



**HIPKNIT CATALOGUE**

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## **Namaste**

As Director of the Society for Health, Environment, and Women's Development (SHEWD), I would like to welcome you to our volunteering brochure and thank you for considering helping our organisation through volunteering.

I hope you find all the information that you need, but if you have any further questions please contact me or one of our previous volunteers who will be happy to help.

I look forward to meeting you.

Krishna

Director of SHEWD

**The Society for Health, Environment and Women's Development**

The Society for Health, Environment and Women’s Development (SHEWD) was established by a group of local activists in 1998 as a facility through which to develop four key areas of life in the Lalitpur region. We work to promote and increase understanding concerning health, education, environmental awareness and the improvement of the socio-economic status of women.

The people of the Lalitpur district are among the poorest in Nepal. The majority are farmers and craftspeople with an average annual income of less than USD 250. This falls below the UN’s poverty line of USD 1 per day, meaning that many lack even food and adequate housing. Poor education and vocational training leads to unemployment and a low socio-economic status. In turn, people cannot afford even basic medical treatment, including aspects of maternal health care considered compulsory in the West. Many health problems could be solved simply through increased awareness of risks, and the link between a cleaner environment and better health. It is women who suffer most noticeably from these problems.

SHEWD believes that these issues are all linked to a lack of economic means, insufficient education and the low socio-economic status of women. Our four key areas of work have thus been carefully selected in the belief that success in one project will have a wider positive impact. Our main project areas are detailed below.

Maps showing the location of Lalitpur in Nepal, and of Thaiba (the location of our office) in relation to Kathmandu and Patan.



➤ **Healthcare initiative**

Rural communities rely on government-funded health-posts which are able to offer little more than first-aid treatments. The main hospital in Lalitpur is in Patan, which for the most rural inhabitants means 2 days of walking before they even get to the road. Medical treatment is very expensive and for many it is simply not an option. Through our healthcare programme, SHEWD aims to provide basic medical care to these rural areas.



In 1998 and 2001, we organised two free Eye Clinics, allowing almost 1000 villagers to have their eyes checked, and operated on if necessary, by ophthalmologists. They were provided with medication at a minimal fee and 26 people underwent eye surgery.



In September 2009, SHEWD donated much needed birth-delivery equipment to the government health post in Bhardav, Lalitpur.

Research has also shown that the lack of gynaecological healthcare is endangering women's health. SHEWD is currently planning a 'Gynaecology Camp' to provide women with a free gynaecological check-up and is also working with communities to improve the maternal healthcare available at the village health posts, thus hoping to overcome various elements which inhibit women in travelling to hospital for such care. We plan also to use the camp as a platform from which to raise awareness of the importance of family planning. SHEWD hopes to encourage women to see the benefits of providing education and a higher standard of living for fewer children, rather than providing very little to a large family.

➤ **Hipknit**

Hipknit, our micro-credit initiative, aims to empower women in poor and remote villages through the production and sale of knitted products. Helping women to generate their own income in what is often a 'hand-to-mouth' economy, allows them to decide how to spend their money. For example, many of them use it to send their daughters to school. Without this economic freedom, many of these girls would not be educated, leaving them illiterate and unable to in turn contribute to their community's development

So far, 25 women have received free training in knitting and business practices. The only investment the women make is in two knitting needles, which costs approximately 40 NR (around USD 0.60). Selling the products on the international market, SHEWD applies fair trade principles. The women are paid for each piece they produce, based on a wage of NR 180 (around 2.2 USD) for each day worked. This is a higher wage than that paid to women selling to other buyers.

SHEWD plans to increase the number of women involved in Hipknit, while also expanding the range of income-generation activities to include vegetable farming and rearing goats.

We are currently working hard to establish regular trade links with Western retailers so as to ensure regular work for the women.



### ➤ **Youth Development Programme**

Unemployment, lack of motivation and low self-esteem are major problems among the younger generations in Nepal. Through our youth development initiatives, SHEWD aims to increase the employability of young people, giving them hope of a bright future in Nepal.

Such hope is vital in reducing the current trend of leaving Nepal in order to find work abroad in which they are often exploited.

Basic IT skills are required for most jobs in the Lalitpur area but lacking these skills, many young people do not qualify. To address this problem, SHEWD ran the Oracle Computer School for poor young people and those from the Dalit caste from 1999 to 2003. The institute asked a minimum fee from students to cover expenses and gave full scholarships to those unable pay, particularly female and Dalit students. Approximately 200 students graduated from the school.

In 2006 SHEWD obtained and oversaw a one-year IT contract. SHEWD provided 30 young people with a free 3-day training course on the software that was used. As a result, the young people were employed full-time for one year, with a salary of NR 3500 per month (around USD 55). SHEWD is looking to establish other similar IT contracts in the future.

