

Volunteers' tips book

- House of Light -

April 2016

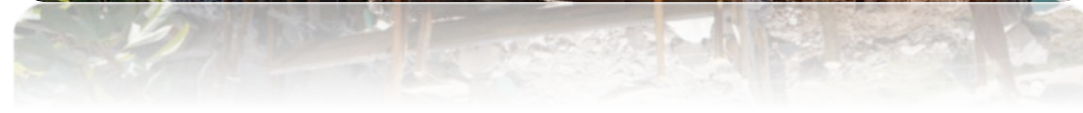


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1. Introduction

This information sheet is made by a volunteer, in cooperation with other volunteers and key-persons of the House of Light in April 2015. The purpose of this document is to provide essential information for volunteers. We suppose that a good informed volunteer can contribute more to the goals of the organization, and find more satisfaction for his efforts.

We also want to list up some difficulties and challenges volunteers might have to face during their stay in the House of Light. We hope to give some good advices and structures to put these things in a certain context.

This document can serve as a guide, but of course volunteers gain the most of their knowledge about the organization and the boys by real interaction.

2. Short presentation of House of Light

House of Light is a boys home in Melsiripura, Sri Lanka. The organization arose in 2003 as an experiment. The creators of this concept thought that the existing orphanages in Sri Lanka didn't really support the complex problems that helpless, neglected and abandoned children had to endure. This is why they started this organization. In the first place House of Light focuses on the rehabilitation of the children. Besides that, House of Light wants to assure protection, a healthy lifestyle, proper education, security and development opportunities for boys who didn't enjoy their fundamental rights previously. If the child has any relatives, House of Light cooperates with them to reintegrate the children into their own family, since the best place for the development of a child is still believed to be it's own family.

The boys can arrive in the House of Light through different ways, f.e.:

- Because they committed a crime.
- Boys without parents or with parents who are unable to take care of them.
- Boys of teenage mothers who are unable to take care of them.

3. Strategy

The basic idea of House of Light is that every child should get a decent education in a safe environment. The organization tries to achieve this by using a happy family concept. The local volunteers, foreign volunteers and the boys are all part of the family. The aim of this family is to ensure the child rights of the boys and to create development opportunities for them. In this way, they can start an independent life in the future. Some boys have special needs due to their complex background. These backgrounds are taken into account so that House of Light can fulfill the boys' needs as good as possible.

These are some methods used by the organization:

- Give the boys their basic needs: Shelter, food, healthcare, safety and protection.
- Give formal and non-formal education to the boys: Give exercise opportunities and homework guidance.

- Give sport and animation activities.
- Organize excursions.
- Give advice about their rights, learning, life-skills...
- Help with the development of practical skills and a professional talent.
- Give opportunities to develop leadership competencies and to take responsibilities.
- Start saving accounts.
- Give the boys opportunities to learn practical skills:
 - Gardening
 - Development of a professional talent

4. Role of the foreign volunteer

This document basically intends to be a guide that can inspire you. We want to help you finding what suits you the best in House of Light. Since the local/fixed volunteers and (old) foreign volunteers have the closest relationship with the organization and the boys, we asked them some questions about the role of the foreign volunteer. These are some of their advices.

4.1. Expectations of local volunteers

- *“House of light wants to achieve some goals, and it is important for volunteers to know these goals, so they can contribute to achieve these goals.”*
- *“Live together, know that you have to take some responsibilities and be a good example for the boys. You can help with everything in the house. First you can take a look around and afterwards you can join in the daily routines.”*
- *“The boys need a good education and a well-behaved attitude. Foreign volunteers can facilitate this by helping the boys with their education and guiding them in a good direction.”*
- *“The slow learners have a lot of difficulties with studying. The Volunteers can motivate the boys to extend their knowledge and improve their work-attitude towards school”*
- *“Organize sport activities, education activities, help with gardening...”*
- *“Help the older boys by motivating them, inspiring them and be a good example for them...”*
- *“Keep in your mind that the daily structure is very important for the education of the boys. Encourage them to follow it. For example: At 9 and 3 they should start with*

their schoolwork. So if you were doing some activities with them, you can put them on hold.”

