



Responsible Volunteering Policy

Statement of Intent

This document provides our thoughts and beliefs around international volunteering. It identifies how we strive to follow best practice and be a positive role model and leader in the sector and how we constantly review policy so we operate ethically, sustainably and responsibly for local communities.

There are many press reports, books and academic papers referencing big international travel companies selling 'voluntourism' for high profit margins, programs constructed with little thought to local community needs or volunteer expectation and cases of negative and sometimes very harmful practices, with orphanage tourism, being a particularly high profile example.

In this landscape, we feel it's important that Think Pacific provide a model for a different version of what international volunteering (or similar examples of responsible community programs) could and should be.

Well delivered international volunteering, which incorporates high standards and best practice, can create tremendously positive outcomes for local communities, increase cultural exchange, perpetuate equality, take down boundaries, and add valuable capacity building, resources and funding to local economies and local programs.

How can volunteering abroad be done ethically?

We believe this comes from a change in mindset and approach, a culture of constant evaluation, local governance and above all, local empowerment.

From a volunteer perspective, it begins from asking key questions, some of which may be:

- Was the project aim initiated by the local community?
- Does the project value sustainability and involve community empowerment?
- Does the project address actual needs in the community or has it been created to fulfil a need for a volunteer or outsider?
- Is there community ownership?
- What is the lifespan of the project, does it create reliance or does it have an exit policy and continue sustainably after volunteers leave?

We'll address the above questions and many other questions during this document

And as a 'prospective international volunteer' reading this it's important to ask yourself:

- Why do I wish to volunteer?
- What are my core motivations?
- Does Think Pacific (or a different project) align with my beliefs?

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What is Think Pacific?

Think Pacific is a registered Fijian Charity and UK Social enterprise. For over a decade, we've partnered with the Fijian Government to support local community initiatives that aim to empower both local communities and volunteers. Together, we believe we can learn from each other, develop new skills and create positive outcomes.

We commonly describe our participants as 'volunteers', but the term may not always be the best fit. At least in a traditional sense of what people may associate with 'volunteering abroad'. We do support local initiatives that create positive outcomes. But we don't deliver projects exclusively to 'serve'. We don't work with the 'needy' or those in 'poverty' and we don't work with 'vulnerable communities'.

Our projects are a **cultural exchange**, fostering **learning**, understanding, equality and respect and **secondary**, our volunteers make small contributions to existing national government

programs. Our expeditions do 'make a difference', but the positive outcomes are reciprocal to all involved and small in scale.

We believe any volunteering should involve:

- ***Learning first***
- ***Immersion***
- ***Respect***
- ***Collaboration with local people***
- ***Reflection***

Through this process, volunteers **may sensitively** contribute a **small amount** to supporting local community initiatives.

Beyond Volunteering?

Are We Experiential Learning? Service Learning? Work Integrated Learning or an Internship?

We view our projects as an amalgamation of all of the above and depending on the nature of the project aims we're asked to support by communities, different projects steer closer to one of the above.

What is consistent is that all projects focus on ***immersion, learning and significant reflection***.

We expose students to different ideas, beliefs, cultures and challenges that can broaden minds, expand cultural intelligence and develop soft skills. Experiential Learning is therefore central to our core values and we've created an award to reflect the skills that derive from living, working and learning in Fiji. <https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/the-tp-award/>

The depth of project partners such as the Fijian Ministry Departments and influential local NGO's, means our projects are often seen as 'work placements', 'work integrated learning', 'credit based modules' or an 'internship', as students work collaboratively and learn applicable career skills or apply theoretical knowledge in supporting specific areas of Fiji's National Development Plan at a community level. We bolster this by employing lecturers from Fiji's two universities, guest speakers from local NGO's, and professionals from the medical and health sectors as well as our government partners to engage within our direct delivery.

Our core projects include less than 5% of travel or 'adventure activities' as we focus wholly upon local immersion and integration into a community setting. So although we don't view our projects as a tourism specifically and certainly not as 'holiday', we do try and invest heavily in

the micro tourism economy (for our transport providers, local resorts used for briefing locations, local shops and suppliers and funding local homestays), investing over 7 million dollars since 2009.

