



## Help Lesotho Volunteer Opportunities in Lesotho

Thank you for inquiring about volunteer opportunities. Lesotho is so in need of help. Your interest in donating your time is appreciated. Your time is valuable and can make a real difference. In addition to the gift of your time, there is a substantial cost in dollars to the volunteers. The following is a brief discussion about the various challenges. Help Lesotho can only accept a limited number of volunteers each year and they are chosen by virtue of the match with identified needs by HL Basotho Project Leaders on the ground.

**Context:** Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world. Transportation and communications are difficult. The devastation of HIV/AIDS has left so many vacancies in the fabric of the nation. At present over 30% of the children are orphaned and many more are vulnerable because there are not enough adults left with the capability to look after them. Doctors, nurses, teachers, secretaries, business people, administrators, etc have died, leaving the capable and willing to struggle to fill in those roles while maintaining their own jobs and responsibilities. AIDS has affected every family. Most look after orphans in their own homes while supporting others in their extended family in any way they can. Consequently, people are stretched to the limit. Lesotho is projected to become the highest in the world for incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Having foreign visitors is stressful on the Basotho. Few, and in some villages none, have ever had foreign visitors stay. They feel that whatever they have could not possibly be good enough. They worry constantly about the happiness of volunteers. As you can imagine, on top of their other concerns, we at Help Lesotho, are determined not to add to the burden they carry.

Volunteering in Lesotho is therefore an emotionally demanding experience. It is very difficult to see so many in dire need and not be able to help as we would like. The demands of their lives leave little room for the luxury of attending to our feelings and volunteers are expected to put aside their own agendas and serve the people. The burden on the Basotho is such that they have very little time. We are expected to adapt to their schedules and fit ourselves into the little extra time they may have available. We cannot expect to be the same after such an experience.

This is a Christian, largely Roman Catholic, country. One's level of comfort with this is key to the blending into the culture and the feeling comfortable with local customs and social activities. Most revolve around the church. While it is not essential to be a Christian, any lack of comfort with this would be disadvantageous to the volunteer and the community in which he or she is placed.

An application form will be sent upon request. There is great need and we are working out ways to minimize the burden of having volunteers on each of our 6 communities.

Things you will want to include in your considerations:

- The people are friendly, generous, clean and hospitable. They have no resistance against the whites historically.

- Lesotho is relatively safe, especially compared to many other African countries, although it is not advisable to go out at night.
- English is the language taught in school so many can communicate (to varying degrees). The native language, Sesotho, is a Bantu language and not easy to learn. Educated people speak English, but many have very limited English. Those working on planting projects should be prepared for communication boundaries. Canadian accents are difficult for Basotho to understand they are used to British accents. Small notepad and pen can often clear things up. Speed and vocabulary should be considered especially for workshops. Basotho will not always inform you if they have not understood.
- Lesotho has the third highest elevation in the world. The altitude precludes many of the health dangers you might find in other African countries.
- The country is magnificently beautiful. Bring a camera.
- It is cold in winter (June-August, about -5 C at night in the mountains).
- Water is scarce and so are most other things (toilet paper, snacks, soap etc). Sponge baths are the most common way of getting washed. Showers or bathtubs are not often available.
- Transportation and telecommunications are difficult, expensive and often unreliable.
- The culture and pace are very different. One cannot expect anywhere near the level of efficiency we normally enjoy in North America. Patience and understanding are needed.
- Each local Basotho team leader for our projects is responsible, welcoming, warm and quite wonderful.
- There is nothing to do at night, very little social life at all. People are too busy. One works and then goes to bed early, rising early.
- Volunteers are placed by themselves or with one other person.
- Accommodations are safe but very basic. Meals are simple.

It is advisable to have prior experience before going to such a challenging environment. Experiences with the poor, living in sparse conditions, having to be resourceful with little are key areas of preparation.

Help Lesotho is working in nine communities, mostly in the mountains. Some are remote. The greatest need is for teachers in English, math and science. Accounting support and instruction, computer maintenance and repair and computer instruction are needed in most areas. Medical expertise— nurses, doctors, helping in village HIV/AIDS clinics and with support groups.

Volunteer training covers the commonalities and many task specific topics so that they can hit the ground running and have the breadth of resources available to adapt. Obtaining resources there is almost impossible. All needs are generated on the ground in Lesotho. The best talents of each volunteer are carefully matched with the express needs in the communities. A volunteer is placed in one community but has the opportunity, when time and transport are available, to visit our other centres.

**Expenses incurred by volunteers:** It is a long and arduous trip to get there. A return flight from Ottawa/Toronto. Montreal costs approximately \$2000-\$2800 depending on the season. Tax receipts for the airfare can be issued if there is adequate time and due process. Every volunteer is expected to purchase and use a water purifier (\$150). There are some expenses for vaccination shots (approx. \$150-200), a valid passport, and we are asking volunteers to raise the money for their own food. Accommodation costs vary by community, ranging from \$0-to-\$60 per month), with the exception

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of the guesthouses where available (approximately \$20-35 per night – three meals included).  
Volunteers will be offered suggestions of gifts for their hosts.

**Duration:** A minimum three month stay is required. Please review the website, [www.helplesotho.ca](http://www.helplesotho.ca) for an overview of the projects.

Thank you for your interest. Our volunteers to date have made a wonderful contribution, donated their expertise, grown from the challenges they encountered, have returned to Canada in love with Lesotho and feeling blessed to have had such an opportunity.

This initiative is about individuals making a difference.

Kea Leboha (thank you in Sesotho)

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