers can be found on our website [www.equalhealth.org.au](http://www.equalhealth.org.au).

# Volunteer Code of Ethics

## 1. Preliminaries

Equal Health volunteers agree to uphold the values of the Mission Statement and abide by this Code of Ethics.

## 2. Relations with communities in developing countries

- 2.1 Ensure total respect for existing cultural practices.
- 2.2 Consider the views, interests and concerns of those receiving care.
- 2.3 Understand the culture before arriving in the community.
- 2.4 All information recorded in the course of aid work must be treated with respect and sensitivity to cultural beliefs and values.
- 2.5 Uphold high standards of personal and professional integrity.
- 2.6 Avoid all discriminatory practices.
- 2.7 Do not exploit the recipients of the aid in any form whatsoever.
- 2.8 Be aware of not passing on sensitive information to third parties that may endanger the welfare of the people you are helping.
- 2.9 Seek feedback from the community.

## 3. Team members

- 3.1 Always serve as a team player.
- 3.2 Understand and comply with the rules of the organisation.
- 3.3 Respond to the directions and commands of the team leader.
- 3.4 Conduct yourself at all times in a professional manner.
- 3.5 Encourage the development of effective communication, understanding and co-operation between fellow team members.

## Placement Details

### When and how much?

Volunteers pay a donation to Equal Health of **AUD \$3,790**. This amount is inclusive of most of the expenses for the two-week placement. **The India 2019 placements will take place from 1 to 17 February 2019**. The first night of placement is spent in Singapore where on the following morning the entire team gathers for an orientation breakfast. Later that day the team flies to India.

It is difficult to spend a lot of money in India, especially in the regions you will be working. Around AUD \$200 should be more than adequate to cover drinks and extra meals etc.; souvenir hunters will naturally need to increase this amount.

Equal Health pays for:

- travel to India and back to Australia
- travel insurance
- three Equal Health t-shirts and an Equal health cap
- virtually all meals
- accommodation
- ground transport

Volunteers are also responsible for:

- India employment visa
- obtaining and paying for appropriate vaccinations
- own spending money
- indemnity insurance
- lunch in Singapore
- alcoholic drinks and some meals on non working days

The India visa cost varies depending on the type of passport. Australian volunteers pay around \$150 for an Entry visa. The visa cost is subject to change each year.

### Can I choose where I go?

Volunteers can nominate their preferred location. Every endeavour is made to place volunteers in their preferred location. However, this may not always be possible and locations may vary due to our Indian partner's wishes and the total number of volunteers attending the camp.

### Accommodation

Equal Health provides only basic comforts in most of its locations. At Katwa (Anandaniketan) volunteers have shared accommodation with flushing western style toilets. The rooms are basic and the shared ablution block has hot and cold water (sometimes!). In Trichy volunteers have shared accommodation with western style toilets but cold-water showers only. You need to bring your own linen, towel, toiletries (including toilet paper) for all placements.

## **Extra travel**

It is essential that all volunteers attend the breakfast meeting in Singapore, so further travel in India should be considered only at the completion of your placement.

Further travel after the camp can be organised by Equal Health's travel agent. Equal Health's travel agent is Jodie Everett from MTA Travel, her mobile 0413 864 967, she will be coordinating the travel arrangements and can recommend various extra tours. Jodie can also connect you with other team members who are travelling on after their placement. For details about MTA Travel please visit: [www.mtatravel.com.au](http://www.mtatravel.com.au) or email [jeverett@mtatravel.com.au](mailto:jeverett@mtatravel.com.au). The travel agent will bill you separately for extra travel expenses outside of the Equal Health itinerary.

## **Health risks and vaccinations**

All volunteers must receive a health clearance from a General Practitioner prior to their placement being confirmed. Please find the form enclosed. It is the responsibility of each volunteer to ensure they have had the appropriate vaccinations. Please check with the Travel Health Plus [www.travelhealth.com.au](http://www.travelhealth.com.au) or your local GP to ensure you have the appropriate and up to date vaccinations for your destination. Please use this link for a 10% discount voucher <http://www.equalhealth.org.au/upload/equal-health-vaccination-voucher.jpg>

Equal Health recommends volunteers to consider having a Mantoux test for Tuberculosis on their return from India. In addition, if you are going to return to work in a hospital or health care setting we encourage you to obtain advice regarding a MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus) test.

Equal Health ensures all volunteers have adequate travel insurance if they need to be admitted to hospital or require medical emergency evacuation. Equal Health team leaders will organise access to hospitals and emergency evacuation if necessary.

## **Insurance**

Travel insurance is an essential requirement for team members and is organised by Equal Health. If you have an existing travel insurance policy, it will need to be equal to or greater than the one Equal Health uses.

It would seem that the risk of being sued for malpractice in India may be unlikely, however, you may consider contacting your provider of professional indemnity insurance and inform them of the dates you will be working in India. Equal Health accepts no responsibility for any action taken against you as a result of your work in India.