From a Fijian perspective at least, we're best known as a Fijian charity. A local registered non-for-profit organisation with over 50 + local staff and Fijian university interns employed annually, led by Fijian Trustees, collaborating with a network of other local Fijian organisations, bodies and ministries. In this context our 'international student projects' are just one small component in the bigger picture of what our Foundation achieves year-round in the country that 80% of our staff are permanent residents of. We are known for delivering workshops, skills training, running sports and youth development conferences at regional and national level and collaborating on Government and NGO health promotion initiatives. As a local Fijian organisation, we are known for providing grants for resources and capacity building of grass roots community groups, schools and hospitals.

Explanation of a Think Pacific 'expedition' - A project of mutual respect

Our core project involves students living and working within remote and self-sufficient Fijian communities, usually for a time frame of 1 month.

We work predominantly with Youth Groups, which are made up of local Fijian men and women aged 18-35.

During the project the international students and Fijian youths (and community members) discuss, share, debate and work together to achieve learning outcomes and small scale actionables. The aim is for 'volunteers' and Fijian Youths and community members to ***learn from each other.***

Depending on the project and needs and wishes of the local stakeholders we work on a mix of thematic areas, or focus more specifically on one area of ***public health, mental health promotion, life skills & leadership, sports development, environment, enterprise or engineering and built environment.***

Through daily workshops, action projects, cultural and group activities we aim for the following outcomes on each program:

- ***International students*** learn about Fijian culture, customs, traditions, history, community and subsistence village life and gain understanding and appreciation of local and national issues. Students learn from Fijian youths, local leaders, community health professionals, local educators, women's groups and elders.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** discuss and learn about thematic areas decided by the community and ministry, such as public health promotion, mental health, sports development, life skills and leadership, environmental issues and micro enterprises or the built environment.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** gain a global perspective and an international experience.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** learn about their cultural differences and similarities.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** learn about global issues in a Fijian and western context.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** pass their skills to younger generations by leading sports, extra-curricular and advocacy through structured games and activities within village settings.
- ***Both international students and Fijian youths*** further their skills in personal development, time management, communication, reasoning, leadership, team-work skills and reflection.

- ***Fijian youths*** further their employability, learn about local training and education opportunities, become local ambassadors for the Fiji National Development Plan and continue advocacy with their peers and younger generations within rural areas of Fiji.

Why do we engage international students with Fijian youth?

Think Pacific was created at the request of members of the Fijian Ministry of Health and evolved to also align with the Ministry of Youth and Sports through formal MOU's. Our visionaries included The National Health Advisor for Fiji, Mr Manasa Seniyasi who is now Trustee of Think Pacific Foundation in Fiji.

A core aim of the government was to bring an international dimension to Fijian youth living in rural areas. To foster global understanding and celebrate cultural exchange and in so doing, build the confidence, knowledge and self esteem of Fijian youth through peer-to-peer learning. The Fijian Government believes that young people in rural areas of Fiji can gain from international collaboration and feel part of a global community. This is the Fijian youth gaining their own version of global mobility.

To this aim, we ask international students to view our project as a ***global classroom*** in which they are participating with peers from Fiji.

Our Local Partnerships

The depth of our association with local communities, government departments, charities and local organisations within Fiji is unique. Think Pacific is an organisation built upon collaboration, trust and long-term partnerships, of which we are very proud. Our partnerships mean that we achieve community driven action plans in line with the Fijian governments aims. We are respected for working within the framework of the government, adding benefit to long term strategies. This includes supporting Fiji's National Development Plan and being a key facilitator of the Ministry of Health's 'Towards a Healthy Fiji Islands Initiative'.

Our Major partners include

- ***Fijian Ministry of Health (Signed MOU)***
- ***Fijian Ministry of Youth & Sports (Signed MO)***
- ***Fiji National Sports Commission (Signed MOU)***
- ***Fiji National University (Signed MOU)***

- ***National Employment Centre of Fiji (Signed MOU)***
- ***Fijian Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation***
- ***Youth Champs 4 Mental Health (Signed MOU)***
- ***NSO's: Inclusive of Fiji Rugby Union, Athletics Fiji, NRL Fiji & Netball Fiji.***

Our partnerships are based on the following principles:

- Regular communication and feedback mechanisms between all parties
- Values alignment between the communities, Ministry, NSO's and Think Pacific
- An equal and balanced relationship between Fijian partners, community leaders and Think Pacific staff
- Engaging with partners on all matters of design, planning, volunteer recruitment, community preparation, review and monitoring
- Clear expectations of all parties

Directed by The Fiji National Development Plan

All Think Pacific's projects, programs and wider initiatives are guided by the Fiji National Development Plan (FNDP). The FNDP is the outcome of a nationwide consultation process and the new national strategy for growth and development in Fiji.