With the increase in the number of competent computer schools in the area, the need for computer training has become less pressing. SHEWD is currently looking into other areas where there is a training need that has not been met. We are aiming to establish regular English conversation classes to be run by volunteers as a way of both helping and feeling a part of the community.

### ➤ **Environmental Awareness Campaign**

The current lack of environmental awareness is a major issue for Nepal's future development. SHEWD aims to increase understanding among villagers of the impact of their actions on the environment, and of the important link between a clean environment and good health.

Our continuing efforts in this area have included initiatives to encourage villagers to re-use, recycle and reduce their household waste. SHEWD has taken part in a field clean up operation, encouraging farmers to adopt more hygienic and environmentally friendly behaviour during their agricultural work.

On 5 June 2000, SHEWD organised an ‘Environment Day’ to inform young people in the area about the importance of preserving the environment. Carrying large banners with the slogan ‘Save the environment, save life’, a group of 200 students and 130 members of various local organizations passed through 3 different villages in the Lalitpur district. During the day, the volunteers raised awareness of the need to combat deforestation and tackle pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.



As a result of these projects, the villages are now significantly cleaner and both sewage and rubbish disposal have improved, thus diminishing related health risks.

### **Funding SHEWD’s work**

As a grassroots organisation we don’t receive external funding from larger development agencies. Instead, we raise funds through the sale of our Hipknit products and from donations by generous individuals. In addition, we are initiating a “fair-trade tourism” project, through which people will be able to stay in the village in order to understand our work and to



experience the traditional Nepal. This process will allow us to raise much needed funds for our other projects.

Due to this lack of official funding, resources are thin on the ground and the final realisation of intended projects can take a long time. Saying that, SHEWD has progressed enormously since 1998 and its current work and future visions are of important benefit to the communities in which we work. We encourage volunteers to initiate their own projects within our key areas of work, as well as continuing our on-going micro-credit initiatives.

## **Volunteering**

### *Why volunteer?*

Working with SHEWD, volunteers gain a wide range of skills, and because we are such a small NGO, you will enjoy hands-on experience. You will quickly learn how to solve problems in a creative manner, imagining ways in which to increase our effectiveness and

establish new areas of work. You will gain an in-depth understanding of important issues surrounding women's empowerment and wider development concerns. Your everyday work will familiarise you with project planning and implementation, which together demonstrate initiative and self-motivational skills.

You can feel assured that your efforts will make a real difference to the community. On a more personal level, volunteering with SHEWD can be a life-changing experience, memories from which will make you smile for many years to come!

SHEWD has also previously worked with university students who have used SHEWD's work as a basis for dissertation research. We are happy to act as a sponsor for those looking for an official internship. SHEWD is able to help consolidate viable research proposals and other necessary documents.

#### *How can I help?*

Every volunteer is different. Different experiences, different expertise, different ideas and different personalities mean that each volunteer will contribute to SHEWD in their individual way. Volunteers are vital to our work through their ability to think creatively and to help the development of our grassroots organization in a variety of ways.

Important areas of particular contribution by volunteers tend to be in networking with the West to raise awareness of our work and setting up trade links through which to sell our HIPKNIT products. Healthcare professionals are also highly valued as volunteers.

Working with both Krishna and the local communities, volunteers help to improve our existing projects and also to establish new ones. For example, a previous volunteer with medical training established two health posts in rural Lalitpur, while another produced a detailed proposal for our FairTrade tourism initiative, which will prove vital in providing us with a regular source of income.

A typical week for a SHEWD volunteer might include some of the following activities:

- Meetings with Krishna to discuss current initiatives and future plans.

- A trip to several Village Development Councils to assess our current work. This involves understanding how the villagers view our work and discussing potential improvements with them.
  - Email contact with existing or prospective retailers in the West.
  - Individual work and research on your personal aims whilst working with SHEWD.
- For example, one current volunteer is working to establish SHEWD as a Scottish Charitable Trust. Previous volunteers have been instrumental to the creation of our website.

### **Previous volunteers**



#### **Elsie Blackshaw**

- *Dates of volunteering:* March-June 2010
- *Nationality:* Scottish. *Age:* 22
- *Background info:* My undergraduate degree was in history and I am just about to start a law degree, with the aim of becoming professionally involved with development issues.
- *Why did you volunteer with SHEWD?* Because I wanted to experience Nepal as a country rather than a tourist destination while learning about the reality of grassroots development issues. Have a look at my Nepal blog: [www.elsieinnepal.blogspot.com](http://www.elsieinnepal.blogspot.com)
- *Contact details:* Please feel free to email or call me to discuss anything relating to SHEWD or Nepal. My email is [eblackshaw\\_320@hotmail.com](mailto:eblackshaw_320@hotmail.com) (underscore (\_) between w and 3). My UK mobile is +447510086851.



