

20. New Zealanders as international volunteers

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Every year in February, as students arrive back on campus and into classes, the recruiters are ready. The coloured flyers are pinned on noticeboards, the classroom booked for lunchtime meetings, permission sought to speak in lectures. The slogans are enticing: 'Experience the difference you can make' ... 'Want to be part of something bigger? ... 'Where do you want to explore?' Accompanied by pictures of happy volunteers posing with children in Fiji or hugging elephants in Laos, these slogans are common in volunteer tourism ('voluntourism') marketing, and attract thousands each year to travel to locations all over the globe.

But, should the prospective volunteer search further, they might come across a very different set of ideas on volunteering. From 'Barbie Saviour' on Instagram, satirising volunteers through '#slumfies' and '#saviorchic' (*barbiesavior*, 2016), to SAIH Norway's 'who wants to be a volunteer' parody video (SAIH Norway, 2014), and a raft of critiques of volunteers on blogs, Twitter and in the media (Cole, 2012; No White Saviors, n.d.; Rosenberg, 2018; Zakaria, 2014). Scholars have also pointed out concerns with the marketing and practices of volunteering, critiquing voluntourism organisations for unethical behaviour and for perpetuating colonial power structures and white saviourism.

Despite this, large numbers of New Zealanders continue to volunteer overseas, at least up until the Covid-19 pandemic forced international travel to a near shutdown. This chapter explores volunteering as a form of active citizenship outside our border, from long-term skilled volunteering to voluntourism, and examines both the opportunities and the pitfalls of international volunteering, including the debates introduced above. As citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) we are often engaged in discussions about colonialism, and in ongoing debates about citizenship, rights and justice within our country. This chapter brings these debates to the practise of international volunteering, asking new questions of New Zealanders who want to volunteer outside our borders, in order to encourage critical thinking around the role and practices of international volunteers, and to pose new questions for those who are thinking of volunteering in the post-Covid era. Rather than asking where you want to go, or

what you want to do, we ask: Why do you want to go? What can you actually do? And, should you be going at all?

What is international volunteering?

International volunteering is defined by scholars as ‘an organized period of voluntary engagement and contribution to society across international borders with little or no monetary compensation’ (Lough, 2013), and is considered a way to ‘lessen nationalistic and ethnocentric attitudes while increasing global citizenship and perceptions of responsibility to people in other nations’ (Lough & McBride, 2014, p. 457). The term covers everything from two-year development volunteering positions to one-week volunteer tourism trips; from skilled technical, medical or educational assistance, to painting walls and digging gardens. To understand this, Lough (2013) proposes a helpful spectrum of volunteering, from development volunteering to voluntourism. At the **volunteer** end of the spectrum is international volunteer service, international volunteerism for development, also referred to as long-term international volunteerism. These are longer-term placements — often for 1–2 years — include placement-specific training, and often pay volunteers a stipend during their service. These placements typically require professional or technical skills, and are demand-based: host communities request volunteers with specific skills (for example, a librarian to train local library assistants, or a website developer to work with a government department).

At the **voluntourism** end of the spectrum are the experiences highlighted at the opening of this chapter, which combine short-term volunteering with travel. These experiences require little or no training or skills, and generally the volunteer pays all associated costs. In the past couple of decades an increasing number of organisations and private businesses have appeared offering voluntourism experiences, which are generally supply-based and cater to the volunteers interests (Lough, 2013). Between development volunteering and voluntourism lies a diverse range of volunteer forms, including opportunities focused on facilitating cross-cultural understanding or shorter-term professional or technical assistance, and youth volunteering associated with an ‘OE’¹ or gap year and school trips.

A brief history of international volunteering

Volunteering as we know it today is closely linked to the post-Second World War era of development. It has roots in nineteenth-century missionary service, the work of early voluntary-sector organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross

¹ ‘OE’ is a well-known abbreviation of ‘overseas experience’.

