



The Parent & Student Guide

Two places. Six months. The Himalayas.

Everything you need to know about a Gap for Good Fellowship at Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong — including the difficult bits.

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Dr Graham's Homes on its hillside above Kalimpong — Kanchenjunga on the horizon.

A note on honesty. Gap for Good is preparing for its first placements. Where a practical detail is still being settled with the school, this guide says what will happen and when families will have it in writing — always before anyone commits.

What is Gap for Good?

Gap for Good places two UK school leavers a year — no more — as volunteer Fellows at Dr Graham's Homes, a school community founded in Kalimpong, India, in 1900. Fellows live at the school for a minimum of six months, supporting lessons, coaching sport, running clubs and

joining the life of the Cottages — in roles agreed with the school and shaped around what each Fellow can genuinely offer.

It revives a great tradition. For decades, young volunteer teachers from Britain were part of daily life at the Homes, bringing energy, sport, music and an extra pair of hands — and taking away rather more. Our founder, Angus Norriss, was one of them: a GAP teacher at Dr Graham's Homes in 1993, at exactly the age of today's applicants.

This is not a holiday with a conscience bolted on. It is closer to a fellowship: you apply, you are selected, you are prepared, you serve — and you join a community that will claim you for life.

Gap for Good is being established as a UK social enterprise. We trade to fund a mission rather than to maximise profit: after the costs of running the programme, surpluses are applied for the benefit of Dr Graham's Homes — never distributed as private profit.

The philosophy is Work Hard – Play Hard. Work hard: teach, coach, mentor, restore, turn up every day for a community that expects much of you. Play hard: sport at 4,000 feet, sunrise from Deolo Hill, expedition weekends, festivals, friendships. Six months at full stretch — and not a party programme.

The programme at a glance

- **Places:** a maximum of two Fellows each year
 - **Location:** Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong, West Bengal, India
 - **Duration:** six months minimum
 - **Nature:** voluntary service, in roles agreed with the school
 - **Programme contribution:** £3,750, covering board and lodging at the Homes and the programme around you
 - **Not included:** flights, visa, insurance, vaccinations and personal spending
 - **First applications:** opening dates announced at gapforgood.org
 - **Contact:** hello@gapforgood.org
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The school

On 24 September 1900, a Scottish missionary named Dr John Anderson Graham opened a home in Kalimpong for six children who had nowhere else to go. From that single rented cottage grew one of the most remarkable school communities in Asia: hundreds of acres on a Himalayan hillside, a family of cottages with names generations of pupils know by heart, a farm, a chapel, classrooms, pitches and famous choirs.

Today Dr Graham's Homes is a co-educational school drawing pupils from across India and the wider region, including families with connections to Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet. Alongside fee-paying pupils it remains home to children with the fewest opportunities, supported through a sponsorship tradition dating back to 1908. Its alumni — Grahamites — include prime ministers, judges, film-makers and teachers on every continent. In September 2025, hundreds of them came home to Kalimpong for the school's 125th anniversary.

Two things matter for a prospective Fellow and their family. First, the Homes is not a project awaiting rescue — it is a 125-year-old institution that has been building confident, capable young people since before any of us were born. Fellows arrive to participate and contribute, never to “save” anyone. Second, it is a working residential school community, with teaching staff, house parents and estate staff who have looked after young people on that hillside for well over a century.

Gap for Good is proudly associated with the school’s UK charity, **Dr Graham’s Homes Kalimpong (UK)**, registered in Scotland (SC050985) — you can read about its work at drgrahamshomes.org.uk.

The place

Kalimpong is a hill town in West Bengal, strung along a Himalayan ridge some four thousand feet above sea level, above the Teesta River and below Kanchenjunga — at 8,586 metres, the third-highest mountain on Earth. It grew up as a trading town on the old mule-train route to Tibet, and the crossroads character remains: a twice-weekly market, monasteries and mission churches, flower nurseries, and Nepali, Hindi, English and Bengali in a single bazaar transaction.

It is a genuine journey: fly to Bagdogra near Siliguri, then two-and-a-half to three hours by road up the Teesta valley. Darjeeling is a couple of hours across the hills; Gangtok and Sikkim are close. The town has banks, pharmacies, clinics, cafés and functioning — if occasionally temperamental — mobile data and wifi. Remote, not cut off: yes, your son or daughter can call home.

