

Care Travel



Information Leaflet 2018

Our Mission Statement and Team:

Care2Travel is an independent, non-profit organization located in Csíkszereda, Harghita, Romania, established in March of 2011 to connect volunteers with different nationalities to work together in responsible placements that support both local community and personal development, along will providing access to and opportunity for responsible tourism. Moreover, by creating positive volunteer experiences, we will popularize volunteer activity in Romania, thus supporting the growth of an active civil society.

Péter Kedves - *Director*

Jackie Curtin - *Vice Director, Foreign Correspondent, Volunteer Coordinator*

Botond Balazs - *Ethical Tourism Manager, Volunteer Coordinator*

Orsolya Biró - *Local Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Coordinator*

Norbert Sentes - *Volunteer Accommodation Administrator*

Gertrúd Keresztes - *Projects Coordinator*

László Laczkó Angi - *Tour Guide*

Our Story:

In 2008, Jackie Curtin came from the UK to Romania to teach in a village near Csíkszereda, where she was operating on a solitary level. Her efforts proved to be unsuccessful, however, and in 2010, she decided to invest her time elsewhere. In March of 2011, she came up with the idea of Care2Travel, spawned from her desire to foster effective, sustainable volunteer work. She partnered with her good friend László, a seasoned local tour guide who helped her grow more familiar with the area. Together they set up this association.

Through their hard work, along with the help of other important teammates and volunteers, they were able to establish a network of sympathetic individuals who also found the project worthwhile. They were working in Jackie's small flat in the city at that time and were in need of an official space to conduct their business. In December of 2014, Jackie was able to secure an office space for free through a friend who was the vice-president of a local organization called DJST (Directorate County Sports and Youth Association). This proved to be advantageous because we were able to welcome representatives of International Volunteer Headquarters (IVHQ) who expressed interest in partnering with Care2Travel. In 2015, we officially partnered with IVHQ, which launched our association to greater heights.

Organization Programs

Volunteering: Our international volunteers are variegated in their nationalities, age, backgrounds, and previous experiences. We have had high school graduates, college students, graduate students, siblings, seniors, and even pairs of parents and their children. All come with amazing stories to share with one another and forge lasting friendships. They arrive bi-weekly, with 80% serving during the Summer months due to academic obligations. An orientation is held for them the Sunday after they arrive which includes lunch at the volunteer accommodation and a city tour with a local guide. The actual volunteer work commences the following day once duties are assigned and the volunteer site is visited. Support for the volunteer continues until the day of their departure. Our volunteer administrator goes grocery shopping for the volunteers twice a week so that they have the materials to make their own breakfast and dinner, while a hot lunch is provided through a local restaurant with whom we have an agreement. The accommodation is equipped with all the basic amenities that the volunteers need to be comfortable and ready to work.

We also manage the local volunteers who can work alongside the international volunteers in programs and clubs like English, music, film, and board game club. The locals provide needed assistance in outreach and charitable influencing that involve the community.

Ethical Tourism: Ethical tourism offers a selection of reasonably priced, environmentally sound adventure tours using services based in the local community to provide an authentic and sustainable Transylvanian experience. All our tour guides were born in the region and have a deep passion for promoting while protecting their local countryside. We support local providers (guest-homes, charitable foundations, local craftsmen) and seek to minimize the impact on the local environment. Our aim is to work in harmony with the natural environment and local communities to enhance the growth of sustainable and responsible tourism in the region. The money generated from tour sales minus the transportation and guide expenses are donated to fund other Care2Travel programs.

Preservation Project: As interest grows for authentic cultural experiences and as the influx of travelers seek out opportunities to learn more about Romania, a plan is underway by our Ethical Tourism team to facilitate such. The proposed Back in Time Association will focus its attention on preserving the local culture and professions, protecting local trades, and celebrating tradition so that volunteers and tourists can learn more about the people that live in this beautiful country.

What Do the International Volunteers Do?

Care2Travel has had 339 international volunteers since it's inception, 253 of them being female and 86 male. The United States has had displayed the strongest representation, with 115 volunteers making their way to Csíkszereda, followed by the UK with 66, Australia with 24, Canada with 23, and China with 21. The remaining 90 volunteers have traveled from 29 other countries and each has made invaluable contributions to our cause.

