



Think Pacific Volunteer - Mental Health & Wellbeing

You are joining a Think Pacific project because we believe that you have the skills and passion to be a valuable addition to one of our volunteer projects. However, it's important to be aware that just because you'll be in Fiji doesn't mean you will be immune to the ups and downs we experience - something which can then be further magnified when you are in a challenging environment!

Furthermore, many individuals who join us may have previously or are currently experiencing ill mental health. We hope to inspire people who have the skills to join one of our projects regardless, and see support around mental health and wellbeing as an extension of the care we put into any element of Think Pacific.

Mental Wellbeing on Project:

It's important to remember that **mental health is something that we ALL have, and ALL need to care for**. Each and every one of us will have a unique relationship with mental health challenges, ranging anywhere from simply having 'down' days to experiencing diagnosable ill mental health. It's important to remember in a challenging environment like a Think Pacific project, anyone can be affected regardless of what your relationship with mental health and wellbeing has been in the past. Recognising that mental health is something that we must all maintain and care for, just as much as our physical health, is hugely important to get the most out of your Think Pacific project!

First arriving into Fiji, and at times during your period abroad, you might experience feeling anxious and that you're being pushed out of your comfort zone. These feelings aren't unusual in international travel or taking part in projects abroad - but setting this expectation early means that we can get a head start on maintaining mental wellbeing during your time in Fiji. Feelings of homesickness, apprehension, being thrown into the deep end and that you're unprepared are completely normal - and while you acclimatise into your project make sure you reach out for any help that you need. Your leaders are there to help you get the very best out of your project and so maintaining your mental wellbeing and health is one of their utmost priorities.

PLEASE NOTE: Joining a Think Pacific team, you may meet individuals who have experienced or live with mental health disorders - you may even have one yourself! We pride ourselves at Think Pacific on understanding, uplifting and engaging people passionate about our aims, regardless of their medical history. As one of our volunteers, we expect you to be an extension of this ethos. If you don't know about or understand someone else's past experiences, *that's OK*, but always remember to tackle these issues from a place of compassion and learning - everyone is different, and so is our mental health.



The Leader's Role - Supporting YOU:

During your time in Fiji, you will be surrounded by people helping and encouraging you through the highs and lows - from your team-mates, to your Fijian family, to your Project Leaders. Your leaders in particular are there to facilitate your project and experience, and are available 24/7 for any physical, mental and emotional support that you may need. When we say 24/7, we really mean it! Our leaders are chosen because we have every faith in their ability to support and guide you through your project, and they will be with your team every step of the way.

As you know, Think Pacific projects are challenging and you are undoubtedly going to have tough moments - which could affect *anyone's* mental health or wellbeing. Try to communicate this with your leaders if you can. You wouldn't hesitate to talk to them about your physical health if you were having an issue, so try to treat your mental health exactly the same. Remember the old phrase, *a problem shared is a problem halved*, sometimes you might feel better from simply opening up.

Ill Health Processes:

If, for any reason, you experience ill health on project then your leaders are the first port of call. This is *any* sort of ill health - both physical and mental. It is not uncommon for these situations to arise, and hence the standard Think Pacific ill health process is as follows...

1. Make your leaders aware of what you are experiencing when concerns first arise
2. Leaders will offer any physical or mental health support that they are comfortable with
3. Your leadership team will fill in a medical diary documenting the occurrence and discuss with you the next steps that you and they are happy to take
4. Whilst in the project environment a 48 hour review period will begin, in which you and your leaders will closely monitor how your health progresses
5. If ill health continues or worsens, you and your leadership team will discuss the next steps to be taken. This will most likely be removal from the project environment for 48 hours to receive any professional medical treatment needed and/or time to recover outside of the village

IF AT ANY STAGE you wish to see a Nurse, Doctor or medical professional please make your leaders aware, and they will help you receive this treatment as soon as possible. Please remember that although your leaders are with you to support and assist your project and are first-aid trained they are **not**, however, medical professionals.



An Open Environment at Think Pacific:

Our aim at Think Pacific is to make mental health and wellbeing something that we talk about just as much as any aspect of our physical health. However, we appreciate that everyone is different, and some people might not feel as comfortable talking about mental health and wellbeing as others. Because of this, we try to make having an open environment something that is part of the very essence of your Think Pacific journey. Our aim is for everyone's mental health and wellbeing to be something that is constantly upheld, regardless of whether ill mental health is something you have experienced previously or not! Here is the way that we have structured this into your project's journey...