(founded in 1864) and post-First World War work camps that brought young people from Europe and North America to work in parts of Europe devastated by war or famine (Lough, 2013; Sobocinska, 2017). However, it was during the era of development² following the Second World War that the idea of international volunteering as we know it today started to take shape and spread, as states and transnational organisations sent volunteers to help the newly decolonising colonies develop economically.

One of the first volunteer programmes was the Australian Volunteer Graduate Scheme, which was established in 1951 as a response to an Indonesian request. As Sobocinska (2017, pp. 54–55) describes:

On their way to the 1950 World University Service conference in Bombay, two Melbourne University students befriended an Indonesian delegate who told them of the critical skills shortage facing his nation as the Dutch colonial bureaucracy departed. VGS was established shortly afterwards: the first volunteer, Herb Feith, departed for Jakarta in 1951, followed in 1952 by two more volunteers and funding from both the Australian and Indonesian governments.

Although the scheme was developed to address Indonesia's need for skilled workers and Australia's need to improve its image in Asia, it quickly expanded in terms of new receiving nations, and by actively spreading the model of development volunteering abroad. The influence of VGS can be seen in the development of the UK Voluntary Services Overseas (1958), the United States Peace Corps (1961), the Canadian University Service Overseas (1961) and the United Nations Volunteers (1970) (Sobocinska, 2016). ANZ was one of the first to pick up the model. As early as 1951, VGS contacted the New Zealand University Students' Association and the New Zealand Student Christian Movement. The organisations stayed in touch, and in 1955 the New Zealand Volunteer Graduate Scheme (NZVGS) was formally established, following a conversation on a flight from Indonesia between the Australian VGS secretary and New Zealand's Minister for External Affairs and the department's Secretary.

In late 1959 the first two VGS volunteers left New Zealand, to serve for 18 months in Indonesia (March, 1961). In 1962 NZVGS and a School Leavers' Scheme, which had originated in Britain, were incorporated into one organisation: Volunteer Service Abroad

² The beginning of the development era is usually associated with US President Truman's 1949 inaugural address, which announced a 'bold, new program' to address underdevelopment around the world. In the speech, Truman stated that experts from the United States should share their 'technical knowledge' with underdeveloped countries to facilitate economic growth and raise standards of living.

(VSA). The objective of this new organisation was to contribute to ‘the development of friendship between the peoples of New Zealand and the peoples of southern Asia and the Pacific Islands by recruiting, training, placing and maintaining New Zealanders as volunteer workers to assist such peoples and their Governments in the task of developing their respective countries’ (Hansen, 1965).

Internationally, the volunteering movement grew slowly, despite increased public awareness of global affairs following the anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. However, from the 1970s smaller private and voluntary-sector international voluntary organisations (IVOs) began to proliferate, including Médecins Sans Frontières (1971) and Habitat for Humanity (1976), and both public and private IVOs continued to expand and flourish by the end of the century (Lough, 2013). In ANZ, the growth of the sector was slow, with many non-government development agencies just beginning to appear or expand their operations during the 1990s, including local branches of international organisations such as Oxfam, World Vision and Save the Children (Overton, 2012). While many were successful in appealing for public support through campaigns such as child sponsorship and 40-hour famines, volunteering opportunities were limited to skilled development volunteering. However, since the 1990s the number and variety of IVOs and international volunteering experiences have expanded dramatically.

From VSA to IVHQ: international volunteering agencies in ANZ

While there is no way to know how many New Zealanders leave the country with the intent to volunteer, one way of measuring the popularity of international volunteering is to explore the diversity of organisations recruiting and sending volunteers from ANZ. These range from government-supported, professional programmes to full, for-profit travel agencies (see Table 1).

Using Lough’s (2013) categories we can see that both government-supported and non-government organisations (NGOs) send long-term development volunteers to work on a range of programmes and projects around the world. For example, ANZ’s first volunteer-sending organisation, VSA, continues to work with partner organisations, recruiting volunteers for specific positions. At the time of writing, the positions advertised on the VSA website included a sports development adviser to Kiribati, a finance and administration mentor to Bougainville, a veterinarian for Tonga, and the Univol programme for New Zealand graduates.