FNDP has been written to align with broader global commitments including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Crucially, The Fijian Government has taken steps to apply UN SDGs to a ***Fiji-specific context***. By delivering the Fiji National Development plan, our projects and programmes work towards achieving **all 17 UN SDGs**, whilst ensuring implementation is tailored to rural Fijian settings and locally directed, managed and monitored by Fiji. Our commitment to understanding just one country's needs and focusing solely upon Fiji is core to Think Pacific's beliefs of thoughtful and purposeful international development and volunteering.

Please see the following link for the specific areas of The FNDP that we support:

<https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/fiji-national-development-plan/>

Local empowerment

Ensuring the host community is empowered and drives their own projects is fundamental to ethical volunteering.

How do we facilitate community empowerment?

- In any project, the community is prioritised above all other stakeholders. We believe to achieve best practice, projects must have local direction, local management and local leadership.
- We focus upon advocacy and training, which empowers rural communities to develop sustainably by providing much needed assistance to build local capacity rather than creating an ongoing dependence on international volunteering. The core focus of our assistance as a charity in Fiji is facilitating access to information, opportunity and advice to people in rural areas, so they may have the same life chances as young people living in urban areas of Fiji.
- Every project supports existing government initiatives and provides specific support where it has been identified as needed by the Fiji National Development Plan and host community.
- We only work on projects where the local government and communities have conducted and approved a formal needs assessment.
- We work with the Fijian Ministry, local partners and community leaders through committee meetings to take the lead upon direction and delivery.

- The rural Community and government always initiates the request for projects, which then must be approved and consulted by all parties.
- Projects are designed so that volunteers only ever work alongside locals and never replace local jobs
- All projects should incorporate personal development for Fijian youths, job creation, work placement opportunities or training for local people to ensure a net gain for local employment.
- The core objectives of the projects address the needs and priorities of local people and their environments.
- The community is actively involved in the running of volunteer projects and the benefits derived from them.
- There is a high level of community engagement and input throughout the project; for example, the organisation of daily activities, pastoral support, training of volunteers, cultural teachings and organisation of weekend and evening activities.
- There is total ownership over projects by the communities or local government and there must always be local leadership of the project.
- The operations of the project never jeopardise the fundamental needs of the local community such as access to local resources, land rights or intellectual property protection.

- Over 70% of funds by volunteers is invested into Fiji, such as supporting local training, local business and local tourism.

Our Fijian Charity & Local Staff Team

The Think Pacific Foundation (FIJI) is a registered Fijian charitable Trust FJ989, which directs our projects and programs in Fiji.

Our charity comprises talented Fijian Trustees, Youth & Sports Development Officers, Community Development Advisors, Health Professionals, Former Fiji Civil Servants, and experienced OSEP practitioners. The Foundation operates year-round, regardless of volunteers being present and has a budget of approximately 1.5 million dollars annually donated by Think Pacific (UK).

By investing in local staff we ensure that we are making as positive an impact as possible within the communities where we work by not only providing well paid, long-term employment opportunities, but also ensuring that those who know the country and the culture best are directing projects, consulting with community and government officials and implementing our wider charitable initiatives.

Projects address genuine need

We work on projects and initiatives, which have genuine need. We do this by:

- Only supporting existing locally led initiatives that are directed at government and provincial council level.
- All initiatives must align with the Fiji National Development Plan
- All projects have a strategic plan and Community needs assessment compiled by the Ministry of Health.
- Ensuring that any project has the complete support and full engagement of the local community leaders and that the wider community has been consulted throughout the planning, delivery and review of any project.
- Ensuring projects meet local needs and have measures of sustainability from start to finish.

