

## Mulanje Mission Guidelines: Ethical Visiting and Volunteering

Mulanje Mission offers our guests and volunteers a warm welcome and generous hospitality. In return, we ask that before you decide to visit, you spend a little time considering the following points:

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### *1. Reflect on your motivations for visiting and your expectations for your time here.*

Few, if any, visitors come to MMH for purely unselfish reasons – for some it may be an exciting way to take a break, a holiday, a chance to meet new people and perhaps a chance to share skills or learn new ones. We enjoy meeting new people and the fresh perspectives that they bring, but please remember that this is our home and our workplace, and there are usually good reasons why things are as they are. Your ideas for change may not be in the best interests of the whole community – innovative ideas are welcome but must be assessed by the relevant Mission management staff before implementation.

Try to avoid underestimating the contribution that the knowledge, skills and experience of those who live and work here every day, year in, year out, can make. We are working towards social justice, equality and human rights – i.e. development – for all. Our timescales may not be the same as yours.

Be realistic too - it is unlikely that you will change very much here in a short visit. The balance between what you will learn and what you can contribute will undoubtedly be in favour of your own development.

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### *2. Educate yourself about Malawi before your visit*

Learn as much as you can about the history, economy, politics, environment and other issues, which affect our community before you come. Visiting or volunteering here will help you to appreciate different cultural perspectives and make you more sensitive to poverty and disadvantage in the world. You will also learn how much can be achieved with minimal resources.

Respect local culture and customs such as dress code, and be prepared to be flexible. You will then be in a better position to understand and learn from those who will be working with you and if or when you decide to offer help, it is more likely to be appropriate. Try to make the effort to learn some Chichewa before you visit - it will be appreciated here, and you will be less dependent on interpreters.

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### *3. Sustainability*

It is important that your role or project is planned in partnership with the local community, so that it responds to real needs. Yours is not to impose ideas - even if fully funded! Yours is to work in partnership with people in your field of expertise, whether evangelism, nursing, teaching, IT, engineering or public health. Projects that simply reflect your own wishes or the views and aspirations of the funders or organisation you come from, are unlikely to become sustainable. Involving the community will strengthen local priority setting and increase local ownership of development projects. Don't seek to take on a job which displaces a local person – this defeats the point of volunteering.

Bear in mind that it is easy for an outsider in a position of power, even if unskilled, to unduly influence the confidence and motivation of local workers, leaving them less rather than more competent. Your aim should be to empower your local colleagues to continue when you leave.

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### *4. Consider the suitability of your skills for the role you wish to take on*

If at home you are a website designer, think about how those skills may be applied here – it may not be helpful for you to decide to build a house or to dig a well. You may speak English – but this does not necessarily qualify you to teach. If you really want to teach, take a course (e.g. TEFEL for teaching English as a foreign language) or volunteer as a teaching assistant in a school in your home country before you leave.

When considering your skills, also think about any tools or equipment that you might require, find out what is available locally, and be prepared to bring essential items with you.

### *5. Be professional*

Once you have agreed a visit or a volunteer role for a short or longer term placement at Mulanje Mission you are making a commitment to those who host you, as well as those who have assisted you to come. Placements at Mulanje Mission are very popular, and it is likely that in accepting your application, someone else has been turned down. Remember that we will rely on you, and other staff will watch your example. It may seem reasonable as a volunteer to come to work late, leave early or take long weekends and holidays at short notice - but this can be very disruptive.

Please make sure that you abide by the conditions of your Malawi visa, student permit or Temporary Employment Permit, as well as any professional registration necessary to the role you hope to take on. We can usually help to obtain these permissions for you, but the future of volunteering at Mulanje Mission can be undermined for everyone if some individuals accepted for volunteer placements disregard the law.

Consider how you might behave in a hospital, school or community setting in your home country – would you ask to be allowed to cuddle the babies in the hospital special care baby unit? Would you take photographs of sick patients on the wards? Would you give sweets to all the children you met in a school or health clinic? It should go without saying that hospital or clinic patients, or children attending school in Malawi deserve the same respect, dignity and privacy as you would expect for your own family at home. Please be very careful with taking pictures, they can only be taken in- and outside the hospital with signed consent of the person or parents.

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### *6. Be prepared to take responsibility for your own health and safety.*

You may be planning to travel a long way from home. In doing this you need to be ready to take responsibility for your own health, mental and physical. Your sending organisation may not know Malawi well, and you may be given out of date or incorrect advice about matters such as malaria prophylaxis or PEP for health workers. It is important that you feel up to making decisions for yourself in unfamiliar situations. Make yourself aware of local health issues such as HIV, malaria and bilharzia and make sure that you have adequate insurance if you would wish to return home if you become unwell.