- *“A good and respectful attitude towards the place, the boys and the culture is very important for us. Sometimes it is good to take some distance from the boys.”*
- *“The methods we are using in HoL are of course a partly determined by the Sri Lankan culture. You can help us by searching in a constructive way for new child-friendly methods that can support the education of the boys. For example: A good punishment/reward system.”*

4.2. Useful qualities of a foreign volunteer

Some of the (old) foreign volunteers listed up these qualities, which can be useful during your work with the boys:

- *“A volunteer at House of Light should be a flexible person who is very committed to his work.”*
- *“Being enterprising /efficacious /venturesome and creative are some of the most important qualities for a volunteer at the House of Light.”*
- *“To volunteer in an organization like HoL, it is not immediately required to have certain qualities. You can be of great aid just by being present every day and by helping with the daily tasks of the organization. Because many of the boys in HoL have no family, and had no love or attention in their past, giving these things is already a great help for them. Of course, the more qualities a volunteers has, the more skills he can share with the boys and the family.”*
- *“I think you definitely need to have these skills: Have a heart for children, be open-minded, be communicative: A mix of broken English, Sinhala and sign language worked quiet well for me.”*
- *“I think volunteers need to take responsibilities. But they can choose for themselves how to fill them in. I see it this way: If you put your life ‘on hold’ for a certain time to engage yourself in another culture, you can get the most out of it by fully integrating in the project. In House of Light this means that you live on the rhythm of the locals, and that you are there with and for the boys. Try to see things in a bigger context. For example: They don’t like to do schoolwork but be creative and find interesting ways to do this with them. It can help them a lot. Everything you do should benefit the education of the boys.”*

Basically, these are the expectations: A respectful attitude towards the boys, the local volunteers and their culture is a fundamental property of the foreign volunteer. Support the boys with their education, be there for them and organize meaningful activities for them.

4.3. Examples of activities

We wrote a number of tasks that you can fulfill as a volunteer in the House of Light. But of course, this is only a guide, so if you want to try other things with the boys, you can definitely do it!

It is also useful to organize meetings with the other volunteers on a weekly base, to make plans for the next few days...

4.3.1. Sport activities

- Cricket match/tournament
- Volleybal match/tournament
- Soccer match/tournament
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Sport exercises: push ups etc.
- ...

NEVER hesitate: each game you have in mind is an opportunity to have a good moment with the boys! Do not give up if only a small group is interested, sharing love and happiness is the essential.

4.3.2 Educational activities

- Use creative teaching-methods to teach them English.
- If you have specialized skills (woodworking, playing music, dancing, electricity...) you can definitely give some classes to teach the boys.
- Teach them good and healthy habits.

4.3.3 Tasks that support organizational goals

- Three times a year the House of Light makes a newsletter to keep old volunteers and interested people up to date about the life in the House. This newsletter is released in March, Juli and November. You can refresh the newsletter, just ask Aruna.
- Make case studies of the boys by observing them and writing down their behavior. Thereby we can anticipate on their needs.
- Help with fundraising. You can search for people in your country that would like to sponsor House of Light.
- You can take a look at the spelling of English texts made by Aruna.
- **Update this document with useful information. This will help the next volunteers!**

4.3.4 Other tasks

- Make a documentary of the place.

5. Basic House rules

The basic rules in HoL are given below.

- **No alcohol.**
- **No cigarettes.**
- Don't try to spend too much time in your rooms.
- Couples: Don't show affection when you're outside your room.
- Girls: Because of cultural reasons, it is recommended to cover your knees and shoulders.

5.1. Day schedules

Structure is very important for children in a organization like HoL. Therefore, the day schedules should be followed as strict as possible to give the boys a safe and peaceful environment. You can support the boys by helping them with their tasks. Not all the boys in HoL are going to the same school. Depending on what is best suited for their education, they need to go to temple school or a government school. In the government school, lessons are giving in the morning. The temple school starts in the afternoon. During the weekend/holiday, they follow the weekend/holiday schedule.

Government school	
5	Get up
5.30-5.45	Face cleaning
5.45-6.30	Garden/cleaning work
6.30-6.45	Breakfast
6.45-7	Preparing for school
7-2	School
2-2.30	Lunch
2.30 -3	Washing clothes/bathing
3-4	Study time
4-5	Play time
5-5.10	Teatime
5.10-6	Garden/cleaning work
6-7	Buddha time
7-8	Dinner
8-8.10	Tooth brushing
8.10-9.30	TV time
9.30	Sleeping

Temple school	
5	Get up
5.30-5.45	Face cleaning
5.45-6-30	Garden/cleaning work

6.30 -6.45	Breakfast
6.45-7.45	Garden/cleaning work
7.45-9	Play time
9-10	Study time
10-11	Play time
11-11.30	Bathing
11.30-12.30	Lunch
12.30-5.30	School
5.30-6	Washing clothes
6-7	Buddha time
7-8	Dinner
8-8.10	Tooth brushing
8-9.30	TV time
9.30	Sleeping

