

Daniel O'Connor filming VSO  
volunteer Claire Nic Gabhann from  
Monaghan in Bukoba, Tanzania.



# VSO IRELAND

## VOLUNTEER MEDIA SUPPORT PACK

The VSO team is here to support you with any media opportunities that arise and offer advice about how best to capture and communicate your volunteer experience.



@VSOIreland



#IrishVSOs



VSO Volunteer Dora Vanourek with school children at the Culture Zone in Samarathanam Residential School, India.

Volunteering is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, an opportunity to create sustainable change overseas, develop your professional skills and build lifelong friendships. This pack provides information about how you might want to convey your unique volunteer journey to people back home in Ireland – in a blog, news article, radio programme or on social media.



#### **WHY IS CAPTURING YOUR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE IMPORTANT?**

As a VSO volunteer, you have the ability to demonstrate the powerful impact volunteering can have in alleviating poverty. A blog post, newspaper article or radio interview has the potential to inspire other like-minded individuals to pursue volunteering opportunities, donate to VSO programmes or advocate for the rights of marginalised people the world over. It can also increase awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals – more on those later!

If you have any questions that aren't covered in this support pack, email Annette O'Sullivan, VSO Ireland's Marketing and Communications Manager on [annette.osullivan@vso.ie](mailto:annette.osullivan@vso.ie).

And please let us know if you start a new blog or are going to be featured on a local media outlet – we'll share it on VSO Ireland's channels too!

#### **INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE:**

- Blogging about your volunteer placement
- Approaching local media to share your volunteer story
- Telling volunteer stories through photos
- Using social media responsibly
- Spreading awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals

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# BLOGGING

## about your volunteer placement

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**Blogging is a great way of recording your volunteer journey and sharing your overseas experiences with family and friends. It also helps to build up your profile if you are interested in moving into the development sector in the future.**

Starting a new blog doesn't have to be a daunting task. The main thing to remember is to keep the tone conversational and write about what matters most to you. To help you get started, here are some blogging tips:

**PLATFORM:** If you haven't used blogging software before we would recommend going with WordPress. This is a free platform with hundreds of different themes and plugins, allowing you to follow a standard template or go with a more customised design depending on your tech skills. It's also very easy to use and is able to support images, audio and video content.

**TITLE:** Have a think about what you would like the name of your blog to be. It's a good idea to choose something that lets your audience know exactly who and what it is about. This will help people interested in volunteering and development work to find your blog. You may want to use your own name in the title to personalise it further, for instance 'Claire in Kenya' or 'Tom's Volunteer Journey'. You can be as inventive as you like with the titles of individual blog posts.

**ABOUT YOU:** Let people know your background and mission in this section. You may also want to include an email address and links to your social media profiles so people can connect with you.

**CONTENT AND TONE:** What you blog about is completely up to you – you can vary posts to cover where you live, the kind of work you're doing and the impact volunteering has. We'd advise keeping the tone positive and empowering. While you may want to touch on the poverty you encounter or lack of resources you have at your disposal, refrain from portraying local people in a negative or humiliating light.

**LENGTH:** As a general rule of thumb, your blog posts should be between 400 and 800 words. That being said, if you're on a roll and it ends up being longer, it doesn't matter too much once you use headlines and line breaks to mix up the text. You may want to split lengthy blogs into two posts. For example, 'My trip to Karamoja Part 1' and 'My trip to Karamoja Part 2'.

**LANGUAGE:** Your blog doesn't have to be in fancy, formal English. Write as though you're talking to a friend and it will be much more enjoyable to read. Use 'you' and 'I' throughout and make the most of boldening and italicising to emphasise certain words.

**LINKS:** Connect with previous blog posts and external blogs by adding in links. Other bloggers will be likely to return the favour and link to your blog too.

**IMAGES AND VIDEOS:** Lots of text can be boring if there aren't photos or videos to break it up. It's easy to add these in on WordPress. Photos and videos don't need to be professionally shot. Even a few snaps or a quick video using your smart phone can bring your volunteering placement to life.

**SOCIAL SHARING:** Very few people find new blogs through Google and other search engines. To get your name out there and increase traffic to your blog, make sure you share it on your social media profiles. Use #IrishVSOs and tag @VSOIreland on Facebook and Twitter - we'll share it too!



If you set up a blog about your volunteering experiences, please let VSO Ireland's Marketing and Communications Manager know. You can then be featured as a guest blogger on [www.vso.ie/news/blog](http://www.vso.ie/news/blog).