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Many international non-government organisations (INGOs) offer shorter-term skilled volunteering. For example, Caritas New Zealand oversees the Catholic Volunteers Overseas (CVO) programme, which matches New Zealand volunteers to situations in Oceania that are appropriate to their skills, for medium- to long-term placements. As with VSA, the placements are demand-driven — partners in receiving countries send requests for assistance from partners, which are posted on the Caritas website for potential volunteers to see.

While many NGOs no longer send volunteers (for example, Red Cross now only sends paid professional ‘delegates’ overseas), and others offer mainly long- or medium-term, skilled volunteering for development, there are still many NGOs offering short-term volunteering experiences, some of which overlap with voluntourism. For example, the medical charity Mercy Ships offers a range of unpaid, volunteer positions from two weeks to five years, with volunteers expected to fundraise in order to pay crew fees of US\$125–US\$700 per month (Mercy Ships, 2020). Child Rescue recruits for longer-term skilled positions in administration, media, medical and operations, but also offers short-term, paid trips.

While patterns of volunteering can be easily tracked for large, international organisations, patterns of volunteering among smaller NGOs, and professional, community and diaspora groups are harder to gauge. Significant numbers of New Zealanders volunteer each year through community and professional contacts, or with smaller organisations such as The Cambodia Trust and Smiles for the Pacific, which send a few, highly-skilled volunteers for specific roles in a small number of destinations. Diaspora groups also often operate within their own communities to mobilise resources to help, particularly in times of emergency. For example, during the 2019 measles epidemic in Sāmoa, the Samoan Doctors Worldwide Volunteer Service was formed and sent 40 Sāmoan doctors from Australia and New Zealand to Sāmoa to assist in the medical response (Rheeney, 2020).

As faith-based organisations, the work of INGOs such as Caritas and Mercy Ships overlaps with religious volunteering. The distinction made in Table 1 relates to the stated purpose of the volunteering — if the aim of the volunteer’s work is primarily about development or technical assistance, the organisation is categorised as an NGO. However, many groups have a clear aim that is primarily religiously or missions-oriented. For example, Youth with a Mission (YWAM) and associated missions have an explicit commitment to ‘presenting Jesus personally to this and future generations’ (YWAM, 2017). Church-based short-term missions are also a longstanding form of volunteering, and ‘short-term mission trips’ by the churches are an integral part of church mission activities (Hart, 2016). Trips by

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church members to visit projects and sister churches overseas ‘combine global travel with worship, evangelism and volunteerism . . . where participants might also run a children’s club, assist in a building project or provide some other form of labour’ (Hopkins et al., 2015, p. 388). These religious groups generally only recruit internally, and expect volunteers to be fully self-supported through fundraising.

At the other end of the spectrum from development volunteering is voluntourism. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, voluntourism organisations and businesses were thriving, with voluntourism trips advertised by specialist organisations and generalist tourism agencies, including STA. Prices vary significantly, but even the cheapest are in the thousands. Several large international volunteer tourism agencies operate in ANZ, including some offering full service (recruitment, travel, and direct provision of the volunteering programmes), while many others work with local partners and NGOs to provide volunteering experiences. Experiences range from a year or more (including ‘gap year’ programmes) to a week or even less. Included here are school trips, where groups of high-school students fundraise thousands of dollars to travel to places such as Northern India and Vietnam (Keogh, 2019). While many of these organisations are based in Europe, the United States or Australia, some are founded and based here. For example, International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ) was launched by Dan Radcliffe from the Radcliffe family farm in Taranaki in 2007 (IVHQ, n.d.). IVHQ is a private company that claims to have sent over 113,000 volunteers to 40-plus countries since 2007.