- Please see our 'Bespoke Approach' on our website for more information on our processes <https://thinkpacific.com/about-think-pacific/bespoke-approach/>

Sustainability is central to any project

Volunteering must advance sustainable community development, without damaging the present. To practice sustainable projects, we work to ensure the following:

- That there are sufficient resources to support the project activities and the volunteers and they will never be a burden but only a financial benefit to rural communities we collaborate with and support.
- The project must empower communities by providing support to advance a longer-term community goal or solve an identified problem. Our core aim is facilitating unemployed youth to gain employment, training and skills.
- We do not create our own initiatives. We only support existing local initiatives that are in need of resources to start, continue or expand and would not be funded by other means locally
- We ensure our programs provide sustainability by being interconnected to the local economy. We have invested over 7.5 million dollars since 2009, supporting sustainable business development; This is achieved through making traditional village homestays our primary accommodation offering, supporting local tourism suppliers, using only local accommodation providers, local transport providers and local shops and suppliers for all project resources, food and materials. Through our charity, we also have facilitated the start-up of two community businesses, which are now run by local communities.

- There must always be a definite outcome and exit. Our projects are predominately 'advocacy based' and the culmination of each project is confirmation that the information and learning has been delivered and feedback has been attained. For other initiatives such as supporting youth and community to assist in the creation of sports development, youth clubs or kindergarten programs, we focus upon projects running wholly by the community/ local youths/ local person as exit. To this end we have contributed to over 70 kindergarten schools being established, which now run locally. And over 200 sports clubs and after school clubs, which now run locally and without any volunteer or external charity support.
- Built environment and engineering projects must always have local planning, design consultation, be led by Fijian builders and have wholly local ownership. They must involve community training to ensure skills capacity to repair projects. They must have a clear outcome of community wide use and they must be needs assessed by the Ministry of Health.
- Whatever the project, from mental health advocacy to enterprise projects, sustainability always needs to be incorporated from the outset. We ask ourselves, at what point will the project run without volunteers. And we work towards this aim and defined date.
- As a Fijian charity, our role is to continue to provide support, feedback and consultation with all stakeholders to ensure aims flourish locally or learning outcomes are derived for future best practice.
- We advocate a shift within international volunteer projects from 'helping' towards 'learning' from one another. By ensuring a learning mindset from international students, we foster a culture of communities being empowered and respected, rather than pitied or seen as a demographic to help. International volunteers gain skills from Fijians, are asked to reflect on what they have learnt and Importantly, the interaction between participants and communities is equal – it is about having a connection and doing things together. Through this we readdress any powershift or potential implication that international students may travel to Fiji to find 'solutions' to Fijian development. It is up to local communities, local decision makers and local youth to be

the leaders of projects and initiatives and for our charity to support and integrate international volunteer interaction as local communities, partners and government would see best to achieve their goals (such as cross cultural experience for their youth and income generation)

.Creating local jobs, never replacing them

Central to our mission as a charity in Fiji is creating jobs and training opportunities for local people through our projects and wider aims. Think Pacific volunteers never have or will take jobs from local people. Training and job creation is a key feature of our government MOU's and our contribution to the Fiji National Development Plan. We add to the economy, expand the job market and create opportunities and this is one of our proudest contributions within Fiji. We create employment by:

- Prioritising roles within Think Pacific such as program leaders, project managers, logistics and operations and community development officers.
- As a core aim of our project, we provide advocacy of adult learning, training schemes, local job training and government programmes available across Fiji.
- We provide Internships for over 40 young Fijians annually, supporting the professional development and skills of mainly unemployed youth through our partnership with Fiji National Employment Centre.
- We provide work experience and placement opportunities annually for Fijians from Fiji National University and The University of the South Pacific.
- We fund local apprenticeships, scholarships and short courses for unemployed youth.
- We support a training scheme for local Fijian youth to act as Ambassadors for Public Health, Mental Health, Sports Development and Engineering in their community and continue the local delivery of the Fiji National Development Plan.
- Through millions of dollars of investment into the local tourism industry through use of resorts for briefings and debrief, transport providers, food outlets and shops, we increase employment in hospitality and add to the local economy.

Protecting vulnerable people and children

We take full responsibility for ensuring that vulnerable people and children do not come to harm as a result of volunteering activities. In addition to following National and International Child Protection Guidelines, Think Pacific has a Safeguarding policy and has put together rules to ensure that our volunteers never cause distress to any beneficiary that we work with:

To mitigate risk, we ensure the following:

- We do not and have never volunteered in care institutions or with vulnerable adults
- We do not and have never allowed unskilled and short-term volunteers to work in residential care.
- We do not and have never volunteered with or supported orphanages
- We do not and have never had any roles where volunteers are a primary caregiver to children.
- We ensure volunteers are appropriately vetted in line with Fijian Government Guidelines, regarding police checks, references or meeting other formal requirements for working or coming into contact with children.
- We have an updated and accessible Safeguarding and Child protection policies, which we disseminate to all stakeholders including volunteers, staff and partners and provide briefing and training to staff and volunteers,
- Volunteers are never to be alone with a child and this is communicated and enacted by all.
- Volunteers are trained how to manage sports or youth programs without strict discipline.
- Volunteers are educated in appropriate touching and how to discourage children from engaging with them in an overly tactile manner.
- Volunteers are instructed in how to deal with a situation if they suspect that someone's human rights are being violated.
- Volunteers may only ever work with children in a support role, for example coaching sports or assisting with extra-curricular activities and this is always done with parents, teachers or staff present.
- Think Pacific has registration at government level to adhere to child protection laws
- We partner with Save the Children Fiji for their consultation, toolkits and training.
- We apply a zero-tolerance policy to exploitation, including physical, sexual and emotional violence and have specific PSEAH policy in line with latest DFAT guidelines
- We have a clear code of conduct for responsible volunteer behaviour and acting as a role model.
- We train staff on all policies and how to recognise and report abuse
- Will never have volunteers replace local staff
- We prevent any attachment issues by ensuring volunteers always undertake roles alongside Fijian leaders/ parents/ young adults / teachers and never as primary instructor or care figure.

- The structure of our projects reduces potential issues of attachment as we never provide long term or continuous roles working with the same children or adults. The project is planned and delivered in line with local government objectives to only visit the same community for 1 x short programme (maximum 7 weeks), never more than once per year (at minimum).
- We have been a contributor to the Australian Government Funded a Child Safe Volunteering Hub in the Pacific region to work in partnership and collaboration with local organisations, tourism sector and government to provide a central resource of best practice and expertise in volunteering and tourism.

Safeguarding the dignity of local people

We have the highest regard and respect for the communities and people in Fiji we work with. We ensure measures are in place to safeguard the dignity of local people. We ser a culture of mutual respect. This is achieved by ensuring the following steps are instigated:

- We Do not 'market' poverty. We do not portray local people being in helpless situations needing to be 'saved' by outsiders; instead we use language and imagery to reflect authentic pictures of community life and scenery taken from past projects.
- We stress the ideals of mutual respect and partnership in training and preparation and live these ideals during the project.
- We foster cultural immersion as central to our projects and require volunteers learn about local life, customs and different world views.
- We Consider what is an appropriate level of volunteer time spent within rural communities , working with specific groups and in different contexts and activities.
- We provide mechanisms for the volunteers, community and staff to reflect on and evaluate what they have learnt.
- We put the priorities of the community first and activities are always conducted on local terms.
- We Involve local community leadership and employ collaborative planning from start to finish.
- We will not market our projects as though they are holidays and we demand volunteers go through a selection process to take part.
- Volunteers are always required to conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner. Inappropriate behaviour will be addressed immediately and disciplinary action, including expulsion from the project will be taken.

Financial Transparency

We keep our prices as low as possible whilst ensuring our team expeditions operate to exceptionally high standards, providing a safe, fully supported and structured experience.

We pride ourselves on transparency and ethics when it comes to our project fees and we provide a clear cost breakdown on our website.

<https://thinkpacific.com/dates-and-costs/costs-breakdown/>

Over 70% of each project fee is spent within Fiji and supports local jobs, communities and local tourism.

30% of each project fee is donated to our charity to provide long term and year round support, training and achievement of wider initiatives. This includes providing training, funding internships, supporting local empowerment and job creation for Fijian youths. We have a team of Fijian Project Managers and Youth Development Officers providing year-round programs, evaluations and implementation for rural communities alongside our NGO and government partners, furthering advocacy surrounding messages of public health, mental health, sports development and enterprise at community level.

Volunteer Selection

Think Pacific is a challenging program, involves a great deal of personal investment and is not for everyone. This is not a holiday. With this view we have a policy to only accept volunteers on a selection basis, which includes:

- All volunteers must apply to join our team.
- Volunteers must successfully complete an interview over the phone with one of our team, all of whom have been on placement with us before and are previous staff in Fiji.
- About 40% of all applicants are awarded a place on their preferred team upon successful completion of the initial interview.

