



Starfish International

Gambian Educational Program
Volunteer Information Packet
(Adult Applicant)

Gambian Educational Program Description

So you are considering coming with us to The Gambia this summer? Well, if you were sitting right across from us on our couch, here's what we would say to you:

- *Imagine being introduced to 200 girls in whose lives you can make a huge difference in the span of a few weeks.
- *Imagine designing and teaching your dream class and sharing a passion of yours with students hungry for the information and ready to put it to good use right away.
- *Imagine it being so hot in the classrooms that sometimes it is better to sit in the shade under the trees to have class.
- *Imagine watching as these 200 girls carry their chairs, some on their heads, some in tandem with partners, and some in front of them as they head for the grove of trees that has become the classroom for the day.
- *Now imagine teaching them without any board to write on, and with no control over the birds chirping in the trees.
- *Imagine considering the two previous statements minor challenges as you watch these girls wading in rain water, some soaking wet when they get to class, and many going without lunch just so that they can make it to class on time everyday to hear what you have to share.
- *Imagine being thoroughly exhausted by the end of each week but extremely excited to see what fascinating things the next week will bring.
- *Imagine cleaning the stagnant water in a neighborhood and knowing that you have played a part in malaria prevention in that neighborhood.
- *Imagine going on excursions that expose you to many fun cultural celebrations, beautiful birds, crocodiles you can touch, a monkey park, and historical giants such as the slave trade and how it touched The Gambia.
- *Imagine going home daily to eat, arguably the best and healthiest food you have ever had, and leaving The Gambia slimmer, healthier and more energized.
- *Imagine, at the end of two weeks, four weeks, or the full eight weeks, watching these girls transform into more confident and purposeful young women and knowing that you, in no small way, played a big part in making them fearless and well equipped first educators of the next generation. And in so doing, you have just increased, in very tangible ways, a higher level of security on our planet.
- *Most importantly, imagine being embraced, completely and unconditionally, just the way you are, by people who have always been a part of your family but whom you just had never met until the summer of 2010.
- *If you can imagine yourself in these scenarios, then start gearing up for the summer of your life!
- *If you can teach Mathematics, English, or Science, then you will be teaching one of these subjects in our morning sessions (9-12, Monday through Thursday). You will come up with a project on the basic things you feel every student needs to know if they are to be successful in your subject and you will

teach those concepts for the duration of your stay in The Gambia.

*If you can teach Health, any of the Arts (performing or other), or Career Development (especially as it relates to Business or Financial independence), you will teach in our afternoon session (3:30-6:30p.m.Monday through Thursday). Using your area of interest and expertise, you will develop a toolbox that your students can use for the duration of their lives to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. For example, a photographer (professional or someone who has a passion for it) could develop and teach a photography class with the end goal of putting cameras in the hands of the girls so that they can take and sell good pictures and manage the money well enough to be financially independent individuals rather than dependent wives.

*If you can train teachers in innovative ways to teach Mathematics, English or Science, you can carry out teacher training workshops for up to 200 teachers.

*If you love working with your hands, there is a bathroom to build for our library, bookshelves to make and install, a floor to put in place, and a ceiling to construct. You can help do any of these or you can carry out fundraising campaigns that will see these projects through while you are in The Gambia.

*If all this appeals to your heart and spirit, your next question is probably, “how much will it cost?” The program fee of \$500.00 per week covers accommodation, meals, weekly program excursions, project related transportation, and shuttle service to and from the Gambian airport. Volunteers are responsible for airfare and any personal travel within the Gambia.

*If you have read thus far and can’t wait to get to The Gambia this summer, here are the four most important questions to consider next:

1. What vaccinations and medications do I need? How much do they cost?

[Please consult with your physician concerning how soon before your trip you should be vaccinated.]