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Opportunities

Most volunteering agencies, whether providing opportunities that are short- or long-term, paid or unpaid, share laudable goals. Volunteering for development is an integral part of the work of development NGOs and community organisations, and there is considerable scholarly support for long-term and well-designed volunteering programmes (Schech et al., 2015; Tiessen, 2018; United Nations Volunteers, 2015). Development volunteering is highlighted in the United Nations’ *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which explicitly recognises volunteer groups as stakeholders to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³, and as providing a means to bring people together, strengthen

³ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 goals, and associated targets and indicators that were agreed to by all of the UN member states in 2015, and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. They are described as a ‘blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all’, and address challenges including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice (United Nations, n.d.).

civic engagement, deepen solidarity, provide technical support and enhance capacity (Howard & Burns, 2015; United Nations Volunteers, 2020).

Moreover, all volunteering programmes are strongly linked to discourses of global citizenship, and the promotion of cultural understanding and solidarity, mutual learning, empowerment, social justice and community-building. International volunteering can do much to promote intercultural understanding, bringing people from different cultural settings together, and to building international solidarity (Howard & Burns, 2015). Proponents believe it can open new opportunities to ‘enhance global citizenship by connecting citizens and facilitating the education and learning of citizens across country, region, religious, or ethnic divides’ (Devereux & Holmes, 2018, p. 103). For example, in their study of volunteering Howard and Burns (2015, p. 6) found that the cross-cultural relationships formed by development volunteers have considerable significance as a form of solidarity, and can challenge the social norms of both the volunteers and the communities in positive and constructive ways.

Even very short-term volunteering and voluntourism can have positive impacts for both the volunteer and the host, where there are collaborative opportunities that support long-term sustainable development. Relationships between hosts and volunteers are key to this. For example, research with voluntourists in Fiji found promise in the two-way learning and strong relationships formed between volunteers and hosts, particularly within home-stays (McLennan, 2019). McAllum and Zahra (2017) also found that the embodied, face-to-face encounters of voluntourism can open unexpected relational spaces and enable a dialogue in which there is a sharing and exchange of cultural meaning.

Pitfalls

Despite the ambitious aims of most international volunteering agencies and volunteers, both the scholarly literature and the internet are replete with stories of volunteering assignments gone wrong, and of volunteers ending up in places they shouldn’t be or doing things they shouldn’t be doing. The strongest critiques are directed at the voluntourism end of the spectrum. But while many organisations at both ends have introduced codes of conduct and strive for ethical volunteering, unethical and unsafe practices remain a significant concern, in particular volunteering with children, and the use of unskilled and inexperienced volunteers.

Work with children

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Some of the most popular of volunteering placements involve work with children. Volunteers are often drawn to the idea of helping children, but there is significant potential for harm, ranging from separation anxiety (when a volunteer forms a relationship with a child and then must leave) to abuse and exploitation. Best-practice guidelines emphasise the recommendation that short-term, untrained volunteers and voluntourists do not work with children (see, for example, Milne et al., 2018), and most agencies sending development volunteers no longer send volunteers to work directly with children and other vulnerable groups unless they have a long-term commitment, clear expertise and are well-trained.

However, many voluntourism agencies continue to market opportunities to volunteer with children. Of particular concern is orphanage tourism, where volunteers are placed in orphanages to assist with childcare, education or orphanage maintenance. Over the past decade this practice has been widely criticised in both the academic literature (Cheer et al., 2020; Guiney, 2018; Wearing, Young, & Everingham, 2017) and the media (Keogh, 2019; Papi-Thornton, 2017; Rosenberg, 2018). While many volunteers are drawn to working with children, orphanage volunteer tourism is implicated in long-term problems for the children, including abandonment and related emotional issues, and for widespread corruption and exploitation of children for profit (Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2014; Wearing et al., 2017).

Guiney (2018) argues that the commodification of children through orphanage tourism experiences has resulted in an expectation that the children will behave as ‘poor-but-happy’ orphans, and engage intimately with volunteers in order to encourage sympathy and donations. In many cases the children in orphanages are not orphans at all – one study found that more than three-quarters of children living in orphanages have at least one living parent (Guiney & Mostafanezhad, 2014; UNICEF, 2011), and orphanages are often built simply to cater for the voluntourism trade. These critiques have been heard and acted on by many voluntourism agencies (Jones, 2018; Projects Abroad, n.d.), although many New Zealanders continue to undertake orphanage tours (Keogh, 2019).