- If an applicant does not meet the minimum education and experience criteria or does not adopt the correct learning mindset and cultural interest, we will refuse the applicant until they are able to meet the minimum requirements.
- We require all volunteers to hold relevant DBS check, visa and provide references and required by the Fijian Government to participate in their specific project.

Volunteer Guidance

Think Pacific, alongside the community and Fijian partners work collaboratively to guide, teach and support our volunteers so we can have respectful and purposeful engagement. Our training support includes:

UK Preparation. We provide thorough guidance needed to be prepared for volunteering in Fiji. Through an online Portal, resources, guides, webinars, live online Q&A sessions and follow up phone calls, we foster a learning mindset of volunteers, a culture of support and guidance for best practice and ensure volunteers have the correct kit, medical supplies, flights, visa, insurance and vaccinations.

Fiji Briefing. Each project begins with a minimum 3-day briefing, orientation and training in Fiji. This includes gaining instruction and further understanding by local staff on the project aims, experience, safety and process. It also includes setting learning goals for each volunteer, establishing roles and responsibilities and setting clear objectives for the weeks ahead.

Cultural Learning. We prepare volunteers for Fijian culture, village structure, and we engage the community directly to provide cultural lessons and learning. The family unit within Fiji supports volunteers to integrate into the community and we perpetuate a culture of respect, understanding and immersion into Fijian life.

Clear and Appropriate Volunteer Roles. Due to this holistic approach and learning mindset of our project, our volunteers may be involved in a range of initiatives as part of each project. We ensure from our planning that roles meet the skill set of volunteers and students have the support needed to be effective in their role. We also ensure there is a clear daily itinerary and volunteers know where they should be and what their outcomes are. We market the roles clearly and honestly and before allowing any person to join as a volunteer they must first be interviewed and selected

Health, Safety and Wellbeing. Throughout the project the health, safety and wellbeing of our volunteers and the community is our number one priority. We have thorough risk assessments for each project, crisis management, fire, first aid, transport policies and 24 hour support

throughout as well as additional support for mental health, all of which can be viewed on our Staff Portal. <https://thinkpacific.com/staff-portal/>

Resources and handouts

Volunteers are discouraged from distributing donations or giving gifts to the children or youths we work with. It is important to Think Pacific that community members and especially children, do not expect gifts or hand-outs from volunteers. Think Pacific aims to create a position of equality between volunteer and community members and not to see themselves as receivers of charity. This can reduce equality and self-esteem, create reliance.

Volunteers are welcome to bring resources to help them in delivering their sessions, which can then be utilized by future youth groups. Volunteers are also allowed to provide a small and appropriate welcome gift for their families, ideally to be shared by the whole family. In return Fijian families often reciprocate with offerings such as small handicrafts.

As an organisation, Think Pacific Foundation prioritises its funding on providing access to training and skills development for Fijian youth as a core follow up action to programmes.

Our Foundation does also make grants and provide resources annually, but each request is vetted by Fijian trustees and in consultation with stakeholders in line with our foundations policy of fairness and due diligence. Donations of resources to registered local groups have included medical resources and ultrasound machines to rural medical facilities, stationary and learning resources for Fijian schools and kindergartens, sports equipment for youth groups or support in community completing local building projects.

We value the importance of Fijian beneficiaries having awareness that these donations come from and are fully overseen and directed by a registered Fijian charity and not outside source. Although funding does come predominantly from volunteer donations, they are managed locally.

Continuous improvement and evaluation

Volunteering can be beneficial for all parties. Yet it is complex and honest self-reflection and evaluation, and dedication to continually improving is needed to achieve best practice. This is

required of all stakeholders – the volunteer, Think Pacific, the host organizations, local communities and the government.

Crucial to success is that we evaluate each project from both the host community and the volunteers. Evaluation includes post project interviews, village workshops and discussion, volunteer reflection and discussion and data gathered through anonymous forms. Co-creating the evaluation criteria in conjunction with all stakeholders, especially the host communities, has helped us to ensure that everyone is moving towards the same objectives.

We believe that reflecting on past actions, collaboratively working with local partners to monitor, debate, improve and progress is what constitutes best practice. This is an intrinsic and constant process.

