

Coming Home: How to Make an Impact After Your Volunteer Program

We've all heard about culture shock—that disconcerting, fish-out-of-water feeling that comes with newly visiting a foreign locale. Many international volunteers don't realize they can experience that same phenomenon upon returning home. Once you're back on familiar ground after a volunteer excursion, you may feel a little disheartened that the trip is over and disconnected from your charitable cause. The good news is, you don't have to stop volunteering just because you're back on native soil. We invite you to explore our tips for getting adjusted and staying involved after you've returned.

Give yourself time to acclimate. Just as you needed a transition period when you first arrived at the foreign locale, there will be an adjustment period once you've arrived back at home. Alleviate any feelings of detachment by spending time looking through journals, photos, and mementos of your time abroad.

Cultivate newly formed relationships. Stay in contact with the people you met during your journey. As long as both parties are interested and willing, long-distance friendships can prove to be rewarding and mutually enlightening. You might also try reaching out to local communities of people with their roots in the country you just visited as a way of staying connected with the culture.

Stay involved locally. Although nothing rivals volunteering abroad, there are likely plenty of organizations in your area that would welcome your time, passion, and knowledge in furthering a particular charity or cause.

Share your story. A good way to prevent your experience from fading is to speak at public venues, such as schools, churches, or volunteer organizations. Recognizing the audience's reaction to and appreciation of your efforts can be highly rewarding.

Turn your experience into a career. One possibility is to tie your particular passion into your work. For instance, if you found it rewarding to assist orphans in Bolivia, you might consider finding a job working with disadvantaged children in your area. Remember: need knows no boundaries.

When returning home from your international travels, be prepared for local people, places, and things to seem different to you—not because they've changed, but because you have. Allow yourself some time to

process the “reverse culture shock,” and do whatever you can to continue to make an impact from home.