

# SVA UPDATE

Student Volunteers Abroad Newsletter: Issue 1

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## Our first Newsletter!

Thanks for taking the time to read our newsletter. This will be a monthly newsletter bringing you features about SVA - as well as development in general.

Some articles have had to be amended. Clicking on the title of the article will then take you to the full article on our website.

## A word from the editor...

It's hard to believe that Student Volunteers Abroad is 15 years old this year. Since 1998 Student Volunteers Abroad has been changing the lives of individuals and communities in developing countries all round the world. From infrastructure to education, clean water to gender equality SVA has been at the frontline of positive change in places as diverse as Uganda and Nepal. Last year Student Volunteers Abroad sent 80 volunteers to 7 communities in Asia and Africa. We at Student Volunteers Abroad aim to make 2012-2013 our biggest year yet sending more volunteers to more communities. What better way to celebrate 15 years of development and cultural links?



This year's president, Colin Reilly, checking the children's homework in Malawi

As we are 15 we thought we'd also start acting our age and have decided to publish this monthly newsletter packed with all things SVA to show off our wisdom and maturity. With this newsletter we aim to keep you up to date with all the projects – and give you features like profiles and interviews with our partners, alumni, project coordinators and our board.

We feel that our alumni members are as valuable as our current

members and ask for your support through our new direct debit scheme were by alumni can continue their excellent international development work by supporting current and future projects. We hope to have this facility operational by the New Year. We also want to hear from alumni who want to let us know what they have been up to since they were rosie-cheeked student.

This first edition is a taster of things to come.

We have a story from the dawn of time, by which we mean the founding of Student Volunteers Abroad on a rainy day back in 1998, an interview with Charlie Ager of the Scotland-Malawi Partnership, an interview with Ann McKechin MP, delightful Coordinator profiles from Fiona Greenhalgh and Chloé Pratt - more SVA related news than you can shake a stick at. So enjoy and keep supporting Student Volunteers Abroad.

## Once upon a beginning... the SVA story

It was a wet, blustery evening back in November 1999, and my stomach was turning somersaults as I walked up the stairs of the John McIntyre building. I was about to kick off SVA's second-ever information evening – and I was nervous. I was fairly sure that no one was going to turn up for the event, and I had visions of giving an awkward, stumbling address to a near-empty room.

Three friends, Chris Kidd, Mora McLagan, Rosa Hoshi and I had set up SVA a year before. Of course it had "naïve failure" written over it from the get-go - few of the people we first discussed it with thought it would ever come together. But we persevered, finally bidding goodbye to our first two groups of SVA volunteers at the end of the summer term.

Climbing those stairs in the John Mac, I had no idea whether SVA would have any sort of future, or whether it was just a one-off – a nice experience for a dozen people. After all, the odds were stacked against us. Keeping SVA ticking over was no small job.

We worried that student turnover would sap any institutional memory from the group, cutting off the contacts in developing countries that made the projects possible.

But, as I rounded the corner of the first floor I realised that something quite special was happening.

The room was already packed – standing room only – ten minutes before we were supposed to start.

I opened the evening and talked briefly about SVA. But what was most powerful was the first group of volunteers standing up, one by one, and talking about what their summer had meant to them – not only in terms of experiencing another culture, but realising they could make a tangible difference.

That second year we were many times over-subscribed for places on SVA. We sent groups to Senegal and Uganda as well as Nepal; were given an office space in the John Mac; and set up a proper committee to manage the day to day running of SVA

*"I had visions of giving an awkward, stumbling address to a near-empty room...the room was already packed - standing room only - ten minutes before we were meant to start"*

and raise more money for development projects overseas.

Since then, I've moved on. Chris, Mora and I still work on development issues and we've watched with admiration and pride from afar as SVA has gone from strength to strength.

We set out to prove that University of Glasgow students were neither lazy, self-centred beer drinking layabouts, nor naïve idealists who couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery. That it has continued so long and done so much is none of our doing, but rather a testament to the passion, hard work and dedication of generations of Glasgow students.

