

C O R D
(Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development)
Tapovan, Sidhbari, Distt. Kangra, H.P. – 176 057

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS : -

Hari Om and Welcome to CORD at Tapovan [earlier, we were known as Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care & Training Centre (CRPHC&TC) under Chinmaya Tapovan Trust (CTT). CORD is now a national trust for greater outreach in other parts of the country. We are located in the small village of Sidhbari in the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Our project is a comprehensive integrated rural development and women's empowerment programme, initiated by Poojya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda's Grace in 1985. Our NGO has a variety of programmes in progress and we welcome volunteers whole-heartedly to join, contribute and learn along with us. We hope that some of the following information may help you in deciding which programme you would be interested in, as well as help in your adjustment into our villages and programmes.

Many have helped to make this work possible. However, most of this work would not have been possible without our partners at Chinmaya Mission Halton Region (CMHR) in Canada, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) who have been responsible for this work for the past 11 years to a great extent, besides others who have helped too.

Project Details:

There are a wide variety of programmes in process under our NGO, and we welcome volunteers to choose the programmes they may be interested in working on. This note is simply to give you a brief idea before your visit.

1. Health Department
 - a. Outpatients Walk-in Clinic at the Centre and one External Subcenter Clinic.
 - b. Dai Amma – Village Midwives; Traditional Birth Attendants.
 - c. Village Health Guides - trained village "barefoot health workers".
 - d. Holistic Community Based Rehabilitation and A Full Life for the Differently Abled (HCBRFLDA) Programme – Inclusive Village Level Disability Programme and outpatients care for the mentally challenged, individuals with locomotor disabilities and the hearing impaired.
2. Informal Legal Cell and Social Justice - the legal department handling cases of alcoholic domestic violence, wife desertion, separation, etc.
3. Mahila Mandal - Village Women's Groups.
4. Yuva Mandal - Village Youth Groups for Adolescent Males and Females.
5. Income Generation Schemes - The department handling trade and service skills' development at the village level, for women and men to grow financially independent.
6. Balwadi - Nursery Schools for ages 2-5 in villages.
7. Participatory Natural Resources Management – Training programme for villagers on sustainable management of their natural resources to ensure future agricultural survival.
8. Office – Computer work, filing, secretarial tasks.
9. Local Self Governance – Panchayati Raj Institutions.
10. Adult Literacy.

****Please read the attached Project Summary written by one of our previous volunteers, for details regarding each programme at the Centre, as well as some history/background on the Project.****

Project Instructions and Common Concerns for Volunteers:

1. Since the Project has a vision of sustainable rural development for *the people and by the people*, the majority of the workers are themselves local rural villagers. Also, since much of the work has an emphasis on communication, we prefer Hindi-speaking volunteers. Please try to learn Hindi before you come. This will definitely help you to adjust better to our programmes, and will also allow you to become more involved with the staff and the village community.
2. The village community is very conservative. It is important to try and blend into the community as much as possible for the villagers to accept you. However, this does not mean that you need to change as a person. Women volunteers are advised to wear Indian dresses (Salwar-Kameez or Punjabi Style Dress is suitable for the field). You can purchase Indian clothes at the Project when you arrive.
3. Since the Project is a participatory people's programme, the volunteers have to be prepared for a flexible programme of interaction with the people. There are no fixed scheduled programme activities. We welcome you to become as involved as you'd like to. We usually work all day and sometimes at night too! Oftentimes, volunteers come with the expectation that they will be working right away and become very busy. Please allow yourself time, sometimes even a month or more, to learn about the Project as well as become adjusted to the village community, lifestyle, and culture. Also, you must allow time for the villagers to become comfortable with you as they are not used to interacting with visitors. The pace of the Project may seem very slow for visiting volunteers; please understand that this is a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable development project that has been in process for twenty years now.
4. Traveling to the field/villages from Sidhbhari is not easy because distances can be far and it requires a volunteer to be willing to adjust to rough circumstances including using public buses and walking, sometimes even trekking, to villages, and no toilets in villages. Please bring comfortable walking shoes; you may wear any shoes with Indian dresses here.
5. Immediately upon arrival at the Centre in Sidhbhari, please complete a Volunteer Profile Form - this form will provide the following information to the Project office: Name, Contact Information (Foreign and in India - if applicable), Birth Date, Parents' Contact Information, Photograph, Prior Experience in India, Educational Background and Resume (if available). Also, please meet CORD's National Director, Dr. Kshama Metre, upon arrival.
6. While working in the Project, please observe the following Centre rules:
 - a. No watching of television during working hours in the Centre.
 - b. Without prior permission of the National Director, Dr. Metre, the Project computer and Internet will not be used.
 - c. Please notify Dr. Metre of your whereabouts when you are leaving the Project/Ashram area for village fieldwork, or if you are staying out in the village overnight.
7. Our experience has been that volunteers come with a set time in mind, and expect a corporate set-up. As 3) above explains, it is a totally different game

altogether with the team largely drawn from the community, making it a totally different experience. You will be virtually thrown into a sea of diversity.