We continually look at useful and relevant ways of how impact can be measured. This includes reporting on outcomes that were planned at the beginning of the project, using surveys, anonymous feedback and hosting honest discussion forums with community members, government partners and volunteers to retrieve critical feedback. We have started to produce data from our community feedback forms as well as logging the number of objectives achieved (including persons employed, local persons engaged in training, local work placements offered, number of facilities completed, number of local sports and youth clubs that have reached sustainability, impacts upon local business and level of financial investment in areas of the local economy). Looking forward, we wish to link to others into this process, such as universities in Fiji and external bodies and this is a process we are consulting upon at present as well as creating more formal and comprehensive joint reports to be produced annually.

How do we facilitate a positive and respectful volunteer mindset?

No saviours. No heroes. Just equal collaboration.

We ask volunteers to bring an appropriate mindset. We take responsibility for teaching you to be an appropriate volunteer. Questions to ask when wanting to volunteer. Do you pity or do you empathize? Do you come to teach or to learn? Are you saving Fiji or celebrating Fiji? Always put context into situations – How would you volunteer at home? We ask volunteers to keep their approach and mindset to visiting 'lower economically developed countries' on an equal footing and be a wiser and more respectful visitor.

As both a UK organisation and a charity in Fiji, we acknowledge our responsibilities to manage students' expectations of volunteering. We aim to raise the standard of students engaging in responsible volunteering abroad by:

- Ensuring our brochure, guides and marketing material reflects a true as possible and honest portrayal of the programs in Fiji and the challenge, expectations, expected contribution and experience.
- Taking a proactive stance on re-defining narratives; for example, from 'Poor countries need Western help' to 'We can all learn about the world and help each other'.
- Refraining from portraying a distorted image of Fiji or creating pity, but rather celebrate Fiji.
- Ensuring our language on the phone or in material is empowering towards Fiji.
- Selecting volunteers through application forms and interview and turning volunteers away who do not match the ethos or aims of the project – volunteering in Fiji is a privilege not a rite of passage.
- Ensuring volunteer roles and duties are matched to the volunteers' level of skill and capability,
- Only engaging volunteers in roles that they would be allowed to undertake in their home country.
- Providing thorough pre-departure support and advice and teaching how to be the best example of an international volunteer.
- Encouraging students to be reflective, honest and critique their intentions and motivations behind joining our expedition.
- Advising students to be realistic about what value they can contribute to the project and what limits they should expect.
- Requesting students come to Fiji with a 'Learning Mindset'.
- Demanding students to show respect at all times to local people, culture, customs and ways of life and to listen and try to understand local ideas.
- Enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards our code of conduct and for students to be accountable, responsible and the best version of themselves in Fiji

A message to our prospective volunteers

If you're considering Think Pacific, then with the right mindset, you will have a hugely purposeful and rewarding experience, filled with adventure, culture and new friends made in Fiji.

But be prepared to leave your comfort zone for a great challenge, tremendous learning, honest reflection and immense cultural exchange.

We practice volunteering where your 'contribution' is best achieved by small thoughtful interactions, undertaken after first investing in understanding and learning through a Fijian perspective.

Through working side by side with Fijian youth on equal footing, discussing local and global challenges and working together to collaboratively achieve project outcomes, you will return a wiser, more educated 'traveller' who has made a true connection with Fiji. And you'll encapsulate volunteering 'the Think Pacific way'

The future direction of volunteering?

We're always open to discussion, debate and collaboration on best practice in international volunteering, service learning, internships, study tours and all forms of responsible experiential travel in Fiji.

We make it our duty to work closely with organisations within Fiji and outside organisations who wish to engage and discuss best practice, including collaborating with governments, universities and NGO's and fellow organisations. We are always looking to strengthen our approach and raise standards. This must involve all parties and especially the host communities and local partner as the driving force and leader.

Over the past decade Think Pacific's projects and charitable activities have become more diverse and, in some ways, more specific as they align with changing community needs and Fijian Government Policy. From feedback from communities and stakeholders we are constantly making small adaptations to suit the needs of the host communities and ensure decisions are made where their needs are prioritized first and foremost.

We have seen a shift in movement, which has been led by communities and local government, wishing for a greater focus on volunteers connecting at a deeper level with local communities, sharing world views and skills, and exchanging knowledge and ideas collaboratively and equally.

This view, positioning volunteering less as 'helping' and more as 'learning' is being adopted more and more by forward thinking organisations. A concept being supported in academic journals, government departments and highlighted recently as a model of best practice by the

Asia-Development Economic Forum (February 2019). It's a vision we believe fosters a more positive and empowering version of sustainable, responsible and ethical 'volunteering'.