



STAIRWAY FOUNDATION INC.
Brgy. Aninuan, Puerto Galera
Oriental Mindoro

Volunteer Handbook
2022





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I. INTRODUCTION

Stairway Foundation, Inc. (SFI) invites skilled persons and professionals from abroad and from the Philippines to be part of our work to protect and promote children's rights in accordance with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Volunteers contribute in different areas ranging from communication, networking, advocacy, income generation, maintenance, construction, farming/gardening, cooking, baking, coaching, teaching and facilitating a variety of workshops and training sessions. Placement of volunteers will depend on their skills, interests, and most of all the needs of the organization.

If you are interested to help make a difference and join a community of talented and committed Stairway people, we suggest that you read this Volunteer Handbook and extend your insights further through exploring our website www.stairwayfoundation.org

A Brief Historical Background

Stairway Foundation Inc. (SFI) is a Learning and Resource Center for the Protection and the Promotion of Children's Rights. SFI's legal status is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), which is non-stock, non-profit, non-denominational and non-political.

Stairway was founded in 1990 by Monica Ray and Lars Jorgensen. The initial program was an alternative strategy to protect and meet the needs of particularly endangered street children. Through networking with multiple Manila based partners, hundreds of children went through the program during the first few years, while the founders solely financed all developments and operations.

As Stairway pioneered in utilizing the performing and the visual arts as a therapeutic tool and a vehicle to advocate for children's rights, the networking extended to the local art communities. Some major productions in theatre and animated film have shaped the organization, and today Stairway is known as a Learning and Resource Center rooted in the use of creative communication in our advocacy for children's rights.

The drivers behind Stairway's expansive reach today, nationally and internationally, are a comprehensive e-learning platform along with continuous strategic development and training of child protection networks with broad representation from government and non-government institutions.



II. VISION, MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Vision

A safe environment for children worldwide where their rights are equally respected.

B. Mission

Through innovation, creative excellence and professional networking, Stairway is committed to continuously learn from our local operations and manifest our gains as a resource to inspire and educate partners in the region and the world to protect and promote children's rights.

C. Goals

1. To promote and protect children's rights.
2. To bring in innovative and creative approaches in raising awareness of the greater public regarding the plight of disadvantaged and abused children.
3. To be a part of a network of government organizations (GOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs), in order to create and implement valid and lasting solutions to the problems of disadvantaged children.

D. Objectives

- To help imperiled children become physically and mentally strong and on their way to become productive members of society.
- To develop a continuing Crisis Intervention Program for the local community.
- To contribute to protection and development of capacities of the community youth.
- To create environmental awareness among children and youth.
- To contribute to the improvement of health, education, skills, self-reliance, and socio-economic well-being of the indigenous people in the community.
- To stay informed and at the cutting edge regarding new technologies and developments that may pose a threat and negatively affect children and youth.
- To develop insight and expertise in child protection from extensive experience, systematic learning, and research.
- To develop innovative tools and training methodologies offering efficiency and scale in protecting children.
- To pursue a strategic advocacy and capacity-building program, which puts in place mechanisms for the distribution of advocacy and creative and effective educational tools on the UNCRC landscape.
- To identify and capacitate local and international networks towards establishment of UNCRC landscape resource centers.
- To promote broad public and multi-stakeholder awareness on the UNCRC and CSAEP.
- To develop and disseminate information on best practices and advocacy on the UNCRC and CSAEP.



III. VOLUNTEER CLASSIFICATION, FUNCTIONS, AND EXPECTATIONS

Classification

SFI operates with more categories of Volunteers, Guests, Interns and Practicum Students, as specified below:

- A. Unskilled Volunteers, long term. People committing a minimum of 5 months on site to take on assignments, as decided by SFI management.
- B. Unskilled Volunteers, short term. People committing 1 to 5 months on site to take on assignments, as decided by SFI management.
- C. Specialized Volunteers. People with special skills requested to do specific tasks on site. There is no specific timeframe for stay or engagement.
- D. Long Distance Volunteers. People who help SFI from a distance, for example by networking, advocacy income generation or other tasks that do not require physical presence at the center.
- E. Guests. People who visit SFI for a month or less for exposure and learning.
- F. Interns and Practicum Students.

Guests, Interns and Practicum Students differ from the other categories, as their main objectives are not to serve the organization or the cause. Interns and Practicum Students come with specific learning objectives, which to some extent require support from Stairway staff. Guests are not staying long enough to really become assets for the program.