## **Safety**

Equal Health does everything it can to ensure the safety of its volunteers, by working with its partners and reviewing advice provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Volunteer's safety is of paramount importance, and to date, Equal Health volunteers have experienced a remarkably safe time. However, Equal Health will not compromise the safety of team members beyond what is believed to be an acceptable risk including calling off the placement even at a minute's notice.

Volunteers can also improve their everyday personal security by being culturally aware, adhering to local social behaviours and generally being attuned to their environment. To further enhance safety, volunteers are briefed on risks relating to their placement prior to departure and are kept up to date during their placement. Volunteers who compromise their own safety and/or the safety of other team members will be immediately disqualified from their placement and asked to leave.

Perhaps the greatest threat to your safety while in India is road crashes. Although Equal Health uses reputable transport arrangements, the sheer mayhem on the roads reveals an obvious risk every time you travel.

## **Culture**

It is Equal Health policy that no volunteer disputes another culture, custom, religion or political belief in any way while on a placement. Equal Health uses a multitude of in country partners ranging from political, governmental, not for profit and religious based organisations. Equal Health does not represent these organisations' views and beliefs in any way; however, volunteers are required to respect the beliefs of all partners.

## **Interpreters**

The interpreters provide a vital role in the work Equal Health does in India. The Indian languages you will encounter during the camp are Tamil, Hindi, Bengali or Telegu. They are difficult languages to learn, and likewise the interpreters find English difficult.

Because of the language barriers you may find interaction with the interpreters sometimes frustrating. When this happens you must remember to be tolerant, after all, you are the visitor.

## **Clothing**

In India volunteers are placed in rural locations, where the local Indian culture does not permit exposing the legs and shoulders. Shorts and short/medium length clothing are inappropriate for volunteers. Jeans for male volunteers are acceptable, however, lighter material is more suitable considering the climate. Volunteers must wear clothing that goes down to the ankles and loose fitting tops with at least mid length sleeves. Three quarter pants are not suitable for women to wear, neither are shorts for the men. It is also advisable to wear light coloured clothing that covers the arms in the evening to lessen the risk of mosquito bites. Volunteers will require some warmer clothing for their placement in West Bengal as it can be quite cool in the evenings. A detailed checklist of items to take will be available in the pre-departure volunteer information booklet.

## **Food**

Equal Health provides local cooks to cater for its volunteers. Indian food is aromatic, but not too hot and although it is good, there is not a lot of variety, especially in the Indian villages. For those working in the South of India, eating often takes place sitting on the floor using a banana leaf for a plate. There are no knives and forks and by the end of your placement you will be an expert at eating rice and daal with your fingers. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian is readily available and most of the food is gluten friendly.

## **Local water**

In India if you drink the local water you will get sick! Equal Health provides ample bottled water for volunteers; you just need to bring a water bottle and fill it up. You will be able to refill your water bottle as often as you wish.

## **Volunteering**

Most placements span a two to three week period. Such short-term placements are unique to Equal Health and enable health professionals who are unable to participate in long term placements the opportunity to contribute and share their knowledge and skills.

Volunteers are placed in small groups of approximately 15 to 30 team members for the duration of the placement. An experienced team leader who is responsible for the safety and welfare of the volunteers manages each team.

Equal Health works closely with host organisations on logistical issues and security of the team.

**\*\*It is essential that all volunteers complete the **entire** duration of their placement. This means that if you are planning on doing any further travel, please ensure that you arrange to leave the team once the placement is complete.\*\***

### **Can I take my partner and children?**

Occasionally there are opportunities for couples to volunteer together, however both partners need to have the appropriate qualifications. Equal Health endeavours to place couples at the same location, but this cannot be guaranteed. If you and your partner wish to volunteer together you must inform Equal Health when completing your application or contact an Equal Health representative to advise on this.

Equal Health is unable to cater for children on volunteer placements.

### **Alcohol and other drugs**

It is strict Equal Health policy that alcohol is not permitted on the premises of our host organisations. Do not bring alcohol with you to India as there is ample opportunity for alcohol consumption (at your own cost) whilst on excursions and outings. Volunteers who breach this policy will have their placement terminated immediately and asked to leave the team.

Taking or carrying of illicit drugs (and prescription drugs other than those for personal use) will invoke an immediate disqualification from the team. Equal Health relinquishes responsibility for a team member that has been disqualified from the team for taking or carrying illicit drugs. Your placement will be terminated immediately.

**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU DO NOT CARRY NARCOTICS OF ANY DESCRIPTION INTO ANOTHER COUNTRY, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER IT IS INTENDED FOR YOUR OWN USE OR TO USE IN AID WORK.**

Smoking is not permitted on the premises of any of Equal Health's host organisations and it is recommended that if you are a smoker, you refrain from smoking at all times when you are with the team.

### **Withdrawal from placements**

Volunteers wishing to withdraw from a placement must provide sufficient notice. Equal Health will endeavour to repay all deposits and payments made by you, minus any non refundable payments which the organisations has made on your behalf.

### **Registration**

All attempts are made and will continue to be made to register volunteers with the appropriate health profession boards in host countries. Equal Health has been successful in gaining temporary registration for its volunteers; however, this cannot be guaranteed for every placement. We believe that the risks of working unregistered are minimal, but the final decision to do so rests with you.

