



LOTUS CHILDREN'S CENTRE VOLUNTEER INFORMATION HANDBOOK

Dear potential volunteer

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with us at The Lotus Children's Centre.

For you to get the most out of your volunteering experience, and for us to get the most out of you, it is really important that you are well prepared for your volunteer placement. This handbook aims to give you a wealth of information about volunteering opportunities at Lotus, and what you can expect during your time with us, should you eventually apply and be accepted. The first section is about Lotus, our history, and what we stand for. From page five there is volunteer-specific information.

If after reading this handbook you still have unanswered questions then please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. On our website we also have testimonials from past volunteers and FAQs, which may also help you.

If you decide you would like to volunteer then please fill in the application form on our website and send it to us for consideration.

We hope to see you soon here in Mongolia!

Best wishes

The Lotus Team

(The information in this handbook is correct as of December 2016)

ABOUT THE LOTUS CHILDREN'S CENTRE

The Lotus Children's Centre is a Mongolian non-profit, non-government organisation that works with vulnerable children and families to help provide basic human rights of shelter, food and education. In 1993 Didi Kalika, moved by the plight of the children living on the streets of Ulaanbaatar (UB), founded the Lotus Children's Centre. At its peak, Lotus cared for around 150 children, many of them babies. As of 2016 the centre cares for around 80 abused, orphaned and abandoned children directly, as well as some families who otherwise could not support their own children. Initially set up to provide basic needs for just a handful of children, Lotus now provides a creative environment and loving family for the children, as well as employment opportunities. The children in the care of Lotus include many who have special needs or psychological issues. At our main centre, children between the ages of 2 and 18 live in family-style houses, according to their age. A housemother supervises the youngest children, whilst an older child supervises their own unit.



Our Goals:

- To provide primary care to all of the children at the centre, including food, health care, clothing and suitable accommodation
- To provide development care so the children can break free of the poverty cycle. As such we aim to give each child a quality education, counselling, tools for building self esteem and access to life-skills.
- To give every child love and attention, and the support of a family group.
- To provide the children with support in their 'post' Lotus lives so that they have a safety net, are able to find employment, and tertiary education placements.

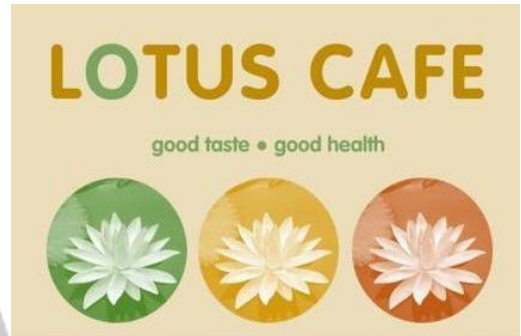
The welfare of our children is the organisation's primary concern. Lotus attempts to keep overhead costs to a minimum in order to ensure that funds are spent on the children's needs rather than administration, which is why we rely on the generosity of our volunteers. As an NGO,





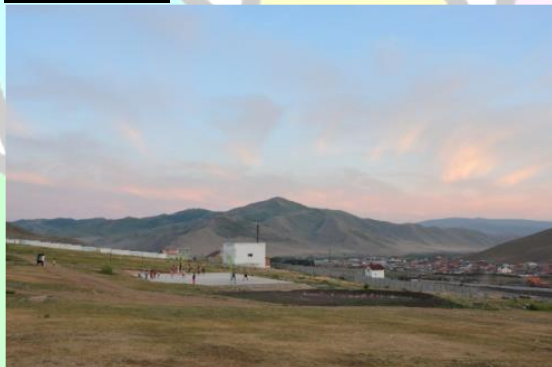
Lotus gets no funding from the Mongolian government, and all of our funding comes from donations and sponsorship. As well as a network of individual supporters around the world, Lotus is supported by the Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team (AMURT) in Italy. All donations are directed towards the children and needy families.

Furthermore, The Lotus Children's Centre also runs The Lotus Guesthouse in UB. All profits from the guesthouse go towards the running costs of the centre, and it also provides employment opportunities for our older children when they grow up. In 2017 we are hoping to open The Lotus Café in town, with similar aims to support the centre both financially and with employment opportunities for our older children.



Locations

Gachuurt



Our main centre is based in Gachuurt, which is around 20km to the east of central Ulaanbaatar. In this beautiful location, out of the city, we have a large secure area of land where our children can safely live and play, away from the dangers and polluted air of the city. In Gachuurt we have our main office, six children's houses, kitchen and bakery complex, an activity centre with

classrooms, library and music room, and an abundance of outdoor recreational space. In 2017 we are hoping to build an extension to our garages which will be a multi-purpose training workshop and indoor play area.

Rose House

We have a smaller centre located centrally in UB, where we look after our children who have special educational and care requirements. By these children living in a smaller separate unit, we are able to give them the more intimate care they require in a more relaxed environment.

The Lotus Guesthouse

Our guesthouse is located just northwest of Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar. The guesthouse offers a range of accommodation from private double rooms to 10-bed dorms, as well as a separate private apartment. In total the guesthouse can





accommodate over 50 guests at one time. The guesthouse also runs a variety of day trips and tours around Mongolia. For more information see lotusguest.com.