Functions

Volunteers have different assignments and functions, depending on skills, interests and the current need of the organization. Stairway has four programs accepting volunteers on site, the Community Assistance Program, the Environmental Awareness for Children and Youth Program, the Family Home Program and the Break the Silence Advocacy and Capacity Building Program. Volunteer applicants may specify in their application which program and activities they prefer to work with, but it is always the prerogative of the SFI management to place a volunteer where they are needed and can contribute the most. If a volunteer is very particular in his/her placement preference, he/she must state so clearly in the application. The chance of being accepted as a volunteer increases with having useful skills and a high level of flexibility in placement and working tasks. Our greatest need for volunteers is with our Outreach and Organic Farming program in the Barangay of Baclayan. You can read about Stairway's various programs on our website www.stairwayfoundation.org



Expectations

What volunteers can expect from Stairway Foundation aside from an adventure and a life enriching experience:

- A warm welcome from your new colleagues.
- A friendly and professional work environment.
- A comprehensive orientation as applicable and necessary.
- A specific job description detailing duties, responsibilities, and working schedule.
- The opportunity to develop your volunteer role with us.
- A safe working environment, to the best of our ability.
- When on duty, reimbursement for costs associated with your task (supplies, transportation, etc.).
- A supervisor assigned to offer you support and the opportunity to discuss concerns, issues, and successes.

What Stairway Foundation expects from volunteers:

- They come to Stairway with the intention and purpose to contribute to our work.
- They have read and agreed to comply with the Stairway Foundation Volunteer Handbook and Child Protection Policy.
- They have a comprehensive personal insurance covering potential medical assistance and injury to third person.
- They agree to and have signed the agreement with SFI, which specifies terms and conditions for their stay.
- They attend orientations, meetings, and trainings, as scheduled.
- They perform duties to the best of their abilities, and they are flexible with hours and tasks assigned.
- They work within the policies, procedures and guidelines of Stairway Foundation.
- They show initiative and are always willing to lend a helping hand.
- They abide by the safety policies of Stairway Foundation and report anything unsafe they may encounter.
- They maintain the confidentiality of any privileged information during and after their time as volunteers.
- They notify their supervisors of planned or unplanned absences.
- They do not draw fast conclusions, they are open-minded, they try to learn, and they welcome a variety of tasks.
- They understand that as a volunteer at Stairway, they will always be seen as an ambassador and a representative of the organization in all their activities, inside and outside of the Foundation. Thus, personal negotiations and dealings with the community/individuals/clients connected with Stairway, whether related or unrelated to Stairway's programs, should have written consent/approval from their supervisor or the Executive Director.



- They understand that possession/use of illegal drugs is a serious criminal offense in the Philippines, and Stairway has a zero tolerance policy to any staff or volunteer engaging in any illegal activity, including drugs.
- They understand that there is no smoking and drinking of alcohol within Stairway Foundation, except on special occasions.
- They will abide by the organization's Behavioral Policies.

Financial Contribution:

Volunteers, Guests, Interns and Practicum Students contribute to their food and accommodation during their stay at Stairway Foundation. The rate varies from 10 to 30 Euro per day, depending on category, location of service, accommodation offered and the duration of stay. The rate of financial contribution falls under the confidentiality agreement between Stairway and a volunteer/intern/practicum student/guest. Any concern pertaining to the financial contribution should be discussed with the SFI finance department, only.

IV. APPLICATION PROCESS.

If you are interested to apply as a volunteer, but you still have some questions, you can talk to former volunteers, who are now board members of Stairway Denmark, the sister organization of Stairway Foundation. They can be reached at volunteer@stairwaydenmark.dk

If you are ready to apply, please fill out the online application you find at www.stairwayfoundation.org/contribute/volunteer

You submit your application to volunteer@stairway.ngo

You can expect to hear back from us within 1 to 2 weeks.

If you are shortlisted, we will facilitate an interview online.

If you are accepted, you will receive an acceptance mail specifying the period of your stay and your daily contribution to the foundation during your stay.

After receiving the acceptance mail, you can proceed with the general requirements for volunteers as described below.



If you are accepted and a schedule is set for your stay at Stairway, you need to submit the following documents through e-mail:

- A signed Volunteer Contract of Commitment with SFI, which you find here below. Please include a recent photo.
- A clear scanned copy of your passport with number, your photo and date of expiry, or other valid ID for local volunteers.
- A clear scanned copy of your vaccination certificate.
- A clear scanned copy of your plane ticket to the Philippines, if you come from abroad.
- A Certificate of Criminal Record, along with a Child Certificate from your local law enforcement office/police station
- Name and complete contact details of home contact person/s.
- Copy of travel/health/accident insurance policy with contact details clearly visible.
- Information on any particular health concerns, including allergies, and your blood type.

Contract of Commitment with SFI.

Volunteer Agreement:

I, _____, hereby sign up to volunteer at Stairway Foundation from _____ to _____, doing my best to be a good team member and serve the organization to my best ability. I understand the necessity for me to contribute to my food and accommodation, and I agree to a daily rate of ~~xx~~ EURO, to be paid to the SFI Cashier at the center by the end of each month.