It is suggested that you work out which programme you would like to be associated with, and decide what literature, equipment, instruments you would like to bring for that particular programme.

It should also be kept in mind that we are running a participatory development programme and not a welfare organization. Our endeavour is to connect the needy to our Community Based Livelihood's income generation schemes. The indicator for development is self-respect and we must focus on motivating people on the path to self-reliance.

Traveling to Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh from Delhi:

To reach Sidhbari, the following modes of transport can be used:

- 1. By train:** The nearest railway stations are Pathankot and Chakki Bank (which are only 2 K.M. apart). From either station, take a taxi to Tapovan Ashram, which is normally a 3-hour drive. If you are worried about hiring a taxi with an unknown taxi driver, you can call us before your arrival so that we can help you by sending a taxi from here. The taxi driver will display a CORD (Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development) placard. However, the cost would go up in this case. You can also take a bus from Pathankot to Dharamshala, and then take a taxi from Dharamshala to Tapovan, which takes about 20 minutes (8 km.)
- 2. By Bus:** Overnight luxury buses (government or state or private) are available from New Delhi to Dharamshala. The boarding point is at the Inter State Bus Terminus (ISBT) at Kashmiri Gate. There is another service you could call up - Bedi Travels in Delhi, phone number - 91-011-2391-3254 to book your bus ticket privately. This bus leaves from a private point near a Tibetan Monastery at Majnu Ka Tilla. Make sure you know the exact time and place. It usually leaves at 6:30 pm. Tickets can be booked on telephone in the name of Tapovan Project, Sidhbari. From Delhi to Dharamshala, it is a 12-hour bus ride. The Ashram and the Project behind it are 20-minutes (8 k.m.) by taxi from the Dharamshala bus stand.
- 3. By Air:** Direct flights from New Delhi to Kangra (Gaggal) Airport. There are three flights in a week - Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tapovan Ashram and the Project are a 30-minutes drive by taxi from the airport.

Housing and Board Arrangements:

Volunteers generally stay at the Chinmaya Sandeepany Ashram, which is a five-minute walk from the Project. However, during spiritual camps, the Ashram is full with visitors. The largest camps are in March and May each year; please plan your trip accordingly to avoid not having accommodation. It is important to contact our Project well in advance. Please get prior permission from the Ashram management here and inform us again a week before your arrival, so that all arrangements can be made. Please contact Mr. R.S. Kalra at the Ashram Office for information regarding available

accommodation. The Ashram office phone number is 91-01892-234324/236199. E-mail id is ctthm@sancharnet.in.

Food in the Ashram is simple and vegetarian. The Ashram's rules and regulations with regard to the timing of food served, silences, abstinence from alcohol consumption, and non-smoking, have to be observed.

The Ashram has bathrooms attached to each room with a hot water heater. Often, volunteers will be sharing rooms with others, especially when there are many visitors to the Ashram. There is a laundry man that washes and irons clothes for Rs. 5/piece of clothing. Often, volunteers choose to wash their clothes by themselves.

Additional Miscellaneous Information:

1. Volunteers must take responsibility for their own health including health insurance, appropriate immunizations, malaria prevention, and any other necessary medications. Please ask your health care provider at home regarding international health requirements.
2. Bring walking shoes and slip-ons for the Ashram. It is better to have your own torch and umbrella. Bring some mosquito repellent.
3. In the winter months of October to March, warm clothing is required. There is no central heating. The temperature ranges between 2 and 5 degrees Celsius in winter.
4. The summer months of April to the first half of June are quite warm. Monsoon rains begin in the second half of June and continue till September. The rain is often very heavy.
5. Drink boiled or distilled water in India. You may request the office for mineral or filtered water.

Please contact us once you decide to come to volunteer and finalize your plans. Please send us information about yourself, your background, age and areas of interest. One or two weeks before arrival, please send information again regarding the confirmed date of arrival so that proper accommodation arrangements can be made.

On arrival, please ask the project office for a volunteer's form. Fill it and kindly submit your bio data in the Project Centre Office immediately on reaching the Centre, along with your photograph, passport details, emergency contact information (abroad or in India), birth date, and prior experience in India. Please submit passport and visa information at the Ashram Office too upon arrival. Also please do remember, that you are requested to fill in a format on your work experience, before departure.

We hope that this information would answer some of your questions as well as ease your concerns. Please feel free to contact us at CORD, Tapovan, for further information. We look forward to hearing from you soon and seeing you here in the Himalayan foothills!

**Dr. Kshama Metre,
National Director,
CORD (Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development),
Tapovan, Sidbhari, District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh -176 057
Phone : 91-1892-234322, 236987
Fax : 91-1892-235829
E-mail : chinmaya_tapovan@vsnl.com or metre_kshama@yahoo.co.uk**