The Lotus Cafe

Our café, which we aim to open in 2017, is located very close to our guesthouse to the west of Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar. The café will serve a range of healthy vegetarian hot and cold food as well as juices and smoothies with an emphasis on a healthy lifestyle.

Education and Personal Development

We view education as one of the most important tools in breaking the poverty cycle. The curriculum at state schools in Mongolia is limited, and we try to supplement our children's learning wherever possible. Most of our children go to the local school in Gachuurt, with the older children attend various high school in and around central Ulaanbaatar. We employ social workers that work on extra-curricular activities with our children when they are at home, but we also rely on the various skills and abilities of our volunteers to bring new educational opportunities to our children. For example, our children are very keen to learn new languages, and this is something that volunteers from around the world can help with.



Obviously, many of the children at Lotus have endured incredibly difficult life experiences, including abuse, abandonment and suffering. Lotus is always conscious of developing programs which help children deal with their pasts and develop useful skill-sets for their future. Our team of four social workers and psychologists work to available to equip children with skills that will help them to have a positive outlook on life.

THE LOTUS CHILDREN'S CENTRE - VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is a wonderful way to give something back and to really make a difference. The benefits can be huge for the volunteers, for the children, and for Lotus as a whole. Feedback from our past volunteers tells us that living and working at Lotus is a deeply rewarding experience. Mongolia is a beautiful country with a proud and interesting culture and everyone that comes here is sure to remember the experience fondly for many years. That said, volunteers coming from outside of Mongolia should consider the following points before applying:



- Ulaanbaatar is on average the coldest capital city in the world. We have below freezing temperatures for eight months of the year, with temperatures below -30°C in December and January, but rising above $+30^{\circ}\text{C}$ in July and August.
- Mongolia is a developing country. Living conditions here are often seen as basic and sometimes harsh. This can be difficult for foreigners from more developed countries to adapt to, particularly in the winter months.
- Working with children that have lived on the streets and suffered abuse is not easy. Some of our children have had very difficult starts to their lives, and their behaviours sometimes reflect this.
- Most of our staff speak no, or very little, English, which can make communication a challenge at times.



Roles of volunteers

Our volunteers fill a variety of roles depending on their own skills and interests. It is important for you to decide what you think you can best help Lotus with and put a suggested project forward in your application. Essentially, the reason we need volunteers is to supplement the fun and learning opportunities we can offer our children, as well as to give assistance in developing our centre.

The school summer holidays run for three months June-August, and it is this time that we require help from volunteers the most to help with organising both indoor and outdoor, fun and educational activities for our children to entertain them and supplement their learning. We are also always working on projects to improve our infrastructure, and this is something we look for assistance with from skilled volunteers.





You do not have to be skilled to volunteer at Lotus, but experience in working with children is certainly an advantage.

For skilled volunteers, generally we look people who can offer their time to help with:

- Basic healthcare and dentistry
- Care of children with special needs
- Maintenance
- Gardening
- Baking
- Language teaching
- Performing arts



Whilst we require volunteers mostly during the summer months when the children are on holiday from school, we do accept volunteers all year round. Due to visa restrictions, the maximum volunteers can currently stay is 60 days. We tend to expect volunteers to stay for a minimum of two weeks.

Visas

You should apply for a standard tourist visa at the Mongolian embassy in your home country. In most cases this will be a 30-day visa. You will not need an invitation letter for a standard tourist visa. If you intend to stay for longer than 30 days, then you can register at the Immigration Office within 7 days of your arrival in Mongolia, and then you can extend your visa by a further 30 days. The maximum stay, therefore, in most cases, is 60 days.

Arrival in Mongolia

We recommend that all volunteers spend at least their first night after arriving in Mongolia in the city at our guesthouse. This will allow you time to rest, acclimatise and do things such as changing money and buying a SIM card etc. The guesthouse can also help with pickups from the airport or train/bus station, trips to the immigration office if necessary, and transport out to Gachuurt. Please arrange this directly with the guesthouse by emailing lotusquest@gmail.com.



If you want to make your own way here, please see our website for a map and directions for how to get to Gachuurt from UB.

Accommodation and Food

At our main centre in Gachuurt we have traditional Mongolian gers that our volunteers can stay in, and we can also provide food. **We ask ALL volunteers that stay at the centre to donate 20USD per night** to contribute towards the cost of three meals a day which are provided as well as



accommodation. This donation also contributes to the continuous improvement of our volunteer facilities. Unfortunately, without volunteers covering these costs for themselves, we could not afford to have volunteers. In 2017 we will be building a new toilet/shower block and kitchen facility solely for volunteers. Currently these facilities are shared with the rest of the centre.

Please be aware that the food we provide is the same as what our children eat. This will likely be different to the food you're used to in your home country, and make take some adjusting to. There are local shops if you need to buy your own food to supplement your diet.

What to bring

Project Materials: Unless prior arrangements are made, you should bring any specialist materials you require for your project. This does not mean you need to bring them from you own country, in fact these days most things can be purchased locally in Ulaanbaatar.