I understand that as a volunteer, I may resign from my service with Stairway Foundation at any time. I also understand that Stairway Foundation may terminate my service at any time.

By my signature, I declare that I have read the SFI Volunteer Handbook and the SFI Child Protection Policy, and I agree to abide by Stairway's behavioral policies, as stipulated therein.

Volunteer's signature: _____

Date: _____

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: _____



As a volunteer, you are an important colleague and a representative of our organization to the community at large. We look forward to working with you and welcome you as a member of the Stairway community.

The Stairway Team

Orientation Process after arriving at Stairway Foundation

All volunteers will be oriented upon arrival at the Stairway Learning and Resource Center. The orientation will involve the following:

- Introduction to colleagues, children and a different culture
- Orientation to the rules and regulations, the functioning of Stairway, and reading and signing SFI Child Protection Policy.
- Guided tour of the grounds, buildings, workshop areas, sleeping quarters, etc.
- A few days to observe workshops and activities
- Assignment of chores and other activities

Rules and Regulations

Since 1990, Stairway Foundation has built a good rapport with the community and a reputation as a highly respected and professional institution for the protection and promotion of children's rights. Therefore, visitors and volunteers are usually well respected. It is important that everyone is aware that we are all ambassadors of the organization and we must act and behave accordingly. A volunteer is expected to live and work under the conditions set by Stairway Foundation and is expected to follow the rules and regulations. There are **no exemptions** and **no exceptions** to these rules.

- It is not allowed for a volunteer/intern to have an intimate relationship with staff members, other volunteers, or members of the community. If such relationship evolves, the volunteer may be told to leave.
- Cigarette smoking and vaping are prohibited in front of the children and within Stairway.
- Any use of illegal drugs is absolutely prohibited and will result in expulsion.
- Beers or any other alcoholic beverages are prohibited around the children.
- Limit the use of your phone around Stairway. During meal times and activities with the children, phones should be kept away.
- Try to speak English in order to avoid creating cliques.
- Guests are not allowed in the volunteer sleeping quarters without permission from the staff-in-charge.
- Filipinos are non-confrontational. Please keep this in mind if ever you are in a situation of conflicting interests. Before revealing your emotions, calm down and try to discuss the situation with the project coordinator or the staff-in-charge.



- As a volunteer, you are a guest in a foreign culture working under the local staff.

Useful Information

Address

Stairway Foundation, Inc.
Brgy. Aninuan, Puerto Galera 5203
Oriental Mindoro, Philippines
Tel. +63 (917) 843-1922
Email: stairway@stairway.ngo
Homepage: www.stairwayfoundation.org

You may take a quick glimpse of Stairway by clicking this link:
<https://app.lapentor.com/sphere/stairway-360>

How to get to Stairway

Depending on what time of the day you arrive at the Manila International Airport, you may be able to head straight down to Stairway, or you may have to or want to take a night or more in Manila. You can find and book a hotel to your liking and budget online, or we can recommend you a hotel, as you please.

It is very possible to go to from Manila to Stairway using all public transportation, but many prefer to ease the stress of arriving in a new country by hiring a private vehicle to take you to the port of Batangas, from where you are to catch a boat to Puerto Galera. We do recommend the private vehicle, but it is of course a bit costly compared to the public transportation. Feel free to ask advice from our volunteer support persons.

Accommodations at Stairway

During your stay, you will be housed either dormitory style or private room, depending on your request and budget. It is likely that you will be staying in two different locations, depending on your tasks. We have the Learning and Resource Center in Barangay Aninuan and we have our camp house/farm house in Barangay Baclayan, where we also run programs and activities. Our farm and outreach activities in the Baclayan community require more volunteer assistance than any other of our programs.

Laundry is done by hand and is hung outside in a designated area (or inside when rainy) to dry. Most volunteers wash their clothing several times throughout the week to always have fresh clothing and to avoid wasting big chunks of free time on laundry. We live in a hot and humid climate and it is important to pay close attention to personal hygiene.

There are many buildings at Stairway and oftentimes many stairs to climb in order to get around.



There are also a lot of insects (mosquito's, flies, moths, beetles, etc.), lizards, birds, bats, and snakes at Stairway. Snake sightings are infrequent, but they do occur.

Health/Medical Care

For your health concerns, there are plenty of local clinics and doctors in Puerto Galera. For greater medical needs or emergencies, there are hospitals in Calapan City, which is the nearest city to Puerto Galera - 1 1/2 hours' drive. In addition, there are plenty of pharmacies where you can get most medicines. If you will need medical attention, your Stairway colleagues will always be there to assist you.

As a health and safety precaution, you should seriously consider to have tetanus, diphtheria and hepatitis A vaccines before you arrive. Furthermore, if you are planning to travel around the Philippines you may consider malaria prophylaxes, depending on your planned destinations. Consult with your doctor regarding your safety precautions.

