

Note to EVS applicants:

The work at TFS is very demanding. There is much more work than we are able to do. Volunteers work 32.5 hours per week including breaks. Note that the workshop is cold during the winter.

TFS only works well if the volunteers are happy and committed to be there. Please only apply if you are willing to give 100%. Otherwise you could have a negative affect on the organisation.

Volunteer Opportunities at TFS

1. What is TFS
- 2, What are the aims of TFS
3. What work are TFS doing now
4. What type of volunteer are TFS looking for
5. What does volunteering at TFS mean

1. What is TFS

Tools for Solidarity (TFS) is a charitable organisation, based in Belfast, which supports artisans and communities in some of the poorest countries in the world by providing high quality refurbished hand tools and sewing machines. TFS has no waged staff and relies on the commitment of people who are involved and wish to become involved in our work.

2. What are the aims of TFS

TFS has three basic aims:

To provide people, communities and projects with basic hand tools and sewing machines so that they may practice their skills and improve the quality of their own and their community's life. The tools enable the people who receive them to establish small co-operative and community businesses as well as provide training in vocational schools and opportunities for employment for disabled and women's groups.

To raise awareness throughout Northern Ireland (NI) about the issues of sustainable development within our own society as well as in the so-called "Third World". These issues include the environment, waste and recycling, appropriate technology, self-reliance, sustainability and community development. In the last 3 years we have restarted our education programme with local primary schools and community groups – called Education for Sustainable Development, the programme is run by an Ex-EVS volunteer Laura.

To provide opportunities for people in NI to participate in worthwhile and valuable work. TFS is particularly committed to working with all sections of the community in NI and to focus on providing sheltered placements for people with special needs and those normally excluded from being able to contribute to society in a positive way.

3. What work are TFS doing now

At present TFS work falls into 2 main areas:-

a) Project development:
Mwanza Sewing and Training Centre

TFS work with partners in the countries where we send tools. These are indigenous organisations that help us identify, assess and provide tools to artisan groups in both rural and urban areas. TFS visit our partners and the groups to assess how we can improve the way we work. In 2007 TFS established the first ever sewing machine refurbishment centre in Mwanza, Tanzania to refurbish sewing machines and provide training to the groups. TFS and our partner SIDO work towards making the project as sustainable as possible. This means generating sufficient income within the country to enable the project to move forward. Details can be found on our website.

Supporting the Mwanza project involves preparing sewing machines and other items for shipment. Half our volunteers are involved in this work.

Tools Centre

TFS plans to open a tools refurbishment project in Africa. We are making preparations for this at the moment. The other half of our volunteers work in this area – preparing tools for shipment, box making etc. We hope to start 2 pilot projects in Tanzania this year as part of this process.

b) Supported volunteer programme:

TFS works with between 15 – 20 supported volunteers (SV) in our workshops in Belfast and Downpatrick. This is a major part of TFS's work and we need people who can communicate with and supervise the work for our SV. Volunteers will help organise work plans for the SV and manage their working area. They will also be responsible to ensure that all health and safety precautions are observed when working with SV.

4. What type of Volunteers are TFS looking for

TFS have at present 4 core people and 8 international volunteers working for the organisation. It is therefore very important that future volunteers are able to give a commitment to help manage the organisation.

TFS will be looking for volunteers for 1 year placements and a volunteer who would be willing to work for 2 years.

1) Volunteers for 1 year. They will be required to

- ~ take on responsibility – answer phones and take initiative
- ~ be able to work as part of a team
- ~ be a good listener and be able to communicate with others
- ~ work with supported volunteers
- ~ be able to do physical and repetitive work, e.g. check sewing machines, other tools
- ~ lift heavy objects e.g. sewing machines
- ~ assist with the management of the organisation
- ~ work to agreed times – timekeeping is very important

2) The volunteer for 2 years will be required to

- ~ help manage the workshop
- ~ be willing and able to coordinate people
- ~ assist in the management we show throughout the organisation

- ~ assist in managing the house used for volunteers
- ~ help develop new projects
- ~ work to agreed times – timekeeping is very important

5. What does volunteering at TFS mean

TFS has over the last 20 years hosted many people/volunteers who have helped the organisation. In fact TFS would never have been able to develop and support many of the people in Tanzania, Uganda, and other countries without their help – as well as all the other work we do with SV, producing educational material, etc.

In that period we have seen ourselves as an open organisation where people can participate and take decisions. Some people have been involved at different levels, while others have chosen to come do some voluntary work and not take part in decision making. In previous years this was something that the organisation could accommodate. Unfortunately we have lost 2 core volunteers and we are now in a position where we need people who want to come and give a serious commitment to work and helping to manage the organisation.

I always say to volunteers that the work at TFS gives them a great opportunity to be involved in a project that questions and where they can contribute in a positive way. The work is often seen by volunteers as repetitive and the workshop is not the nicest place in the world, but what we have achieved and continue to do is something positive. There is also an opportunity to learn new skills and to learn how to use tools and well the limits are only those that people come with. Where else can you learn how to repair sewing machines, refurbish tools, get the chance to use them and at the same time provide people in other countries with the means to change their own lives?

The last 2 years have been a transition for TFS – we have moved workshop, a massive undertaking and we now need volunteers who want to come to really help us move forward. If you are interested or would like further information please contact us wither by phone, letter or email.

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