Required Vaccine:

1. Yellow fever vaccine. \$131

Recommendations Vaccines:

1. Hepatitis A vaccine (\$88)
2. Meningitis vaccine if travel is from October to June (\$142)
3. Typhoid vaccine.
4. Hepatitis B vaccine may be recommended depending on plans for travel in Gambia (most young adults will have this also). (\$78)
5. Tetanus Shot (\$82)
6. Measles vaccine x 2 if born after 1957 (most young adults will already have this)

[Note: Measles vaccine and tetanus (tdap is best) can usually be obtained at primary MD office.]

Required Medication:

1. Malaria medication

Recommended Medication:

1. Diarrhea medication

[Note: These are general recommendations and may change based on each individual's health history.]

Passport Health in Cicero can do a group consultation for 5 or more people and the cost is \$29 per person, plus the cost of vaccines. Individual consultations are \$49.

If you have any other questions, or if you wish to set up an appointment, please e-mail Robin Drypolcher, RNC, BA at Passport Health of Upstate NY at sphealth@URMC.Rochester.edu or call her at (315) 698-8858.

2. Is a Visa required for travel to The Gambia?

Yes. **Please apply for your Visa 1 month prior to departure for The Gambia.** Visit the following link to obtain the application for a visa: http://gambiaembassy.us/images/forms/visa_application.pdf

3. What about Flight Information?

We suggest using www.orbitz.com or kayak.com since it searches multiple travel sites simultaneously.

The cheapest roundtrip flight we've found so far is \$1345 from Newark International Airport.

Few flights include 1 stop in Dakar and these are much more expensive.

Most flights including the \$1345 flight above include stops in Europe and Dakar before arriving in The Gambia.

These flights are usually about 20 hours in length including layovers.

To search for yourself, use codes NYC and BNL for your departing and returning cities respectively. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

4. How do I apply to the program?

Complete the application form below and submit it with a personal statement and references. These materials should be mailed to us at: admin@starfishinternational.org or

Starfish International
Gambian Educational Program
9599 Clarecastle Path
Brewerton, New York 13029

For more information: visit starfishinternational.org or call Yassin and David @ 315-882-4192 or 315-882-4190.

Other Frequently Asked Questions

Why this organization? What makes it unique?

The reason I co-founded this organization is that I was one of these girls. I know what they are going through, what they need, and especially what they are capable of when afforded the right opportunities. Our service is rooted in experience, personal experience.

David has worked as an AmeriCorps volunteer in the Appalachian Mountains, with refugees in Bowling Green, KY, and as a Save The Children worker in Eastern Kentucky. Most importantly, other than raising our children to the best of our abilities, this is what we have dedicated the rest of our lives to and we welcome you wholeheartedly to join us.

Is it fair to ask me to pay for serving/volunteering?

When I got my driver's license, I remember signing up as an organ donor and the lady at the DMV asked if I would like to donate some money to a little boy with cancer whose family was trying to raise funds for his cancer treatment. Before donating, I jokingly said to her, "Isn't it enough that I just gave you my organs? Now you want my money too?" The bottom line is that the population we aim to serve is in Africa, and we will have to go to them and this is how much it costs to go there, live and serve. We assure you that it is an investment that will yield dividends for the rest of your life and beyond. It will be well worth your while. Please check out the reports by our volunteers from last summer on our website.

Why should I go all the way to Africa to serve when I can do so right here at home?

You should be serving right at home and probably are. This is simply a different kind of service, one in which you get to build bridges across cultures, get out of your comfort zone, and discover a whole new side of yourself and of course, you cannot import and experience the feelings and lessons of actually living and working in Africa! There is no substitute for it. Trust us!

But what if I have only one or two weeks? Four or Eight weeks is too long.

Apply and come anyway. Maybe someone else is in the same position and your weeks combined can be even greater service. You will either take up from where someone has left off or they will pick up where you left off. Every bit helps.

But in these economic times, is it wise to travel?

Some of the times I have felt most fulfilled by my service have also been those times where I felt I had the least to give but served anyway. Sharing the little I had was somehow more significant than when it was nothing to give from piles and piles. A sense of abundance and giving from a place of abundance has very little to do with quantity and a lot to do with spirit, intention and a sense of gratitude. Besides, service lets you step outside of yourself and not just give but receive.