Weekend/Holiday	
5.30	Get up
5.30-5.45	Face cleaning
5.45-7.30	Garden/cleaning work
7.30 -8	Breakfast
8-9	Playtime
9-11	Educational workshops
11-12.30	Play time
12.30-1.30	Lunch
1.30-2	Playtime
2-3	Study (only on Sunday)
3-3.30	Bathing
3.30-5	Garden/cleaning work
5-5.10	Teatime
5.10-6	Surprise activity
6-7	Buddha time
7-8	Dinner
8-8.10	Tooth brushing
8-9.30	TV time
9.30	Sleeping

Remark

Volunteers can join in at 6 o' clock. In the morning the local volunteers will serve you a tea. It is appreciated if the foreign volunteers all get up at the same time, so they only have to make tea once.

5.1.1 Study time

Note: HoL is a home for the boys like it's a home for a child who is raised by his own family. Therefore, HoL is **not only a playground!**

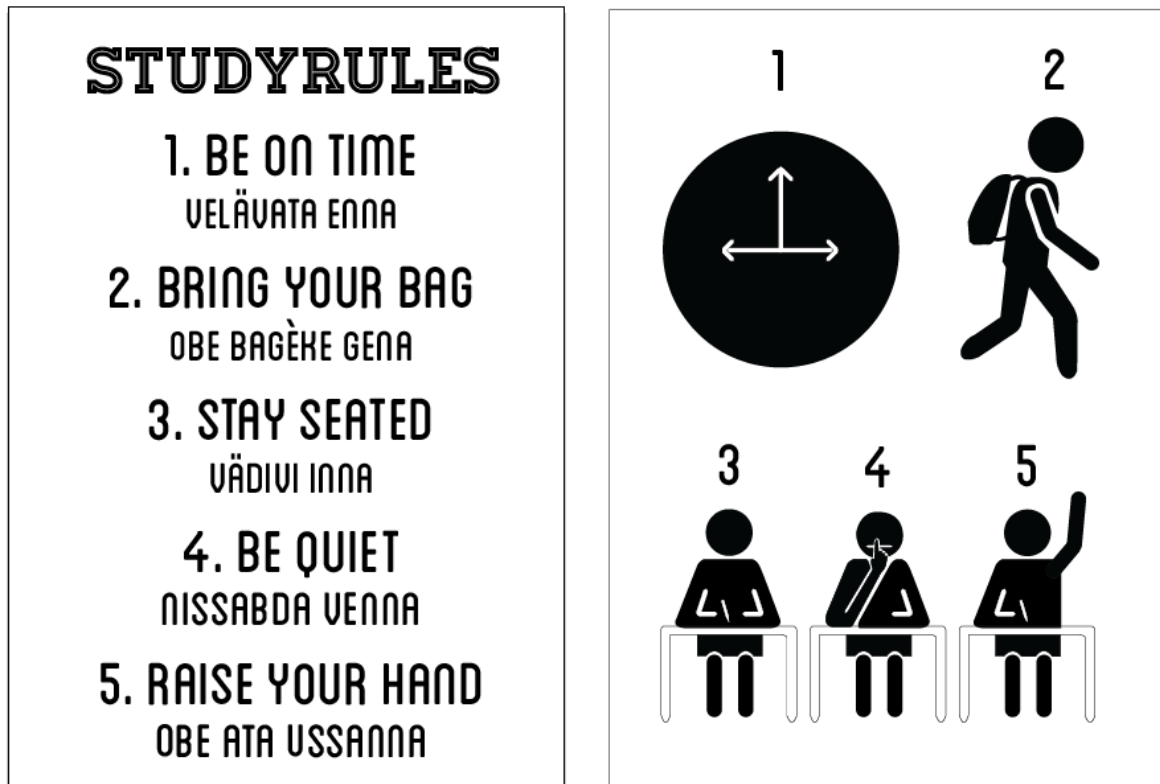
You, as a volunteer, should be present during the Study time. For the temple school, the study time is in the morning (9-10h). For the government school, the study time is in the afternoon (3-4h). Some of the boys do not go to school; these boys still have Study time together with the government school. For these specific boys, feel free to give them some exercises (math, English etc.).

There is an important remark concerning the Study time of the weekend schedule (2-3h). Saturday is a day without Study time. You can play with them during this time if nothing special is planned. Sunday, there is the Study time from 2 to 3h. Beside that detail, the weekend schedule is used for Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

The boys have to follow five fundamental rules during the Study time:

- Be on time.
- Bring your bag and books.
- Stay seated.
- Be quiet.
- Raise your hand.