Health

Lotus employs a doctor and has a well stocked medical room. All social workers and office staff are first aid trained. It is, however, advisable to bring a personal basic medical kit including plasters, painkillers and antiseptic cream/wipes.

Clothing

The weather in Mongolia is very unpredictable, especially in the summer months when we have been known to experience 'four seasons in one day'. July is generally the rainy season, with August usually being the hottest month. If you're coming between September and April, you should definitely bring lots of warm clothing. It's best to check a long-range forecast online before you travel to get an idea of the temperatures you can expect.



Donations

Please ask us or see our wishlist on our website for ideas of what you can bring to donate. Please tell us if you are going to bring donations so we can advise.

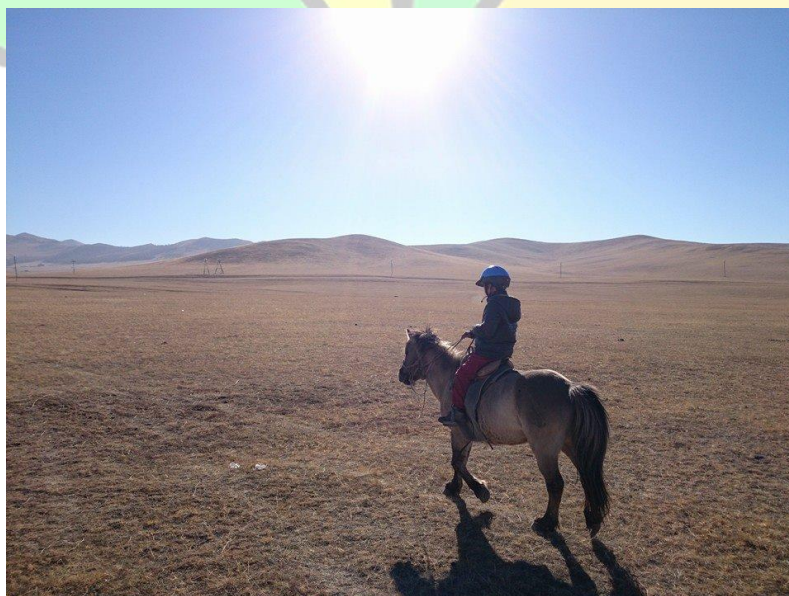


Application Process

1. Having read through this information, you should also review the FAQs on our website, and make sure you are happy to agree to the volunteer code of conduct below. If you have any outstanding questions do not hesitate to get in touch
2. If you decide you would like to volunteer then please send your completed application form (found on our website) to volunteering@lotuschild.org
3. You will receive a response from our volunteer coordinator. At this point your reference(s) will be contacted. We know such a big trip takes lots of planning, and we aim to process your application and confirm acceptance as quickly as possible.
4. You will remain in contact with the volunteer coordinator in the weeks leading up to your trip. The volunteer coordinator will plan your project with you and answer any questions you have.
5. After you arrive at Lotus you will be given an orientation, usually by the volunteer coordinator or, in their absence, by another experienced volunteer. Upon arrival you should also sign the volunteer code of conduct agreement. Where practicable, you will be paired with a volunteer already at Lotus for a day or two to help orientate you. When you are ready you will embark on your own volunteering project!

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information. We hope it has answered most of the questions you may have had about volunteering at Lotus. If you have any questions remaining please get in touch.

Below is our volunteer code of conduct. You will be given a copy of this upon your arrival at Lotus, and you will be expected to sign to say you agree to it.





Lotus Children's Centre Volunteer Code of Conduct

All volunteers must agree to the following code of conduct. Any violation of these rules may result in being asked to leave Lotus with immediate effect.

Lotus Child Care

- No physical aggression towards children
- No suspicious or sexual relationships with the children
- No physical discipline
- No locking children in rooms
- No humiliating children
- No threatening behaviour towards children
- No inappropriate conversations with children
- You will not engage in physical or unruly verbal conflict with children
- You cannot take children off of Lotus' premises without consent of a manager

Working for Lotus

- No smoking, alcohol drinking, or drug taking on Lotus property or around Lotus children
- You should complete all agreed projects/tasks and tell a manager if you are unable to
- You may not invite friends or family to Lotus without the consent of a manager
- You are expected to complete the full term that you agree to volunteer
- You will be a role model for children by working efficiently, effectively and honestly
- You should work as a cooperative team member
- You should endeavour to communicate any grievances or suggestions for improvement with a manager

Lotus Property

- You should treat Lotus property with respect and care
- You must report any broken property to a manager
- You cannot take Lotus property off the premises without consent from a manager
- You must not undertake any form of maintenance work on any Lotus property unless the task is agreed by a manager
- You must keep your own living space clean and tidy
- Theft or dishonesty regarding the use of Lotus property, including the property of staff and children, is not tolerated

Personal Property

- You are responsible for the safety and security of your own property while on Lotus premises. The Lotus Children's Centre accepts no responsibility for any damage, loss or theft of your belongings.