# APPROACHING LOCAL MEDIA

## to share your volunteer story

Local newspapers and radio stations in Ireland are usually very interested in sharing volunteer stories – they want to hear about local people doing incredible work around the globe. Speaking on a radio station or being featured in an article creates awareness about the programme you will be working on overseas. It can also help you to raise funds in the run up to your placement. So how should you go about approaching your local media?

### KNOW YOUR STORY:

Firstly, arm yourself with facts and figures about the development programme you will be working on and how it is going to help marginalised people overseas. The radio producer or journalist is likely to ask you about this when you approach them. If you're going to be volunteering as a teacher trainer, for instance, have information about the number of children in the country that are out of school and how many VSO's education programmes have helped in the last year. This will give your request more credibility. Make sure you localise your story – local media outlets usually aren't interested in national and international news. Focus on the work you will be doing and your background to make it appropriate for their audience.

### KNOW YOUR LOCAL MEDIA:

Use the internet to find out the names and email addresses of local radio producers and journalists who might be interested in sharing your story. Take some time to understand the kind of show or publication and what the target audience is. Someone who has previously shown an interest in the development sector or NGOs is more likely to feature your story. When you've found out who you need to contact, send them a personalised email and follow up with a phone call.

### ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS:

Make things easy for the person you are contacting by answering any questions they may have in your initial email. This doesn't have to be too long – a few lines explaining your professional background, where you will be volunteering and the kind of work you will be doing is enough. It can be helpful to explain how VSO Ireland is different to other volunteer-sending organisations – that we're the development organisation for professionals and our placements tend to be longer term.

### GET SUPPORT FROM VSO IRELAND:

VSO Ireland's Marketing and Communications Manager will be able to provide you with a blurb about the organisation, if necessary. She can also pass on high-quality images of programme areas, which can help journalists and producers to visualise the kind of work you will be doing.

### THINK OF ALTERNATIVES:

Many people now get their news from websites and social media. If a news article or radio feature isn't possible, it's likely that the media outlet may be able to tweet about your volunteering placement or discuss it in a blog. Share any content on your own social media pages and encourage your friends and family to do this the same. This is a great way of spreading the word about the incredible work you're going to be doing.

### THINK OF THE FUTURE:

A journalist or producer may not want to do a feature before you go overseas – they might think readers or listeners will find your story more interesting while you're still away or after you get back. Make sure you let them know that these are also options. Widespread internet means that it's now easy to do a Skype or WhatsApp call or pass on photos and a quote via email. Touch base with your media contact during your placement and again when you return to see what the possibilities are.



If you're going to be featured in a newspaper, magazine, blog or radio show, let us know. We can then share your story on our social media channels and website.

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# TELLING VOLUNTEER STORIES THROUGH PHOTOS

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A good photo should be able to tell its own story, and can be as powerful – if not more powerful – than words. Photos can be used to enhance blog posts and articles, as well as on social media.

When taking photos on your volunteer placement it's important to make sure that they abide by the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. This means that choices of images and messages should show respect for the dignity of all people concerned, display belief in the equality of all people and promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

## HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR TAKING PHOTOS ON YOUR VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT:

- Get consent from everyone being photographed. If you're going to publish the photo online or in print, make sure you have their permission to do so. If photographing a child under 18, ask their parent or guardian for consent.
- Avoid images that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places. Take photos that show people in the local community taking action and using their talents.
- Take photos that illustrate your unique volunteering experience – what life is like where you're living, your work environment and situations where you employ your professional skills.
- Be positive. Take action shots that tell a story and relay the energy and emotion of people in the situation you are witnessing.
- Don't publish violent or sexual images or those that show use of illegal substances or the misuse of alcohol.
- Writing interesting captions to accompany photos can help to attract and retain attention in a blog or news article.

You can read more about the Dóchas Code of Conduct here:

[www.dochas.ie/images-and-messages](http://www.dochas.ie/images-and-messages)

Unsure about whether an image is suitable or not?

Take a look at Dóchas' Illustrative Guide: <http://bit.ly/1MKS1xS>

If you have any questions about whether or not an image is suitable for publication, contact Annette O'Sullivan, VSO Ireland's Marketing and Communications Manager, on [annette.osullivan@vso.ie](mailto:annette.osullivan@vso.ie).