Inexperience

Most volunteering for development programmes emphasise the need for volunteers to have appropriate experience and qualifications. This is less important for short-term and voluntourism experiences, which are often marketed as a way of gaining work and overseas living experience (McGloin & Georgeou, 2015). For example, teaching or health students may find it beneficial for their CV and job applications to have a placement in a school or health programme overseas. This means that volunteers are often gaining rather than sharing

experience, and therefore they have limited knowledge and skills on which to draw in the volunteering placement. This raises questions about the use of impoverished communities as learning spaces for privileged international volunteers.

This inexperience can also place communities at risk, particularly where volunteers are left in situations that are beyond their skill and qualifications; for example, a high-school graduate volunteer left in charge of a room full of students, or a nurse asked to perform tasks they are not qualified to do at home (Hartman, Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2014; McLennan, 2014, 2019). In one well-known example, an American volunteer in Tanzania discovered that the basic construction work they were doing was so bad that each night local men had to take down the structurally unsound bricks and rebuild the structure, so that when the volunteers woke up in the morning they would be unaware of their failure (Rosenberg, 2018). The worst-case scenario is that faced by the American missionary and volunteer Renee Bach, who is implicated in the deaths of 105 children in Uganda, where, despite having no formal medical training, she is accused of diagnosing and treating children while running an unlicensed medical facility (Winsor, 2019).

Impact on local communities

Volunteering can also have negative repercussions for host communities. Donations of clothing, shoes, medical supplies or water filters can divert business from local markets. Volunteers often perform jobs that locals could do better, from building walls and digging wells to providing medical care (Guttentag, 2009; McLennan, 2014). This free labour has the potential to disrupt local economies and to promote a cycle of dependency. This cycle is also perpetuated through the reinforcement of the 'ethos of the expert' (Wearing, 2001, p. 51), where outside knowledge is prioritised over local knowledge. Hosting volunteers can also divert energy from other projects — such as the example of wall rebuilding above. Staff of host organisations may be called on to act as translators and guides, rather than undertaking other tasks that are more important locally. All of these processes can undermine the self-sufficiency of host communities and further entrench unequal relationships.

[Beyond the pitfalls: volunteering as neo-colonialism](#)

The preceding discussion is somewhat misleading. It provides a (hopefully) clear overview of what the international volunteering sector looks like in ANZ, some of the benefits of international volunteering, and some key problems to look out for. But if you read the introduction to this chapter carefully, you might have noted that there are some deeper

questions that go beyond harm minimisation and questions of who pays and for what. Questions are — rightfully — being asked whether international volunteering is a useful means to engage across borders and to practise active citizenship globally, or if it is simply a form of (white) saviourism that serves only to increase the influence, reach and power of [the Global North]⁴, and which leaves intact colonial relations of power (McGloin & Georgeou, 2015).

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Colonial history

There is no doubt that international volunteering has been profoundly influenced by the legacy of colonialism. Think back to the history of development volunteering earlier in this chapter. While the genealogy of development volunteering is complex, it draws on missionary and colonial traditions, and on the paternalistic foundations of the development era, even as it was positioned as a radical departure from the colonial past (Sobocinska, 2016, p. 370). And think about the way in which international voluntary work usually goes only in one direction. The Global North (of which New Zealand is part) sends volunteers, while the ‘rest of the world’ are ‘host countries’ which appear to need the help of the volunteers. Scholars argue that this is not question of geography, but a historical and colonialist construction, and one which Blum and Schäfer (2018, p. 159) note is not an equal exchange or transcultural learning, but one that is unequal to its core:

Being able to participate [in volunteering] depends ultimately on things like visa regulations, access to education and a person’s financial resources. People who live in the Global South are subject to marginalization, poverty and exploitation (Bendix et al., 2012, p. 4), and are thus generally unable to participate in volunteer programs. Right from the beginning, such programs are based on relations of dependence and inequality which render a transnational exchange on equal terms impossible.