### **Volunteer skills required**

All volunteers must be qualified in their profession, however, successful volunteers possess more than their professional skills. They require a unique set of interpersonal skills to meet the challenges presented by a new culture and challenging work environment. Some of these additional attributes that contribute to being a successful volunteer include:

- maintaining a positive mental attitude
- understanding your own strengths and weaknesses
- adaptability and flexibility
- ability to embrace change
- excellent communication skills
- problem solving capabilities
- open to new cultures and experiences
- ability to extend out of your comfort zone
- being a team player

## **Positive mental attitude**

The work that Equal Health performs in India is not easy and the conditions are far from luxurious. It is essential to maintain a positive mental attitude for the entire time. For some, the cultural difference in rural India is difficult to adjust to and understand, especially for those new to travel. There are many great lessons to learn from another culture and it would be a shame if they were missed.

The camaraderie that rapidly develops between volunteers provides the opportunity for many memorable moments during your assignment. You will find several emotions are experienced and this includes a great deal of laughter. Having fun is an essential element of your placement. The experience of this adventure will return something very special that can't be explained, only experienced, and is even more enjoyable when shared among a unified group of people.

## **Checks**

Equal Health has a duty of care to its volunteers and aid recipients. The organisation does all that is reasonable to avoid harm to its volunteers and aid recipients. Volunteers will be working with a cross section of people within communities, including children and vulnerable people. Consequently, it is a requirement that all Equal Health volunteers undergo the following checks prior to their placements being confirmed (forms are enclosed):

- Volunteer National Police Check
- 100 Point Identification Check
- Medical check

Police checks are organised by Equal Health on receipt of your application forms. You need to organise your medical clearance (form will be supplied) and forward it to Equal Health with your application.

All information is confidential. Equal Health complies with the National Privacy Principles (Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988).

## **Selection process**

Equal Health uses a systematic selection process based on merit and is guided by the Australian Equal Opportunities Act.

## **Get ready**

Successful applicants will be notified by email. Equal Health will organise your visa, travel insurance, air travel and accommodation. You will need to organise your vaccinations. You will receive additional information and a volunteer information handbook.

## Fundraising

In their excitement about travelling to India or on their return, many team members in the past have voluntarily wanted to raise funds for Equal Health's work. If you are interested and enthusiastic about fundraising for Equal Health please contact the Secretariat via the Equal Health office at [info@equalhealth.org.au](mailto:info@equalhealth.org.au) for guidelines.

As you may already know, our organisation uses the GiveNow platform for online donations. Recently they developed a new CrowdRaiser feature that is a really simple, low fee peer-to-peer fundraising tool. It means that our wonderful supporters such as you, can easily create your own fundraising page for our youth program to help us, in minutes!

So to take advantage of this new tool, the committee has set up a new cause page on GiveNow. See <https://www.givenow.com.au/equalhealth> Now we need people such as you to sign up as a "CrowdRaiser" by clicking on the blue "Create Crowdraiser" button.

In setting up a CrowdRaiser page, it will allow you to create a personal page to raise funds for our program. You can add your own photo, reason for supporting us and whatever \$ target you think you can achieve. It can be a page you create as gifts-in-lieu for your upcoming birthday or celebration, fun run or just-because. Once you are all set up we hope you will send your CrowdRaiser page link far and wide!

## How to apply – application checklist

Once you have read **all** the information in this Volunteer Information Kit, lodge your application by completing the following forms enclosed:

- Application & Payments form
- Curriculum vitae (maximum of two pages – new volunteers only)
- Provide two referees (new volunteers only)
- Medical check form
- National police check form
- Copy of Working with Children Check card (only if currently have one)
- 100 point identification check \*\* Smart Traveller DFAT information and Emergency Contact details
- Certified** copy of qualifications (dentists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, medical practitioners and ophthalmologists only)
- Certified current** registration from the appropriate board or governing body (dentists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, medical practitioners and ophthalmologists only)
- Membership application form – (for non-Equal Health members)
- Copy of passport and driver's licence

Applications will not be assessed unless **all** of the documentation is provided. Please email you application to [info@equalhealth.org.au](mailto:info@equalhealth.org.au) or post to **Equal Health Volunteer Application, PO Box 445 Karrinyup WA 6921.**

**Applications close October 31 2018 unless places are filled prior.** However, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat in the event some places are still available.

## Equal Health Contact Details

For further information please refer to the Equal Health website or contact us:

Email: info@equalhealth.org.au

Contact: Secretariat, Donella Plowright

Mobile: +61 0415 474 241

Contact: India Camp Co-ordinator, Paul Clarke

Mobile: +61 0417 913 463

Fax: + 61 8 9244 4436

### Postal Address:

PO Box 445 Karrinyup WA Australia 6921

### Physical Address:

1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 1008 Wellington Street, West Perth WA 6005

OR c/- Vision West, Northcourt Building, Karrinyup Shopping Centre, Karrinyup WA 6018



Website: [www.equalhealth.org.au](http://www.equalhealth.org.au)

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