Volunteers can choose to serve from one week to one year, with the average being three weeks. With a total of 1079 total volunteer weeks served with 30 hours per week per volunteer, international volunteers have completed an astonishing 32,370 service hours with Care2Travel, which is the equivalent of 12.5 years of service when accounting for the average work week of the average worker! It is in the following **eight** placements that volunteers donate their time, along with a future endeavor that we intend to involve volunteers in:

Teaching: Through fun activities and game play, volunteers teach basic English skills in local schools located within 30 kilometers of the volunteer accommodation. The ultimate goal is to familiarize the children with English enough for them to feel comfortable speaking it.

After School Support: Run by the St. Francis Foundation and located in separate little houses, volunteers participate in a program that serves disadvantaged youth ages 6 to 15, with the intention to keep the children safe in these secure learning environments.

Child Care: In one of two foster care facilities serving children aged 4 to 11, and children 11 to 13. Volunteers reinforce the English that has been learned at school through non-formal education and fun activities. In the course of their duties, volunteers provide the needed attention that is lacking at the care facilities and their home environments.

Special Needs Project: Volunteers can work in one of several care facilities available for children who have special needs and require more attention. In these establishments, service-users learn self-care and social skills, and for those more capable, they can learn tasks that will contribute to their families' needs.

Summer Camp Support: Every year, Care2Travel organizes several different summer camps depending upon the number of children who are able to participate. All of the childcare volunteers are merged to assist in this effort to provide a structured, hospitable and fun environment for disadvantaged children where they can play games, learn English, and socially interact. Care2Travel has also organized two summer camps for the kids in child protection, which hosted 56 children, 28 in each camp.

Agriculture: For those who like the outdoors and getting dirty, there are planting or harvesting options, as well as opportunities to benefit the farm and garden owned by Care2Travel through activities like fence-building among others. Food that is harvested is donated to the local shelters.

NGO Support: Volunteers provide vital IT support which makes it possible for Care2Travel to extend its reach, thereby increasing its volunteerism and donor base.

Animal Care: In a dog shelter called ProAnimalia our volunteers tend the kennels, socialize the dogs that are in capable of such change, and simply love and care for them.

Gypsy Project: Because the Roma are isolated by the local culture and ostracized by the community, the Gypsy Project aims to cultivate their normalcy and social integration. Starting with the children ages 5 to 7, we want to gradually introduce them to healthier, more physically, emotionally and intellectually normal lives. The Roma live in derelict poverty and rely on government assistance for nearly everything. They lack quality schooling (if the children attend at all) and the discipline, drive and ethical standards required to achieve relative conformity and acceptance. We would like to find a facility in their neighborhood used for the teaching of English. Food would be provided during these lessons. This is a long-term project as the progress of the children will be monitored yearly as they advance through the program. The hope is that other children will hear of these fun lessons and will want to take part when they are old enough. By the time these children reach age 11 to 13, it is our hope that they will have become more self-motivated and desirous of a better life. Building trust among the community members will be a lengthy and taxing endeavor, but one that will be worth the effort. With success, the parents of these children will witness the change in their children and will become more accepting of programs that will assist them as well with the process of integration. Included in this project are plans to place these children in the regular school system and provide job placements as they seek employment. **This is the future endeavor that volunteers will be able to get involved in.**

Our Partners

IVHQ: Partners since 2015, International Volunteer Headquarters, based in New Zealand, provides affordable and high quality volunteer programs. Their partnership aligns with our focus on positive volunteer experiences through international cooperation and integration. For example, IVHQ allowed for a group of 16 Qatari volunteers to come to Csíkszereda and clean up a holy Hungarian pilgrimage site here in the city, one among several other groups that IVHQ has sent to aid our cause.

World Challenge: Partners since 2013, World Challenge provides school expeditions and amazing volunteer experiences to students across the world. Based in the UK, this organization sends youth to select locations to engage in challenging but worthwhile projects. Groups comprised of 8 to 56 children have been sent by various schools to Romania where they can learn and apply the knowledge that they obtained from practical trainings like budgeting, time management, traveling tips, camping essentials, etc. Participants collect their own donations to help fund their individual excursions. During their time as volunteers, they build greenhouses, vegetable patches, playgrounds, schools, and more all in the effort to benefit the community. Care2Travel is compensated for coordinating the children's activities, whose donations and local purchases bolster the community.