International volunteering is both a product of this colonial history, and a process that continues to perpetuate neo-colonial relationships. International volunteers — whether short- or long-term, skilled or unskilled — travel and work in a world in which colonial histories continue to have major implications for global economic, political and social systems (Kadomskaia, Brace-Govan, & Cruz, 2020). These histories also underpin the narratives of development on which most volunteering rests, a narrative originally based on the colonial

⁴ The term ‘Global North’ is an alternative term to “first world” or developed countries and refers to the world’s richest and most industrialised countries (most of which are located north of the 30th northern parallel, and benefited from colonialism).

imperative to ‘civilise’ the ‘primitive’, and the binaries of coloniser/colonised, West/East and North/South (Said, 2003; Spivak, 1987).

As scholars have argued, there is a neo-colonial urge in development work that needs to position the host organisation and peoples as lacking, in order for the heroic subject from the ‘developed’ world to save (Howard & Burns, 2015, p. 5). At the core of development — and of international volunteering — is the still powerful ideology that the Global South is better off with the ongoing interventions of development than it is without them (Mostafanezhad, 2014, p. 1). The good work that most individual volunteers and IVOs aim to do is often enabled by ‘a naïve glossing over of differences, including disparities in power and privilege between the nations and peoples in the Global North and South’ (Lough & McBride, 2014, p. 465).

White saviours

These inequalities, and the neo-colonial and developmentalist roots of volunteering, are evident in the marketing of volunteering and the recruitment of volunteers. Prospective volunteers are often enticed through the premise that they can help ‘save the world’ or ‘make a difference’. While most development volunteering programmes are more careful in their recruitment rhetoric, these tropes remain common, and are particularly evident in voluntourism. Wilkinson, McCool and Bois (2014) refer to this as egoism marketing — appealing to volunteers with a desire to leave a legacy behind.

However, the situation most volunteers find themselves in is always far more complex, and the ability of any individual volunteer to make a lasting positive impact — particularly in short-term placements — is often negligible or non-existent. The result of these heightened expectations based on vague, egotistic marketing is often volunteer disappointment in placements and disillusionment with the volunteering experience (see for example Kaho, 2019; Papi-Thornton, 2017; Reid, 2018). As Kaho (2019) notes, in her blog post about her experience with the voluntourism organisation Floating Foundation:

Everything about Floating Foundation was dependent on Craig [the founder], his merry band of voluntourists, and donations from New Zealand. When they stopped . . . the whole thing stopped. No more medical supplies, no more training. This is how white saviour initiatives work. They don’t centre the communities they enter — and, therefore, they’re not sustainable.

More importantly, as Kaho notes, the marketing and practice of voluntourism feeds into the saviour complex identified by Cole (2012), Ruge (2016) and others. This complex is reinforced by images of white volunteers in impoverished locations, often with children. These images can be racist and objectifying, portraying the volunteers as rescuers so that the viewer may assume that there is nobody else to feed or hold these children. While many volunteer sending agencies actively work to combat this framing, it is hard to avoid. As Georgeou (2012, p. 153) found in research on a long-term Australian development volunteering programme, volunteers ‘began their journey with egalitarian notions of human relations’, but often ended up in unearned positions of power, status and privilege that were hard to resist or challenge.

The commodification of volunteering

Despite the critiques, prior to the Covid-19 shutdown international volunteering was experiencing phenomenal growth, with voluntourism in particular becoming a ‘vast and lucrative’ part of the tourism market (Tomazos, 2015). While development and/or longer-term models of volunteering continue to be an important part of the volunteering landscape, the shift towards shorter placements and paid voluntourism has been referred to as the commodification of volunteering (Howard & Burns, 2015; McLennan, 2019; Wearing et al., 2017). In the process, the idea of ‘helping the poor’ in developing countries has become something to be sold (McGloin & Georgeou, 2015) by ‘an industry for foreigners, run by foreigners, and (financially and emotionally) profiting foreigners’ (Sinervo, 2014, p. 168).