In order to remember the rules, a poster has been made:



Remark

Nearly always, the boys that go to school have homework. You, as a volunteer should check if they are doing it and not just speaking with their neighbor. Open their books and you will directly notice unfinished homework.

The boys easily lie saying they have no homework: do not get trapped and open their book before believing it!

Once they finish their homework, three solutions are possible:

They keep themselves busy with repeating their homework/reading their schoolbooks

They can help their neighbor

You can give them self made exercises

If some boys do not have homework, do not give them directly your self made exercises. Wait something like 15-20 minutes before giving your exercises. During these 15-20 minutes, focus on having everybody present and concentrated on his homework. Instantly giving your exercises to some of them will only lead to chaos: the other boys will desire to do your exercises instead of their homework.

If you are alone for the Study time, it is impossible to manage fifty boys by your own. Just try to do your best: your presence is already really important !

Evaluation criteria's

The evaluation of the boys is based on two criteria's:

- Do they follow the five fundamental rules approximately?
- Doing homework or speaking/playing?

Ideally, you make a list of all the boys. Each school day, you write down whether the boy was good/not good during the Study time. Just use the two criteria's listed above. It is obvious that you cannot manage fifty boys by your own. Therefore, work as a TEAM with the other volunteers!

If you are alone, do not give up even if you cannot manage all the children during the Study time. At least you will help some of them.

Useful Sinhala words

- Inde ganewa = Sit down
- Hemin = Calm down
- Kataa karannewa epa = Do not speak
- Where is your book/bag? = Kohede oyagee potee/bageke?
- Make your *Homework* = Hadenewa oyagee Paasel wedde

5.1.2 Educational workshops

The educational workshop is specific to the weekend schedule (Saturday, Sunday). It takes place from 9 to 11h. During the educational workshop you can introduce educational games like drawing, cards, sport tournament, English games etc. You could also organize games with the other volunteers!

Of course, you can also do educational games during the play times of the week. However, more complicated games takes time to be understood and could therefore be preserved for the weekend.

5.1.3 Surprise activity

The surprise activity is specific to the weekend schedule. It takes place from 5 to 6h.

Normally, surprise activity is only for the boys who behaved good during the week and study time. Therefore, you always have to ask the permission of Aruna if you want to organize an activity.

The surprise activity could be:

- Watching a movie
- Dancing with the boys and/or teach them a dance!
- Others: be creative!

Please, **do not watch action movies or any movies that are violent**. Choose a comedy/funny/educational movie.

6. Threats / challenges for House of Light

In this paragraph we want to list up a number of threats /challenges House of Light has to face in the future. Feel free to think about strategies to tackle these. We are curious for your advices.

- How can we make House of Light sustainable? Nowadays the funding of House of Light depends partly on gifts and partly on the income of Aruna and his wife. The dream of House of Light is to be a strong, autonome organization that is not dependent on other people. How can we reach this?
- There are also a number of building plans that require sponsoring: A library, a computer room, a study hall, a counseling room and a mental therapy room. In total, we need + 15.000.000 Rs. for it (+ 102.000 euro).
- How can we support the children to a good working-attitude for school?
- Since the amount of children is growing and with them the amount of different backgrounds, it becomes more difficult to achieve good results with some of the boys. We noticed that some boys rather like to follow the bad examples in the group then the good examples. Overall we also perceive that it gets harder to get them motivated for working, learning and behaving well.

7. Threats / Challenges for the volunteer

It might happen that you go through an 'emotional rollercoaster' due to the phenomenon of a 'culture shock'. It is known as a personal disorientation when you experience an unfamiliar way of living due to going to another country for more than a vacation. We want to help you giving these negative feelings a place by sharing some experiences and thoughts that other volunteers faced during their stay at House of Light.

- Don't expect someone of the family to tell you what to do. Just do things, ask if you can help with something and don't be afraid to do something wrong. They will deeply appreciate your contribution.
- Know that the perception of time and planning is different in comparison with Western society. It can happen that you've planned something and that it turns out totally different. But, overall, the day schedule of the boys is pretty reliable.
- You might not understand some things that are differently organized in the Sri Lankan culture. It is okay to find this frustrating. But know that you can always talk about these things with Aruna. By sharing thoughts you might even come to a new way of addressing these problems.
- In comparison to the Western society, there is a difference on how they look at women tasks and men tasks. Your role in a Sri Lankan house is partly determined by your gender. We see that in general, women do more 'caretasks' and men get more involved in constructing tasks. Luckily, you as a volunteer shouldn't take this role patterns in account. Even more, by fulfilling tasks that don't belong to a specific role, you show the boys that there don't have to be roles that are based on gender features.

8. Contact information

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