To list several examples of the groups who have come to Romania, one of the first groups was from Dubai who brought 8,000 Euros to build a large greenhouse at a children's home, a football pitch, and to renovate a barn. Other groups have come from Scotland, England, Austria, Canada, Switzerland and Australia. The group from Australia brought 13,000 Euros and built a house for the family managing the animal farm at the aforementioned children's home, along with two outside stoves for two additional children's homes, a gazebo, and a storeroom.

Groups are also given the opportunity to go on long-distance hikes through the Romanian mountains and experience the local culture. All together, 10 World Challenge groups have come to Romania and each have served in immeasurably profound ways while also growing to be more familiar with our history and culture.

Projects and Activities

In addition to the volunteer positions and local volunteer assistance, Care2Travel has organized and participates in activities which **are used to establish connections, elevate local community morale, allow for locals and international volunteers to interact, help isolate a selection of creative local volunteers, and provide entertainment.** Following is a description of the projects and activities that

we have participated in and continue to do so, as well as activities that we have plans for in the future:

English Club: To promote the learning of English and afford better job opportunities, the English Club was established. This comprises of two weekly 90-minute sessions occurring at the Care2Travel office and at the local university of Csíkszereda. This club provides a non-formal setting for locals and volunteers to gather and have meaningful discussions in English, in the hopes that a healthy debate ensues. Topics are chosen by the attendees in advance and may cover cultural, social and current events to promote learning as well as thoughtful contemplation. Average attendance hovers around 10, with several individuals attending both sessions. International volunteers attend as well, contributing a broader perspective and arsenal of experiences. Care2Travel coordinators lead both groups. All English skill levels are welcome to join.

Other Activities

Potato Festival: Every year, Csíkszereda holds a Potato Festival. Potatoes grow prolifically here and are an integral part of the cuisine, so the town has locals gather in teams to compete to see who can create most creative potato dish. This gives the community an opportunity to interact, as well as allowing the youth to feel included. Care2Travel has participated as an association for the past four years, and in 2017 we took second place in the competition.

Pallet Project: This plan entails purchasing broken pallets and using the wood to make functional furniture such as chairs, tables, fences, etc. Volunteers and interns will be given the opportunity to help. We are currently looking for funds to start the project.

Summer University: In 2017, a retired English professor from the United States came to Csíkszereda and taught 40 teachers how to teach English. He brought six of his TEFL certified students and partnered with Care2Travel on this teaching project for four weeks during the Summer. The program proved to be so successful that the professor suggested a return visit to do the same, this time at Bolyai University, though dates remain to be scheduled.

Interviews with Local and International Volunteers

Johanna is a local volunteer who came to be in contact with Care2Travel through a school friend and a school presentation. She was in the 11th grade at the time. Johanna came to Care2Travel having had experience working with people with disabilities. In the Summer of 2018, she worked as interpreter for six camp sessions. Johanna states that she is contributing so little to the world, yet it feels like much more.

Sam is 18 years old and from Georgia in the U.S. He decided to take a gap year before starting college where he will study mechanical engineering. He found IVHQ through a web search, having the desire to do something worthwhile as well as travel. Although Sam had experience working with sheltered couples where he set up and catered food once a month, he chose to volunteer in agriculture as his Summer project. He figured that he would be involved in the planting and harvesting process. What he didn't expect was to dig a trench for the irrigation system and construct a game hut at the volunteer accommodation. He says that it's one step closer to full independence. He loves the food, and if hungry while on the job at the farm, he simply pulls up a carrot or better, or whatever else is ripe for the picking.

Financial Accounting

As every cent matters, Care2Travel takes great care in assuring that all donated funds are spent wisely and that programs are well thought out for investment and maximum success. Since being organized, Care2Travel has been the recipient of many generous donations that are all valuable contributions and are directly invested into the community through a variety of methods. This is something that we take very seriously and are extremely prudent with how we decide to spend the money that we receive. Our association will continue to be a trustworthy example of reliable accounting and dedicated service. We thank our donors, supporters, local and international volunteers, partners, and sympathizers for their support and encouragement. We couldn't do it without all of you!