Rather than being primarily concerned with the priorities of the host communities, the focus of voluntourism is on the volunteer, who often pays large fees for the experience. As consumers, volunteers arrive with expectations of the host organisation. These range from the mundane — internet access, good food and logistical support — to the more profound — a sense of accomplishment and feeling they have made a difference through their volunteering. Meeting those expectations can lead to staff feeling more like tour guides than community development workers, and places pressure on the organisation to choose work placements that fit the expectations of volunteers, rather than those most appropriate or that the communities would most benefit from (McLennan, 2017, 2019; Sinervo, 2014).

The commodification of volunteering is also evident in more subtle ways in longer-term development volunteering (VSA, INGOs), where the costs are covered by the sending organisation or a donor agency. As Georgeou (2012) found, IVO dependency on states and other donors has led to a donor-led, donor-created system in which volunteering is a

‘transmission channel’ for a dominant development paradigm underpinned by neoliberal ideology. This is because volunteering occurs in a context in which public services are increasingly privatised and marketised (Georgeou, 2012, p. 24). In that context, volunteering is seen by hosts and funders (including governments) as a cheap and effective means by which to fill gaps in public services (Howard & Burns, 2015), potentially further undermining local employment, skills and services.

Although it is usually understood as an ‘organic, citizen-based activity’ and remains linked to notions of service and citizenship, the spread of neoliberalism and the increasing commodification of volunteering have resulted in volunteering models and practices that prioritise self-interest and individual choice, and which contribute — knowingly or not — to market-led, neoliberal forms of development (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Georgeou, 2012; Howard & Burns, 2015). Indeed Vrasti (2013) argues that rather than contributing to social change, providing meaningful encounters with difference, or offering professional expertise, volunteering is a useful strategy for producing the subjects and social relations neoliberalism requires.

Some questions to consider

ANZ is a unique vantage point from which to volunteer. As a wealthy and developed nation, we are positioned as donors and providers of development assistance, with our volunteers accepted across the globe both as skilled, long-term volunteers and as voluntourists.

However, we are also a settler colonial nation facing the challenges of our own history and contemporary inequalities. While volunteers from ANZ are generally well-regarded for their ability to build relationships and to collaborate with host communities in meaningful ways, it is important that prospective volunteers from ANZ have sufficiently reflected on and understood their own positionality and beliefs before travelling to ‘help’ others. As Tongan-New Zealander Simone Kaho (2019) has noted, racism is a problem within the volunteer organisations she volunteered with, both casual and conversational, and more deeply embedded in white saviour thinking. As she notes, these are both examples of unquestioned colonial mindsets carried by volunteers from here to the places they travel, and which have impacts on the work undertaken and relationships with locals.

Volunteering can be beneficial. As Howard and Burns note, while international volunteers may in some ways embody the colonial legacy and the neo-colonial present, they may also challenge and resist it (Howard & Burns, 2015). McAllum and Zahra (2017) argue that equal power relationships are possible even in voluntourism, where the inexperience of

volunteers and their wish to make a ‘real’ difference were balanced by the knowledge and experience of hosts, building the confidence of both. In my research in Fiji (McLennan, 2019), I argue that rather than facilitating ‘development’, the day-to-day contact between voluntourists and Fijians in home-stay-based voluntourism enabled the emergence of new cross-cultural relationships. This indicates there may be opportunities for reconsidering — and rescuing — spaces for cross-cultural learning and solidarity, and for building relationally based forms of global citizenship that could perhaps encourage Western volunteers to become (in the words of a Fijian participant) ‘more Fijian.’ But even so, volunteering remains inherently unequal: there are currently no programmes bringing Fijian volunteers to work in ANZ, and, until there are, it is difficult to see how international volunteering can be truly equitable. In the meantime, any potential benefit from international volunteering is reliant on an understanding of the local and global contexts in which volunteering occurs, including the inequalities of our divided planet, and the deep and enduring histories of colonialism, exploitation and exclusion.