Bring sufficient quantities of any medications you require – they may not be available here. Medical and nursing staff at the mission are already busy and you should be self-sufficient for minor complaints. Of course we will always try to help in the case of an accident or emergency – MMH will provide you with telephone no's for key personnel.

Be sensible with phones, iPads, laptops and cameras – these things stand out in our community and can make you vulnerable to theft. In general it is not safe to be out at night alone, especially if you have had a few alcoholic drinks. Visitors who ignore this advice, walk or take minibuses late at night, cause much concern to us.

Hiking on Mulanje mountain can be a great experience - please follow the advice of local porters and guides and make sure someone at the Mission knows when you go up the mountain, and when you expect to be back.

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### *7. Research*

Visiting researchers are often particularly demanding of scarce staff time. All researchers from institutions outside Malawi are required:

- To make appointments in advance and stick to the times agreed for their visits
- To provide a copy of ethics committee approval from within Malawi for your research
- To consider compensating MMH in some way (cash or kind) for the staff time taken for interviews, questionnaires etc.
- To provide a copy of their completed research findings to MMH

### *8. Think about the wise use of financial resources*

It is a common misperception that living in a poor country is cheap. Far from it – food, fuel, utilities such as water, electricity, internet use are all expensive here, almost certainly more expensive than in your home country. The Mulanje community is unfailingly generous in its support of volunteers, but bear in mind that salaries here are low. In a wish to show hospitality, you may be offered more than can comfortably be afforded by local families.

The fact is that most visitors and volunteers spend far more on their own travel, accommodation and entertainment than they contribute to alleviating poverty and disadvantage in Mulanje. Consider the legacy you will leave behind after your visit.

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*9. If having considered the above you have second thoughts about visiting or volunteering here, there are other ways to help:*

- Be an ethical tourist and contribute to the local economy while you enjoy a holiday in this beautiful country
  - Fundraise for existing projects at Mulanje Mission, or sponsor training for a local person to take on a new role
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### **Two final points, wherever you may decide to visit:**

#### *10. Do not visit or volunteer in 'orphanages'*

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of money to be made from kind foreigners who wish to help by volunteering in orphanages. The demand for such experiences and placements fuels the setting up of profit making enterprises, with children readily available from poor uneducated families.

Rather, try to support projects and promote models of care that encourage extended families to support their own children, including orphans, and help poor and rural communities to improve their livelihoods so that they become economically thriving places where people want to stay and orphans are not perceived as an additional burden.

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#### *11. Donations*

Please bear in mind that these guidelines are intended to improve the relevance and quality of donations to Malawi, not to hinder them.

Donations, whether in cash or kind, should always be discussed with the organisation you visit beforehand. If your donation is intended for a specific purpose, you should expect an undertaking in writing to that effect. If you wish to give cash always get an official receipt. The most useful cash donations are those given without strings – for the organisation to spend on locally determined priorities.

Some donations in kind will attract tax and customs duty, as well as being expensive to transport within the country – do not expect that your partner organisation will necessarily be able to meet these costs. Unwanted donations have to be transported to organisations that can use them, or stored and disposed of. Expired medications and clinical items are no more useful in Malawi than in the country they came from.

Most small organisations have a wish list of items they urgently need – if you find out what is needed and meet the costs of transport and delivery we will be truly grateful for your assistance.

**Statement of Commitment**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sending organisation/self-sponsored** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dates of visit** \_\_\_\_\_

**I have read the Mulanje Mission guidelines on ethical visits and volunteering.** [    ]

I have spent time finding out about Malawi and Mulanje in particular, and have discussed plans for my visit with [    ]

\_\_\_\_\_

I feel ready to take on the volunteer job I am applying for [    ]  
I will bring the necessary equipment for this role

I understand the need to respect local customs, avoid taking political positions and am willing to travel as a learner and a guest [    ]

I understand the visa requirements and, where relevant, the professional registration requirements for my visit/role, and will meet the costs of these [    ]

I am prepared to take responsibility for my personal safety, physical and mental health. I have travel insurance to cover health expenses. [    ]

I have discussed the appropriateness of any donation I intend to make with [    ]

\_\_\_\_\_

I have considered the balance between what I will gain as a visitor and what I will give/leave behind and understand that my visit must not unduly burden the community or any individual or organisation [    ]

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_