Food and Diet

While at Stairway, you will receive 3 meals and 2 snacks per day. Rice is served at every meal and is the staple food in the Philippines. Stairway's menu is plant based, with fish, but no other meat. Depending on how long you will be here, you may want to bring a supply of multi-vitamins and calcium supplements to help your body adjust to a different diet. Drinking water at Stairway is going through a UV filtration and is safe, but it is only available in few selected outlets. You will be informed about this during your introduction.

Weather

There are 2 seasons in the Philippines: dry and wet, but they are not always very distinct and do not always follow a set timeline. Generally speaking, the dry season runs from December to June and the wet season from July to November. The dry season is very hot and humid. Summer (when kids are out of school) is April – May, although even that schedule has varied lately.

The wet season produces a lot of rain, and the temperature remains very warm and humid. A jacket is rarely needed here. Typhoons are common and can lead to fierce storm conditions and flooding. The Philippines has an average of 6-7 typhoons per year. Typhoons are categorized into 4 different groups, depending on wind speed. Level 1 is the mildest, and level 4 is known as a super typhoon. The news stations are good about notifying the public about the typhoon categories. Local government units will organize evacuations as needed. On several occasions during strong typhoons, we have used Stairway as an evacuation center for indigent people.

Budget

Apart from your contribution to food and accommodation, your budget will be very individualized.



Things to budget for are personal toiletries, snack food, going out to restaurants, cell phone load, and any other side travel or entertainment you may want to indulge in. Scuba diving is big here in Puerto, and Stairway has our own Dive School as a part of our Environmental Awareness for Children and Youth Program, which offers our volunteers a discounted rate. As Puerto Galera is a touristic area, there are several grocery stores that cater to foreign tourists; you will be able to find most things that you need or want.

Communications

Communications in the Philippines is primarily through cell phones/texting. Most volunteers that bring their own cell phones are able to switch their SIM cards to a local service provider (Smart or Globe).

Stairway has internet (via Wi-Fi) and computers available for you to use in a schedule to email and to stay in contact with your family and friends. Some volunteers bring their own laptops, which is okay. Just keep in mind that we are not liable for theft, loss or damages to any of your belongings. Most volunteers will have comprehensive insurance to cover theft, loss or damage to property, in the extremely rare event such would be needed.

Electricity in the Philippines runs at 220 volts. Most electronic devices work just fine here, unless you plan on bringing a hair dryer or curling iron – which we don't recommend.

Credit Cards

It is possible to withdraw cash at ATMs using foreign credit cards in Puerto Galera, which is only seven (7) km. from Stairway. In addition, you can exchange your US dollars to Pesos in several establishments in Puerto Galera. The office at Stairway has a safe that can be utilized to store your passport, monies, and other valuables as needed.

Things to Do

Puerto Galera is a popular tourist destination. A lot of the local resorts offer water sports such as wave-running, para-sailing, para-surfing, wind-surfing, banana-boating, etc. There are also a variety of waterfalls to hike to, many within walking distance of Stairway, and a local 9-hole golf course. There is also seasonal night-life with live music, dancing, videoke, etc. There are many things to do here, but enjoying amazing nature and reading rank at the top.

Suggested Packing List

Clothing:

- 5-7 pairs of shorts (include board shorts for swimming)
- 5-7 t-shirts / tank tops
- 1-2 nice outfits (for celebrations, events, going out)
- 7-10 underwear
- 2 bras / 1 sports bra
- 1 pair of long pants (for cooler weather and/or mosquito relief)
- 1 hoodie / jacket
- 2 swimsuits / swim trunks



2 pair of socks
Athletic shoes (for hiking)
Flip flops
Light rubber boots and rain gear

Toiletries:

Travel size shampoo / soap
Toothbrush / toothpaste
Brush/comb
Hair accessories (to put hair up)
Bath towel (2)
Razors
Bandana / washcloth (for wiping sweat)

Miscellaneous:

Sunglasses
Hat (to protect from sunburn)
Sunscreen (or can buy here)
Mosquito repellent (or can buy here)
Camera
Flashlight
Books
Earplugs (for light sleepers)
Umbrella (can buy here)
Prescription Meds
Dramamine (if needed)
Multi-vitamins / Calcium supplements
Meds for diarrhea (Imodium or probiotics)
Ointment for Scabies

Language

There are many languages spoken in the Philippines; however, Filipino (based on Tagalog) is the national language and is at least understood by most Filipinos. English is taught in schools and is used for governmental, commercial, and educational purposes, and can also be found on most signage.

While the staff at Stairway both understand and speak Basic English, many of the children here do not. One of the benefits of having volunteers is for the children and youth under our program to learn more English. They may want to teach you some Tagalog at the same time.

In the event there are more volunteers from the same country, we strongly suggest that you use English whenever around other members of our community.