So, before you consider volunteering, it is important to ask — and answer — some hard questions.

Why do you want to go? Are you moved by pictures of children in poverty? Do you want to ‘give back’ something of your privilege? Why do you feel the need to travel to another country to do so? What is your connection to that country and community?

What can you do? What is the aim of the position? Is it skills-based? If so, are these skills you can and do use at home? (If it is not something you are skilled and qualified to do at home, you shouldn’t be doing it overseas!) Is there any risk you are taking a job from a local? Or is the experience about learning and cultural exchange? If so, are you ready for the intense self-reflection, humility and openness to change required?

Should you be going at all? While many volunteering programmes encourage reflection on ‘why’, the question of ‘should’ is often avoided. It is a privilege to travel, and even more so to live and work in someone else’s community. Unfortunately, we live in a world where volunteering in exotic but impoverished places overseas is considered far more exciting and worthy than staying home and helping out at a local food bank or retirement home. So, if you just want the excitement of travel, be honest. Travel responsibly, support local and indigenous travel and hospitality services, and take the time to get to know the people and to learn about places you visit, but don’t try to save the world while you do it.

However, if, after all of these questions have been asked, and you are comfortable with your answers, and are still extremely passionate about a particular place or role, have the

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opportunity to work with a reputable volunteering agency or local organisation, have real skills to offer, and are committed to building and maintaining relationships as equitably as possible, go. And go as long-term as possible. But don't stop asking the hard questions of yourself, and keep listening to the people around you.

As this chapter ends, there is one more question to consider. As we face the changes wrought by Covid-19 and the existential challenge of climate change, the very notion of travel for pleasure is coming under scrutiny. Questions of travel for education and international service are not far behind. It may be that this chapter is irrelevant in the near future, as the world battles the Covid-19 virus (or the next pandemic), the planet warms and travel declines. But the questions that underpin this chapter are still worth asking. Is international volunteering a useful way to engage in active (global) citizenship?

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Table 1: Volunteer sending agencies in New Zealand

Organisational Type	Examples in ANZ (not exhaustive)	Category ⁵	Focus	Skills required	Volunteer pays	For profit
Government — supported international volunteering agencies	VSA, UN Volunteers	1	Host/ community	Yes	No	No
International NGOs	Caritas; Habitat for Humanity; the Jane Goodall Institute NZ; ADRA; Engineers without borders; Rotary international; Mercy Ships; AIESEC; Child Rescue;	1, 2	Host/ community	Usually yes	Usually no	No
Local NGOs and community organisations	The Cambodia Trust; Smiles for the Pacific; local organisations overseas	1, 2	Host/ community but can be variable	Yes, but can be variable	Variable	No
Diaspora volunteering	Samoan Doctors Worldwide Volunteer Service	2	Host/ community	Yes, but can be variable	Variable	No
Educational / service learning	Antipodeans; World Challenge Australasia; Pure Exploration; school trips	2, 3	Volunteer	Variable, but generally low as emphasis on traveller learning	Usually yes.	Variable
Religious volunteering	YWAM and associated missions (Mission Adventures; Marine Reach; YWAM Ships Aotearoa); church groups	2, 3	Host/ community but can be variable	Variable. Religious commitment usually more	Usually yes	No

⁵ Based on Lough's (2013) categories of international volunteer service:

1. International volunteerism for development, also referred to as long-term international volunteerism.
2. Short-term international volunteerism, also known as international volunteerism for cross-cultural understanding.
3. Voluntourism.

				important than skills		
International voluntourism agencies	Projects Abroad; International Volunteer HQ; Lattitude Global Volunteering; VESA; GO Overseas; Changing Worlds; Global Nomadic; Equipeople; Gap Xperience; Madventure	3	Volunteer	Generally no, but can be variable	Yes	Variable
Tourism businesses	STA Travel; House of Travel Outrigger; Awesome Adventures Fiji	3	Volunteer	No	Yes	Yes