Shouldn't I wait until later?

Well, if not now, then when? Since the future is not guaranteed anyone, why not now?

Where will I stay? What will the conditions be like?

Lamin Village is in the Western Division of The Gambia. It is a 10 minute drive from Yundum International Airport and a 20 minute drive from the capital city Banjul. The Coastal Highway passes through Lamin Village to several beaches along the Atlantic Ocean, all no more than 30 minutes away. St. Peter's Senior Secondary School is located in Lamin Village. Situated in a semi-rural area and yet in close proximity to the capital city and many government and parastatal entities including the American Embassy, Lamin Village is perfectly located for the purposes of the program and the needs of its participants.

Volunteers arrange and pay for their own round-trip transatlantic airfare to The Gambia. Participants will reside in housing in Lamin Village provided by Starfish International. The residence will have running water, electricity, and indoor plumbing. There will be a housekeeper for the residence, whose responsibility will be cooking, dishwashing, and laundry, but the rest of the household duties will be the responsibility of the household members. Each volunteer will have a roommate.

Volunteer opportunities...Why and how is it an opportunity? What do I get?

Volunteers will contribute to the educational progress of Gambian girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In so doing, volunteers will gain a more critical appreciation of their own educational backgrounds. In addition, they will be challenged to draw upon their cultural experiences as they come together with people from a different culture to engage in the processes of teaching and learning.

Why now and why these specific programs?

In July of 2008, we went to The Gambia and interviewed girls from kindergarten to high school to find out what they felt were the obstacles in their educational experience and their answers to these challenges is what our program is designed around. In June of 2009, we successfully carried out our first summer program. Please see the website for details. Our programs continue to be based on the findings of these experiences and speak to what the girls identify as needs. As we speak, girls are dropping out of school and being forced by this circumstance to enter into early marriage. They cite the lack of opportunities to effectively study and pass their exams, lack of financial resources for school fees and school materials such as books, and lack of qualified teachers, lack of time to concentrate on their studies due to household responsibilities, and the constraints of low expectations as the obstacles they currently face. For them, as for us, help cannot come any sooner.

Why Gambia?

According to the 2005 United Nations Development Program Report, The Gambia is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking at 155 out of 177 countries when it comes to its Human Development Index. With only 58% of its Primary School teachers qualified to teach the 40% of the population that currently have the opportunity to attend school, the problem is compounded by teachers leaving the profession due to lack of input and incentives for their professional development. The government is struggling to attract or retain trained teachers. Add to this the lack of access to books and the focus on

Gambian Educational Program
Adult Application

(Please Print)

Full Name of Volunteer: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Mailing Address *(if different)* _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Home Phone: (____) _____ Cell/Other Phone: (____) _____

Employer: _____ Work Phone: (____) _____

Date of Birth: _____ Gender: _____

Employer: _____ Work Phone: (____) _____

Applicants who are not United States Citizens

Full Name as it appears on your passport: _____

Country of Birth: _____ Country of Citizenship: _____

Name of Primary Care Physician: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: (____) _____ Fax: (____) _____

Health Insurance Provider: _____

Medical Concerns: _____

Food Allergies: _____

Dietary Restrictions: _____

Teaching Experience *(if any)*: _____

How did you learn about the program: _____

Preferred Dates of Participation: _____

Personal Statement

Please provide a personal statement that includes:

- Why you want to come to The Gambia and work with Starfish International
- What you hope to gain from the experience
- Your educational background
- Your experience with other cultures
- Your concerns and anxieties about participating (*if any*)
- Your skills and talents
- Your personal strengths and weaknesses
- Your interests and hobbies
- Your experience with performing/visual arts
- Why you believe you would be an asset to the program

Reference Letters

Please provide 2 letters of reference.

Please send completed application, personal statement, and reference letters to:

Starfish International
Gambian Educational Program
9599 Clarecastle Path
Brewerton, New York 13029