

ORPHANAGE VOLUNTOURISM IN NEPAL

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Q. WHAT IS ORPHANAGE VOLUNTOURISM?

'Orphanage voluntourism' includes activities that support orphanages by individuals who are primarily, or were initially, tourists on vacation. Usually the tourist wishes to include a social element in their vacation by volunteering their time. In some cases they also provide financial or material support to the orphanage.

Q. ARE THE CHILDREN IN ORPHANAGES ACTUALLY ORPHANS?

Prior to the Nepal earthquake approximately 16,000 children resided at orphanages in Nepal.¹ It has been estimated that up to 85% of children in orphanages in Nepal have at least one living parent.²

Q. HOW CAN ORPHANAGE VOLUNTEERING BE HARMFUL?

In some cases children are deliberately separated from their families and placed in orphanages so they can be used to attract fee-paying volunteers and donors. In some cases, children are also kept in poor conditions. Further, while orphanage volunteers are generally well-intentioned they often do not realize they could inadvertently cause harm to children. Volunteering for short periods of time without appropriate skills and training could contribute to a repeated sense of abandonment felt by already vulnerable children. In addition, background checks are often not conducted on volunteers. This can increase the risk to children of child sexual exploitation.

Q. WHY IS THERE GREATER RISK FOLLOWING THE 2015 EARTHQUAKE?

The trend of sending children to orphanages in Kathmandu began following the civil war with promises of safety and education. There is concern that the earthquake will accelerate a similar trend and children will be separated from their families. UNICEF and NGOs are working with the Government of Nepal to stop the flow of children away from their families.

Q. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION FOR CHILDREN THAT ARE GENUINE ORPHANS?

As organizations like Next Generation Nepal and The Umbrella Foundation have shown, genuine orphans can be successfully reunified with extended family members such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins or older brothers and sisters. Keeping children with a family is also preferential to growing up in an orphanage.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO CHILDREN OF RESIDING IN ORPHANAGES?

It has long been established that it is better for a child to grow up in a family environment and children should only be institutionalized as a last resort. When children grow up in orphanages they are at risk of physical, mental and sexual abuse. They may also experience attachment disorders later in life and find it hard to develop healthy emotional relationships with other adults. By volunteering at orphanages the institutionalization of children is inadvertently being supported.

Q. HOW CAN YOU HELP CHILDREN IN NEPAL?

UNICEF and its collaborators urges those wanting to volunteer with children, that are not qualified professionals, to reconsider. To help children in Nepal recover from the earthquake donate funds to reputable relief and development agencies, which rebuild damaged rural communities and keep children and families together.



¹CCWB: State of Children in Nepal, 2014, ²UNICEF & TdH, Adopting the Rights of the Child, 2008