#### **Sibylla Pigni**

- *Dates of volunteering:* February – July 2009
- *Nationality:* Swiss *Age:* 29
- *Background info:* I am a sociologist and I'm currently doing my second masters degree in development studies.
- *Describe SHEWD in 3 words:* Natural, flexible and efficient.
- *What is your favourite memory of your time with SHEWD?* The discussions with Krishna and his wife Bina.
- *Contact details:* Please feel free to contact me – I'd love to share my experiences of SHEWD and Nepal. My email is [pigni.sibylla@gmail.com](mailto:pigni.sibylla@gmail.com)



### **Ricarda Hirsiger**

- *Dates of volunteering:* November 2007- February 2008 but still regularly works with SHEWD long-distance.
- *Nationality:* Swiss    *Age:* 27
- *Background info:* I have completed my masters in International Development and I currently work professionally in development issues.
- *Why did you volunteer with SHEWD?* To gain experience at a grassroots level and to experience another country.
- *Describe Nepal in 3 words:* Beautiful, exciting, fun.
- *Contact details:* Please feel free to contact me for any advice or information. My email is [R.Hirsiger@alumni.ids.ac.uk](mailto:R.Hirsiger@alumni.ids.ac.uk)

### **Accommodation**

Many volunteers choose to live in Thaiba, from where they can communicate easily with Krishna, the Director of SHEWD, and also feel part of the community to which they are contributing. Thaiba is a beautiful rural area which provides a stark contrast to the chaotic nature of Kathmandu. Volunteers currently live with host families in the village, giving them a great opportunity to experience Nepali culture. Nepali houses are often rather basic compared to those in the West, but the host families provide comfortable and private rooms for our volunteers. Nepali people are very friendly and welcoming and are generally very keen to understand different customs and cultures. Many evenings are spent discussing how things are done in your country compared to how they are done in Nepal.

It is up to each volunteer to choose how they eat, but many decide to eat with their Nepali family. It is typical to eat two main meals during the day. Served at around 10am “lunch” consists of rice and several types of curried vegetables and pickles. A similar meal is then

served at around 8pm, with the option of having a small meal in the afternoon. The food is beautifully prepared but is definitely on the spicy side and takes some people a bit of getting used to it!

SHEWD is currently building a guesthouse next to the office which is in Krishna's house. This will provide volunteers with a comfortable and more private accommodation option, while simultaneously allowing you close interaction with Krishna and his beautiful family.

From Thaiba, it is easy to travel and explore Nepal during the weekends. It is difficult to go too far because of the slow roads but travel within the Kathmandu Valley and parts of the Central Hills is possible. You will need longer periods of time to travel further.

If you don't fancy rural life, it is possible to arrange to live in a guesthouse in either Patan or Kathmandu, from where you can commute to Thaiba.

### **A taster of Nepal**



Nepal is a beautiful country in which to live and work. It is rich in both culture and natural resources (eg the Himalaya), making it incredibly popular for trekking and more general travel.



As a volunteer, you will not only enjoy these aspects of Nepal but you will gain a true insight into life in a developing country. Your experience will give you a deep understanding of the country's fascinating culture which is largely dictated by a perplexing range of religious festivals.



The chaotic nature of Kathmandu, where motorbikes swerve past cows standing patiently in the road, and where many locals wear masks as a form of token protection against the choking smog, is not repeated elsewhere in Nepal. For the large part, Nepal is an agricultural economy, providing fascinating landscapes of terraced fields and hard-working labourers. Saying that, the pace of life is more relaxed than in the West, making patience a key attribute in any volunteer!





The reality of daily life is difficult in many ways. Electricity is an issue in the dry season, with the load-shedding schedule allowing only 10 hours of power in every 24 during the worst periods. Occasional petrol shortages lead to 4 hour waits at the pumps which inevitably reduces the amount of transport available. For many volunteers, the roads shock our Western sensibilities. There are no lanes or any sense of organisation, and the horn seems to be the most vital component in any vehicle! However, don't let these realities put you off as all of these things are key to the patchwork of experiences that make Nepal such a brilliant and interesting place to work.



To get more information about Nepal's culture and history, there are many sources of web-based information, and the relevant sections in both the Lonely Planet and the Rough Guide give a good overview.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

- Do I need a visa?
  - You will need to get a tourist visa to cover the length of your stay. These can be bought at Kathmandu airport although double check if this is still the case. You will need 2 passport photos.
  