Thinking of SVA, the famous quote by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead comes to mind: "Never doubt that a small group of concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

*Ollie Brown,*

*Founder of SVA*

### Coodinator Profile: Fiona Greenhalgh

**What year and course are you in, and what career would you like?**

I study Spanish and Politics and I would love to work in international development. Failing that, I will just be a Zumba Instructor anywhere in South America, please.

**What project are you coordinating?**

This year I am coordinating the Malawi Bangwe project.

**What made you apply for SVA?**

Getting to spend my summer somewhere so different and making a real difference at the same time!

**Can you think of one instance when you really made a difference?**

Starting and completing the construction of the Umunthu Foundation (the HIV testing clinic). I know for a fact it will literally save lives!

**In a few words sell the Malawi Bangwe project.**

The most amazing country with the friendliest people and the best kids you'll ever meet!

**What will you take away from your time with SVA?**

Cheesy but I'll say it anyway; the friends I made over our fundraising time and the months we were out in Malawi together. Four person showers from a shared bucket during water shortages make for some serious bonding time!



Fiona Greenhalgh

## Project profiles

Here's where we let the projects speak for themselves...

### Cambodia

SVA Cambodia currently works to improve the infrastructure of the education system in Siem Reap which was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge Regime in the 1970s. We work with an NGO called VDCA (Volunteer Development of Children Association) which provides free English lessons to locals aged 5-26 so local people can make a living from the recent tourist boom of south east Asia. This year we are also working with two rural schools, Anlung Pi and AIO (Asia International Organisation) which both aim to ensure opportunities for children who live in the countryside.

### South Africa

In 2012 SVA South Africa focused on sustainable projects with our NGO (NAME) and local schools. With very successful fund raising efforts, the volunteers managed to beat their initial targets and gave a generous donation to Vhutshilo Mountain School which will work towards building a new classroom. Funds were also given towards the school's project for the children on Anti-Retroviral medication (ARV). With sustainability in mind the South Africa Volunteers also provided Jumbo Progress Combined School with a water tank, vegetable garden and curriculum based textbooks. In 2013 the project coordinators want to continue the focus on sustainability and hope to set up some local community based projects.

### Malawi Nancholi

The SVA Malawi Nancholi project was based in the small village of Nancholi, outside the city of Blantyre. The project ran for the first time in 2011 with its partner Nancholi Youth Organisation (NAYO). The main focus of the 2012 project was a Malaria, HIV and TB awareness and prevention campaign to educate rural areas. Other activities included teaching in primary and secondary schools - as well as a local young offenders institute -

attendance of youth HIV post-test club with another local NGO, youth groups, a home based care scheme, a sexual health discussion group, a female empowerment group and a local irrigation project.

### Uganda

After 8 days of training with our NGO, the Uganda volunteers spend six weeks living in a rural village. While there they teach WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) through Non-Formal Education. The volunteers construct and paint a 10 000 litre water tank, work to protect a natural spring in the community, teach children and adults about Moringa seeds, a World Health Organisation approved method of purifying water, and also build energy-saving, smokeless stoves. The volunteers also set up committees for each of the initiatives, which gives the community a real sense of ownership over them. We are keen to maintain SVA's strong links with Little Big Africa and capitalise on our success by doubling the number of volunteers from six to twelve

### Senegal

The SVA Senegal volunteers worked with the NGO ENDA-Graf, with the primary aim of ameliorating the lives of street children. The team were able to sponsor the renovation of three daaras in the Guediawaye area and as well as the building of two schools and toilet blocks in the rural villages of Bagana and NGoundiane. This year a new project, with the NGO Tostan, is being piloted, involving work with young offenders as well as construction and educational work in rural villages. It was agreed that it would be beneficial if only board members, who are familiar with the country and SVA, visited Senegal this year, and it is hoped that in the summer of 2014, the new project will welcome volunteers.