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# USING SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLY

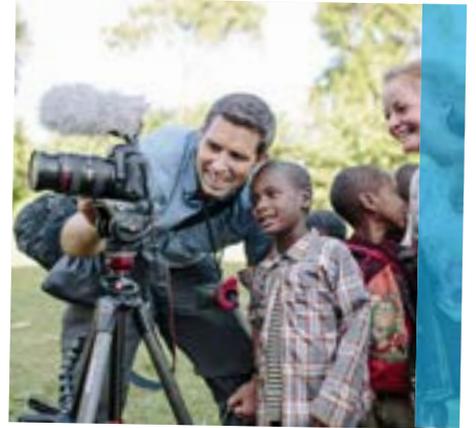
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Chances are you're already on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat... the list is growing every day. It's likely that you will want to relay your volunteering experience to friends and family via social media. Before you start uploading snaps and sharing updates, make sure that everything you post abides by Dóchas' Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. What you share should depict your placement and programme country's people with dignity and respect at all times.

Social media is great because it's instantaneous – but therein also lies its dangers. What you post online stays there forever. If you post something irresponsible it can damage your professional reputation, as well as that of VSO Ireland and the programme's partners. Take time to consider the purpose of everything you post on social media. If you're trying to raise awareness and depict your volunteer journey in an accurate light, it's likely to be good to go. However, if your purpose is to shock or entertain, you should think twice about sharing it online.

As social media is participatory, you may receive comments about VSO Ireland, your placement and the programme – both positive and negative. Use the opportunity to respond to any criticism and provide evidence about the work you and VSO are doing. Stating facts about the number of lives positively affected by VSO volunteers, for instance, is much more effective than being defensive and replying in an angry, rash manner. If you're unsure about how you should respond to criticism, get in touch with Annette O'Sullivan, VSO's Marketing and Communications Manager, for advice.

You can join in VSO Ireland's story by using #IrishVSOs when you post photos and videos online. You can also tag VSO Ireland in your photos and posts on Twitter and Facebook – our handle is @VSOIreland on both platforms. This will help prospective volunteers to get a real sense of what volunteering is like and also encourage people to support programmes through donations.



VSO volunteer Yarina Sheremet speaks to children in Mithapukur district, Northern Bangladesh as part of the Growing Together livelihoods programme.

# SPREADING AWARENESS OF THE SDGS

Sharing your volunteer story and showing the powerful impact volunteering for development can have also emphasises the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These Goals were set by the UN in 2015 and will guide global development until 2030. Here are the main things you need to know about the SDGs:

- There are 17 Goals which cover everything from gender equality and environmental sustainability to hunger and quality education. The most relevant Goals to VSO's work are the following:
  - Goal 1: No Poverty
  - Goal 3: Good Health
  - Goal 4: Quality Education
  - Goal 5: Gender Equality
  - Goal 8: Good Jobs and Economic Growth
  - Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
- The Goals call on all countries to take action and responsibility for their role in fighting inequality and poverty around the world. The Goals are not legally binding, but every country is expected to report to the UN on their progress in achieving the Goals.
- The Goals recognise that we need to tackle climate change if we are to achieve sustainable development.
- The Goals also demonstrate how local action is critical for global development. Individuals in all countries, both in the Global North and South, have their role to play in fighting poverty and inequality.
- The Goals are committed to "leaving no one behind" by adopting an equality-focused and rights-based approach at all levels.
- The Goals are universal – they apply equally to all countries, North and South. So the Irish government will be implementing the Goals and reporting to the UN on their progress.
- VSO worked hard to ensure the Goals recognise the unique role volunteers can play in achieving sustainable development. Volunteering brings people together, allowing them to participate in their own growth and reach out to other people, including those in marginalised communities.

## SO HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE SDGS?

As a VSO volunteer, you embody the spirit of the Goals every day as you share skills with local counterparts and work towards creating a fairer, more equal world. Sharing your volunteer story with local media or online goes one step further – it documents the power volunteering can have and encourages others to follow in your footsteps. When writing about or discussing your experiences with VSO, it's helpful to consider the following:

- Which of the 17 Goals are most relevant to the work you did on placement
- The aspects of your placement that involved skills exchange
- The ways in which spaces were created on your placement for marginalised people to contribute to their own development
- How your volunteer placement contributed to "leaving no one behind"
- How gender equality and climate change were considered on the programme you worked on



If you have any questions about the Sustainable Development Goals, please contact Annette O'Sullivan, VSO Ireland's Marketing and Communications Manager, on [annette.osullivan@vso.ie](mailto:annette.osullivan@vso.ie).

You can also find out more about the SDGs by visiting [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals).



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