- Do I need injections before I come and do I need to take anti-malarial tablets?
  - There are certain injections that are recommended for travel in Nepal. Speak to your doctor at least 3 months before you leave to make sure you have enough time to complete the course of vaccinations.
  - Malaria is not currently a problem in this area of Nepal although if you plan to travel to certain areas, you might need to take anti-malarials.
  - There is a comprehensive medical centre in Kathmandu aimed specifically at foreigners. Their website has a lot of useful information and certainly answers questions relating to injections and malaria. <http://www.ciwec-clinic.com/index.php>
  
- How will I get to SHEWD?

- In order to settle into Nepal life, we recommend that volunteers spend their first few nights in a guesthouse in Kathmandu and we will arrange for a taxi to meet you at the airport (this usually costs about \$10). Once you are settled, Krishna will take you to Thaiba, giving you the opportunity to make sure you are happy with the accommodation arrangements etc before moving in.
- How easy is it to get to Kathmandu?
  - From Thaiba you catch one of the very regular micro buses to Lagankhel, Patan, which should take about 20 minutes. From there, you catch another one to central Kathmandu, taking another 20-30 minutes depending on traffic. Someone will happily show you where to get the buses. Alternatively, there are many cheap taxis available in Kathmandu and Patan.
- Is language a problem?
  - SHEWD highly recommends that volunteers take Nepali language lessons because being able to communicate with locals will enhance both your work and your wider experience. Please see the Appendix for more information.
- Are there any other volunteers who will be there at the same time as me?
  - SHEWD usually only has one volunteer at a time but there are facebook groups, and various other ways of networking with other volunteers in Nepal, so you won't feel totally alone! SHEWD is happy to welcome pairs or groups of volunteers who want to come together to work on joint-projects.
- Will I have access to the internet?
  - SHEWD will provide you with a USB-internet device which works remarkably well although it is definitely slow compared to broadband. You will need to pay the equivalent of \$8 a month for unlimited access. SHEWD does have a laptop but it is better to bring your own which will probably be faster. Make sure it has good battery life!
- How easy is it to phone home?
  - From the office, the internet usually works fast enough to have a reasonable skype

conversation. Failing that there are cheap call shops in Thaiba and volunteers usually get a Nepali SIM card, allowing them easy contact with friends and families. Some of the host families have a landline on which you can receive calls.

- Is there anything in particular I should bring?
  - Aside from the usual list, a laptop (with a good battery life because of the power cuts), is a really good idea because a significant amount of work is computer based, and the SHEWD laptop isn't the fastest!
  - A reasonable personal first aid kit including water purification tablets because although you can get most things in Kathmandu, it might take a few weeks to figure out where to get them from!
  - SHEWD always welcomes donations from volunteers. Please ask Krishna for ideas on what is currently most needed.
  - Both men and women should bring full length trousers/skirts as modesty is an important part of Nepali culture. It is possible to buy suitable clothing here.
  
- Will I be safe?
  - This is obviously an impossible question to answer but in general, volunteers feel very safe in Thaiba. Krishna and his family are so welcoming and caring, that if you have even the slightest problem, they will happily help you to solve it.

### **Other information**

#### **Costs and expenses**

SHEWD does not charge its volunteers any fees as we believe that you are already helping us enough. We are not able to reimburse any of your expenses but you will find that you can live amazingly cheaply in Nepal. If you are living in a family, it will cost you no more than \$40 per week, including all meals. A guesthouse will usually charge a minimum of \$6 per night (excluding meals), depending on the standard.

#### **Next step**

If you are interested in volunteering with SHEWD, please email Krishna [shewd2001@yahoo.com](mailto:shewd2001@yahoo.com) to discuss dates and find answers to any further questions. Please



feel free to contact any of the volunteers if you want any advice or just to say hello! (email addresses above)

### **Contact details**

Email: [Shewd2001@yahoo.com](mailto:Shewd2001@yahoo.com)

Website: [www.hipknit.com](http://www.hipknit.com)

Krishna's mobile: +977 9841299009

### **Appendix :Language Tuition**

Language tuition is in no way compulsory but SHEWD believes that being able to communicate with local people will greatly enhance your volunteering experience.

Tuition is organised through the Axis Education Institute in Lagankhel (Patan). Classes can be tailored to individual needs and can either take place in Lagankhel (Patan) or the tutor can come to Thaiba, which adds slightly to the expense. Various options are detailed below:

- **6 day intensive private tuition:**

4 hours of private tuition in Lagankhel for 6 days.

Price: Rs 2500 (\$35)

- **1 month of tuition:**

2 hours of private tuition, 6 days per week

Price: Rs 5000 (\$70) for tuition in Lagankhel

Rs 7000 (\$97) for tuition in Thaiba.

Tuition options can be tailored to meet individual requirements. If you would like language tuition, please let Krishna know and he will organise it with the Axis Education Institute.