### Malawi Bangwe

The Malawi Bangwe project enjoyed another fantastic year working in partnership with many different organisations including their host NGO, AYISE. In the morning, volunteers taught in a school or orphan care centre. The afternoons saw volunteers support local organisations by taking part in HIV/AIDS support groups and testing, training local women on gender-equality and GBV, tutoring at a special needs after school club, and teaching youths sport. Additionally, SVA was able to successfully construct a new HIV/AIDS testing clinic for The Umunthu Foundation. We wish to build on the success of this year's project by continuing to strengthen our ties with organisations in the Bangwe community by supporting them in creating sustainable income and raising awareness of issues such as HIV/AIDS and gender based violence.

### Nepal

The Nepal volunteers worked closely with long standing partners Partnership for Sustainable Development Nepal (PSD) in Champanagaar and Ganganagaar, helping in the construction of 4 classrooms. The 2012 project altered its focus towards teaching English, a subject not easily accessible to the poorest students in rural communities. Days were split between early morning teaching and afternoon building, with the volunteers basing their work around the rice planting schedules to ensure the greatest amount of students could be included in classes. The Nepal 2013 project will look to switch their volunteering emphasis towards English teaching as the potential for this type of development is massive, and previous infrastructure projects have proved to be a great success upon which teaching can build.

*You can find out more about all of our projects at*

[www.studentvolunteersabroad.org/projects](http://www.studentvolunteersabroad.org/projects)

## Combating the gulf between public and private education in Nepal

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2012 the Shree Rastriya government school in Chitwan, Nepal officially opened the doors of its new nursery unit in an opening ceremony of singing, dancing and the ritual red tikka so evocative in Hindu culture. It was the celebration of the hard work carried out by the SVA Nepal project, the local community of Champanagar, and a team of skilled builders over the monsoon season of July and August, where scorching temperatures were matched only by torrential rains.

But in truth it was the culmination of a long process of consultation and tough decisions made by the school's committee, and Principal Durga Prasad Bhatta. Over the 5 weeks that I had the pleasure of being a guest at Mr Bhatta's house I learned in great detail about the difficulties of the public schooling system in Nepal. Chronically underfunded, racked by political disputes, and poorly coordinated, the government schools of Nepal have not only become semi-dependent on the aid of foreigners but have also become the sole

educational option available to the poorest in Nepali society.

Government schools are faring poorly when compared to their private competitors, as one member of the committee told me, because of one dominant factor – English-Medium Education (EME). For those students whose families can afford it, EME schools provide a wide curriculum taught in English which increases their opportunities for employment in and outside Nepal in the future.

But this education comes at a cost. The Vice-Principle

of one local high school, Shree Himalaya, estimated that to compete with EME schools government schools would have to charge a levy ten times higher than current contributions, a fee that would simply force many of the poorest children out of education. Mr Bhatta informed me that the construction work that SVA funds paid for was part of a different strategy, one of increasing the length of time that the poorest students could stay in school for.

This problem was also identified by the volunteers. Chloe Pratt, a 2013 coordinator, said "The focus of SVA's sustainable development work in Nepal needs to change. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on English teaching. That way the kids of these villages will be able to reap the benefits of their English classes long after they have left school".

*Alan-James Mahon*

**Charlie Ager, of the Scotland-Malawi Partnership (SMP)** has had a long personal and professional relationship with Malawi, a country in which she lived for number years in her youth while her father lectured at Chancellor College in Zomba. I caught up with Charlie in the run up to the SMP's "Yewo" event, a celebration of youth links between Malawi and Scotland and asked her a few questions...

**How important is it to have a focus on international development in education?** In April 2012 the SMP, along with a number of other Scottish NGO's, hosted an event called "Education and International Development: and exploration of good practice". As the findings of the event demonstrated, global citizenship is core to a young person's development and therefore should be given priority and attention across all aspects of learning. In particular active school partnerships with schools abroad improve the quality of education to the benefit of both schools and the

wider community. At the SMP therefore we see a focus on international linking and global citizenship of great value to young people here in Scotland, and strengthening their link with Malawi.

