



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, have realistic expectations set, and have the right approach to volunteering. This handbook aims to give you necessary information about volunteering opportunities at Lotus, and what you can expect during your time with us. The first section is about Lotus, our history, and what we stand for. From page five there is volunteering-specific information, which is particularly important for you to have the accurate expectations about volunteering at Lotus.

If after reading this handbook you still have unanswered questions then please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. 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 January 2020)





ABOUT THE LOTUS CHILDREN'S CENTRE

The Lotus Children's Centre is a Mongolian non-profit, non-government organisation (registration #1018701) that works with vulnerable children and families to help provide basic human rights of shelter, care 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 in the early 2000's, Lotus cared for around 150 children, many of them babies. As of 2020 the centre directly cares for around 75 children, 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 6 months and 18 years 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 give every child love and attention, and the support of a family group.
- 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 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; 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 Al Fayed Charitable Foundation and The Lotus Children's Centre Charitable Trust in the UK. All donations are directed towards the children's needs.



We also run 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 opened the Lotus Café in town, with similar aims to support the centre both financially and with employment opportunities for our older children.

Locations



Main site - 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 dining complex, an activity centre with classrooms, library and

music room, and an abundance of outdoor recreational space. In 2018 we opened the IVCO Vocational Skills Training Centre at Lotus, which has workshops for the older children to train in bakery, mechanics, carpentry, hair and beauty, and sewing.

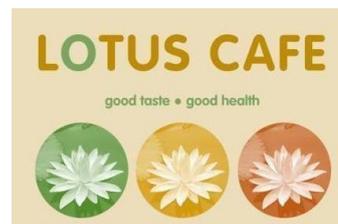
The Lotus Guesthouse

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 www.lotusquest.com or search on Facebook.



The Lotus Café

Our café, which opened in summer 2017, is located very close to our guesthouse to the west of Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar. The café serves 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. Many of our children go to the local school in Gachuurt, while the older children attend various high schools in and around central Ulaanbaatar.



We employ housemothers and 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 housemothers, social workers and psychologists work 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 behaviour sometimes reflects this.
- Most of our staff speak no or very little English, which can make communication a challenge at times.



Some volunteers struggle to settle and be effective because they come with inaccurate expectations of what life is like in Mongolia and at Lotus. Please do not come to Lotus expecting a holiday. Whilst your time with us will certainly be a lot of fun, you may find some things difficult and challenging at times. This is the nature of the work we do and the environment in which we live and

work. You will have many new experiences and find out things about yourself, as you will be living in a new and unfamiliar culture which may test you. The most important thing is to come with an open mind and to refrain from comparing what you see, hear and experience with your own country in the more developed world. Whilst we are always looking to improve the way we do things, it is not helpful to resist everything that is done differently to what you are used to. Remember that Mongolia is a developing country.



Roles of volunteers



All volunteers coming to Lotus must have some relevant skills and/or experience that can be applied to help the organisation. Due to the challenging nature of our work and the responsibilities our volunteers take on, we are unlikely to accept applicants that have not worked with children before.

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. That said, we only have a small group of local staff and thus we rely heavily on volunteers particularly in the summer months. At times you may be asked to take on responsibilities that are extra to your planned project.



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

- Care of children with special needs
- Maintenance
- Language teaching
- Performing arts
- Vocational skills training

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. You will not be met by anyone from the children's centre when you arrive at the guesthouse, if you require assistance upon arrival there then the friendly guesthouse staff will be happy to assist. 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 all of this directly with the guesthouse by emailing lotusquest@gmail.com.

If you want to make your own way here, without assistance from the guesthouse please see our website for a map and directions for how to get to Gachuurt from UB. You should expect to pay around 30,000MNT for a taxi from UB, or the bus costs 500MNT to get here. If you prefer that the volunteer coordinator come to meet you at the guesthouse then please ask and that can be arranged.

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 recent years we have invested in a new toilet/shower block for volunteers as well as a private space for volunteers to relax and spend down time – these are funded by the contributions of volunteers.

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 may take some adjusting to. There are local shops if you need to buy your own food to supplement your diet. Meal times can vary a lot depending on a number of factors, but this is the same situation for all of the children and staff of the centre.



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 your 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. Most 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 forecast online before you travel to get an idea of the temperatures you can expect.



Donations

Please ask us or see our wish list 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. The most effective donation you could make is money, as this means we can spend it on exactly what is needed most at that time.

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 please do get in touch with us.
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 checked. We know such a big trip takes lots of planning, and we aim to process your application and confirm if you have been accepted 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 more



experienced volunteer 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 confirm you agree to it.





Volunteer Code of Conduct

All volunteers must sign and agree to the following code of conduct. These rules are written for the protection of our children and staff as well as volunteers. Any violation of these rules may result in being asked to leave Lotus with immediate effect.

Lotus Child Care

- You must not show physical aggression or threatening behaviour towards children.
- You must not have suspicious or sexual relationships with children.
- You must not physically discipline or humiliate children.
- You must not engage in unruly confrontation with children.
- You must not have inappropriate conversations with children.
- You must not take children off of Lotus premises for any length of time without the consent of a manager.
- You must not enter the children's houses without the permission or presence of a member of staff.
- Children must not enter the volunteer gers, toilet block or rest area. Volunteers are responsible for enforcing this rule.
- You must not give children any medication without speaking to a manager first. In the instance of any injury to a child, however minor it may seem to you, you must inform a manager. Most of the Lotus staff are trained in First Aid.

Working for Lotus

- No smoking, alcohol drinking or drug taking on Lotus premises or around Lotus children.
- You should complete all agreed projects/tasks and tell a manager if you are unable to.
- You must 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 are expected to have a proactive and motivated work ethic, and to work efficiently, effectively and honestly as a cooperative team member.
- Do not give gifts directly to children without the consent of a manager.
- You should give any donations to a manager so that it can be used in the best possible way.
- The daily donation for staying at Lotus must be paid in full before or upon your arrival.
- If you have any concerns or grievances about anything you see, hear or experience at Lotus you should discuss it with a manager as soon as possible. You should not involve children or other volunteers with your concerns.
- If you have any suggestions for improvement you should discuss them with a manager.



Lotus Property

- You must treat Lotus property with care and respect and report any broken property to a manager.
- You must not take Lotus property off the premises without the consent of 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, including your ger, the volunteer toilets and rest facilities 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 will accept no responsibility for any damage, loss or theft of your belongings on or off site during your volunteering period.

Child protection and confidentiality

- You must not take photos of the children without their permission.
- You must not publish photos or information about the children on the internet, **including social media**, without the permission of a manager.
- You must not share details of any incidents or issues that arise involving the children with people outside of Lotus, including after you have left.
- If a child confides in you about something that has happened to them you must share this with a manager so appropriate steps can be taken to protect them or resolve the situation.
- If you are unsure of anything or if anything is worrying you, you should always ask for advice. Lotus has a very experienced management team that can assist you.

If any of this code of conduct is not clear or if anything needs clarifying, please speak to a manager. Note that for the purpose of this code of conduct, a *manager* refers to the Lotus Director, the Centre Manager or the Volunteer Coordinator.

Telephone Numbers

Lotus Director – Didi (+976 99132100)

Centre Manager – Bolormaa (+976 99789750)

Volunteer Coordinator – Connor (+976 94337213)

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.