A placement moves through real seasons: spring blossom and clear mountain light; a warm, temperate summer while the plains bake; the monsoon from June — mist, drumming rain, the greenest green you will ever see; then October, when the air rinses clean and Kanchenjunga stands enormous above the town. There will be power cuts and damp socks. Fellows who thrive treat that as part of the story.

What Fellows actually do

There is no generic Fellow job description — deliberately. Every placement is shaped twice: around what Dr Graham’s Homes actually needs, and around what each Fellow genuinely knows and loves. Everything is agreed with the school and led by its staff; Fellows support qualified teachers and programme leaders, never replace them.

In the classroom — helping in lessons, English conversation groups, hearing readers, homework support. No teaching qualification needed: patience, energy and the memory of being ten.

On the pitch — football, hockey, athletics, swimming; coaching, training sessions, fixtures and house competitions. A Fellow who can properly coach their sport is gold dust.

Outdoors — supporting staff-run hikes, camps and expedition training, with a long-term ambition to help the school's staff deliver structured award programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (subject to the school's registration with the Award's licensed operator in India).

Creative and digital — the Homes is famous for its choirs; music, drama and art run deep. A photography club, a school film, coding basics: things that outlast the stay.

The farm and the campus — the Homes has farmed its own land since 1901; Fellows muck in with growing, planting and agreed restoration projects.

Cottage life — the quiet heart of the role. Fellows are attached to one of the Cottages and become part of its extended family: evening homework, games, reading, listening.

What Fellows don't do: teach unsupervised classes, administer discipline, provide medical or pastoral care, or take pupils off campus outside school-run, staff-supervised activities. These bright lines protect DGH pupils first, and Fellows too — and are set out in full in the Fellow agreement before departure.

The money, in plain English

Where does my £3,750 go?

£3,750 is the programme contribution for a six-month placement. It is not a holiday fee, and it is not a donation. It does two jobs:

- 1. It runs your placement properly.** Board and lodging at Dr Graham's Homes for six months. Selection and interviews. Safeguarding checks and training. Pre-departure preparation. Support and coordination in the UK and in Kalimpong throughout.
- 2. The balance goes to the Homes.** After those programme costs are met, the remainder is passed to Dr Graham's Homes as a charitable contribution, via Dr Graham's Homes Kalimpong (UK), the registered Scottish charity (SC050985).

What we will never claim: that 100% of the fee "reaches the school". No genuine programme can say that, because running a safe, selective, supported programme costs money. What we commit to instead is publishing the actual split — contributions in, programme costs, funds transferred, projects funded — every year, in the Gap for Good Impact Report.

What the fee does not include

Flights (typically London–Bagdogra via Delhi or Kolkata), your visa, comprehensive travel and medical insurance, vaccinations, kit and personal spending money. We say this on page one of everything, not at checkout. A realistic costs checklist is provided at selection. A realistic costs checklist is provided at selection..

The Cottage connection

Each Fellow is attached to one of the Homes' Cottages — and the additional fundraising connected with that placement is allocated to that Cottage and its pupils: restoration, upkeep, equipment, activities. Live alongside Willingdon, and Willingdon benefits. Our intention is that money you fundraise is given directly to Dr Graham's Homes Kalimpong (UK), the registered charity, so it never passes through Gap for Good's accounts at all. Details of the platform and Gift Aid treatment are provided with each Fellow's fundraising plan..

Live there – contribute there – fundraise for it – leave it better.

For parents: safety, structure and straight answers

You're not being overprotective; you're being a parent. Six months in the Himalayas is a serious proposition for an eighteen-year-old, which means it is a serious proposition for you. Here is how the programme is structured — with honest labels where arrangements are still being finalised.