**How did your relationship with Student Volunteers Abroad begin?**

SVA has been a member of the SMP for a number of years however the relationship has strengthened in the last year. In November 2011 the SMP set up a Youth Steering Group, representing a range of youth links between Scotland and Malawi. The YSG had been the lead consultant in advising on the development and execution of the strategy and associated services, supported by the SMP office, board and school forum. SVA has been an active member of the group.

[The full interview is available on our website](#)



Charlie Ager at the recent YEWo event

## Entry Paths and Exit Strategies

### Ann McKechin MP talks International Development with SVA

Since the mid-1980s Glasgow North's MP Ann McKechin (Labour) has been involved with international development at all levels. Beginning her professional life as a solicitor she first became involved with international development after the shocking images of the Ethiopian famine were brought to UK living rooms in 1984.

For Ann, the crisis acted as a catalyst on public and private opinion. She sensed that more needed to be done in the western world to find a political solution to such a crisis. Ann became involved in the World Development Movement (WDM) as the Scottish volunteer member, helping to establish its presence in this country.

Entering Westminster in 2001 she has chaired the All-Party Group on Debt, Aid and Trade, looking at the macroeconomic issues surrounding international development and was on the International Development Select Committee from 2005 to 2008, work which saw her visit Afghanistan, Malawi and Zambia. Although her work at Westminster has now seen her shift her focus away from international development, Ann has been appointed to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy which promotes education and support for political parties and emerging democracies in the Balkans, Middle East and Africa.

McKechin has been keen to see the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by SVA particularly on Gender Equality. Her work in Malawi and Afghanistan brought her face to face with the problems that young women and girls in developing countries struggle with such the maternal and sexual health of women and the question of the marriage ages of very young girls. For McKechin empowering women by giving them greater reproductive and sexual awareness as well as breaking down traditional values that allow girls to be married in their early were "levers" that would speed up the development

*"Are you going to pass on a set of skills that can be sustained?...What is the legacy when you get back on the plane again?"*

process across the board. McKechin argues that "improving women's health and opportunities unlocks a lot of other benefits quite quickly".

McKechin has a number of words of advice for our 2013 volunteers. Firstly she is keen to emphasize empathy, and constant consideration of what benefits the local communities will derive from SVA's help. Exit strategies are also essential, "What is your exit strategy? Are you going to pass on a set of skills that can be sustained?...What is the legacy when you get back on the plane again?" these are questions that McKechin believes are key to any overseas projects, especially those like SVAs in which personal contact with the communities may be lost as members graduate.

She had one last message to SVA 2013 volunteers "It's great to hear of people spending the time and energy in such a worthwhile area. Try and imagine yourself in the situation of the person you are trying to help, seeing it from their perspective...when you do that it will start to change the way you think about what's best [for them]".

## Coordinator Profile: Chloé Pratt

**What year and course are you in, and what career would you like?**

I am currently in 4th year studying Bsc Geography. I am not sure what my future plans are yet but I am looking into postgraduate courses in International Development.

**What project are you coordinating?**

I am coordinating this year's Nepal project.

**What made you apply for SVA?**

A couple of my friends have been volunteers with SVA in the past and after hearing some of their incredible stories I thought it sounded like an opportunity.

**Can you think of one instance when you really made a difference?**

Our counterpart Abishek's English improve considerably whilst we were living with him. Our hard work over 6 weeks lead to 2 brand new classrooms, which will benefit the community for years to come.

**Have you got any advice for future SVA volunteers?**

My advice to future volunteers is to be prepared for anything, and most importantly enjoy every single moment.

**What will you take away from your time with SVA?**

I will take away so many unforgettable experiences that will stay with me forever and friends for life!



Chloé Pratt, far left