Selection. Fellows are chosen through written application, references and personal interview, selecting for maturity, resilience, kindness and judgement as hard as for talent. Two places a year means we never need to fill seats — we turn down impressive applicants who aren't ready. All Fellows undergo an enhanced criminal-record check and safeguarding vetting appropriate to working with children. *Set out in full, in writing, before departure.*

Preparation. Pre-departure training covers safeguarding and the Fellow code of conduct; culture and expectations at DGH; health guidance to take to your GP or travel clinic; visas and documentation; money and communication; and an honest session on homesickness and looking after yourself. *Set out in full, in writing, before departure.*

At the school. Fellows live on campus with meals provided, inside a working school community. Each Fellow has a named supervisor at Dr Graham's Homes responsible for induction, timetable and day-to-day welfare, and a named contact at Gap for Good in the UK, with scheduled check-ins. *Set out in full, in writing, before departure.*

Health. Kalimpong has pharmacies, clinics and hospital access, and the school manages the health of a large residential community year-round. Vaccination requirements follow official UK travel-health guidance (NHS / TravelHealthPro); Fellows receive a checklist for their GP or travel clinic. Specific medical and escalation arrangements are documented and shared with families before departure.

Insurance. Comprehensive travel and medical insurance, including emergency repatriation, is a condition of the placement. Whether Gap for Good arranges a group policy or specifies minimum cover for families to arrange: — either way, nobody departs uninsured.

Visas. Volunteering in India requires the correct visa category — not a standard tourist visa. We will confirm the exact route with the High Commission of India before applications open and guide every Fellow through it.

Communication. Kalimpong has mobile data and wifi. Fellows agree a regular contact rhythm; parents have a direct line to Gap for Good in the UK — a person, not an inbox: hello@gapforgood.org.

If something goes wrong. A written emergency procedure covers illness, injury, incidents, natural events and family emergencies at home — who decides what happens next, and how you are kept informed. We monitor FCDO travel advice throughout each placement. If a placement should end early — for welfare, conduct or family reasons — we say so quickly, manage the practicalities and get your child home; the refund position is set out in our terms.

Questions to ask us — and any gap-year provider

Who, by name, is responsible for my child at the placement? What checks have been done on the people around them? What happens, step by step, if they are ill at 2am? Who pays for what — and what happens to the money if the placement ends early? When did you last visit the placement yourselves? Can I speak to a previous volunteer's parent?

We would rather you asked than wondered. Write to hello@gapforgood.org and we will answer — or tell you honestly that the answer is still being confirmed.

Who we're looking for

Not the finished article, and not straight-A certainties. We select for character: curious, resilient, positive, independent, kind, resourceful, energetic — comfortable living away from home, prepared to contribute, capable of taking initiative, ready to work hard and play hard. Academic brilliance is not the primary criterion. Character matters.

Honest self-selection helps everyone. If you need certainty, comfort and constant connectivity, this will be a long six months. If a power cut is a story rather than a crisis, keep reading.

Eligibility: UK-based school or college leavers, roughly 17–19 at application and at least 18 by departure, available for a minimum of six months, and able — with family and supporters — to meet the programme contribution and travel costs. Our ambition is that money should never be the reason the right person doesn't apply — ask us about support.

How to apply

1. **Discover** — read this guide, explore the website, talk to us.
2. **Register your interest** — two minutes, no commitment; you'll be first to know when applications open.
3. **Apply** — a written application about your motivation, interests and experience, and the question at the heart of it: *what would you contribute?* Email your application and CV (PDF or Word) to hello@gapforgood.org.
4. **Interview and selection** — a personal interview, with references and safeguarding checks: honest, searching and two-way.

5. **Match** — we shape your role with Dr Graham's Homes around your strengths and the school's needs, including your Cottage attachment.
6. **Prepare** — training, safeguarding, health and travel preparation, plus your fundraising plan.
7. **Kalimpong** — six months. Work hard. Play hard.
8. **Return and inspire** — debrief, then step up as a Gap for Good Ambassador: speaking at schools, mentoring applicants, helping select your successors.

Application opening dates are announced at gapforgood.org — register your interest to hear first.

Contact

Gap for Good · hello@gapforgood.org

Work Hard – Play Hard. Gap for Good is a UK social enterprise founded by Angus Norriss, former GAP student of Dr Graham's Homes: we trade to fund a mission, not to maximise profit. Gap for Good is not a registered charity — after programme costs, surpluses are passed to Dr Graham's Homes Kalimpong (UK), a charity registered in Scotland (SC050985), for the benefit of Dr Graham's Homes. Read about the charity at drgrahamshomes.org.uk.

This guide is reviewed and reissued as the programme develops; the current version is always available at gapforgood.org.