Pre-Project UK

Aim: openness and honesty in disclosing any past or current personal (mental) health struggles. Think Pacific projects are challenging and not suited to everyone. That is why we talk just as much about the challenges of your project as we do the good stuff! We aim to open up the conversation about mental health and wellbeing from the start of the process, if anything is highlighted on your application form.

1. **Health Forms & Doctors notes:** if any experience of ill mental health is raised on either someone's application or booking form, you will be asked to fill in a health form so that we have the information we need to know how to best support you. You may also be asked to get a note from your Doctor if you have been recently treated for any condition or on any medication.
2. **Project Coordinators:** your Project Coordinator (as well as anyone else at TP UK!) will be your point of contact up until you head out to Fiji. They will discuss any health difficulties that you may have and discuss the ways in which this will be assisted during your time in Fiji.
3. **Facebook groups:** the run up to your project can be an exciting but daunting time, and being able to connect with the other people you will be going on this adventure with often settles the nerves. If you're feeling a bit apprehensive, then everyone else probably is too - share that with you team mates!

Pre-Project Briefing

Aim: to increase awareness around how your mental health & wellbeing could be affected but on project, and that it's OK to not be OK! When you first get into Fiji it can be a little overwhelming, and so we hope to make your transition from England to Fiji, and then into your village as smooth as possible. Preparing you for the challenges of project is the best way to do this, and during your briefing mental health and wellbeing will be woven into your preparations.

1. **Briefing workshops:** during your briefing, a health discussion will be facilitated, during which you will learn about common health problems that can occur, how these will be dealt with, and maintenance of personal wellbeing at a wider level. This will encompass mental health, with the aim to make the whole team aware that it's OK to not be OK, and what support will be in place.
2. **One-to-one leader chats:** as a further part of briefing you will learn which of your leaders will be your PPP. The leadership team will be allocated certain individuals from the team, who they will be doing weekly Personal Project Plans with during project for every team member. If any of



these individuals on the team have previously highlighted having experienced ill mental health then they will approach them for a brief one-on-one chat to just check in on how they are feeling and reiterating the support in place for the individual.

Project:

Aim: to maintain and support the mental health and wellbeing of all team members. Your time during your Think Pacific project will be a once in a lifetime experience that you'll never forget. However, everyone will inevitably experience highs and lows during their time in Fiji due to the challenging nature of the projects. Each day, your leadership team will aim to give time to both the team and the individual team members to voice any issues and get the assistance and encouragement they might need.

1. **Health Clinics:** Every morning, one of your leaders will run a health clinic in a specified location. Anyone from the team can come along for **any** type of health assistance they may need.
2. **Briefs & Debriefs:** The leadership team will facilitate daily briefings (in the morning) and debriefs (in the afternoon after school finishes). This gives your team a time everyday to prepare for and subsequently reflect on the day, gain feedback, and raise any issues that might have been encountered.
3. **Personal Project Plan (PPPs):** On Sundays the leadership team will hold PPPs with their allocated members of the team. This gives you the time to check in with your leader on how the week has been, anything that you might have been hesitating to come to them with, and generally how you are getting on! Try not to feel shy during these chats, as they are there to make sure every single person in the team is taken care of mutually. Nevertheless, if there is something you ever wish to discuss with your leaders - don't feel like you have to wait until a Sunday!

Post-Project Fiji Side

Aim: to finish the project on a high, and continue Think Pacific's individual support to the highest standard. After the amazing experience of your project comes to an end, you will go through the emotional rollercoaster of leaving your village and returning to the wider world. Towards the end of your time, we aim to make this transition as smooth as possible.

1. **R&R:** While you celebrate everything that you have achieved as a team, your leaders will still be on hand to help support you in anyway. Difficulties can still arise - even on a beach resort - and they will be there to keep you out of trouble!
2. **Project Feedback:** At Think Pacific we constantly strive to improve in any way that we can, and we gain invaluable feedback from each of our teams at the end of your project. If there is any way that we can support you in a more comprehensive manner, then let us know! That way we can implement your ideas in the future.

Any mental wellbeing and health support we simply see as an extension of the care we offer to anyone who is part of a Think Pacific project. We take this very seriously, and hope to foster a nurturing and supportive environment around any type of ill health. Anything that is disclosed to leaders will only every be discussed amongst the leadership and management teams in order to maintain the highest



level of individual support. At the end of the day, if you are healthy and happy during your project then you will be as impactful as you can possibly be! Our aim is to support you to be as healthy as you can during your time in Fiji, in order to achieve all the amazing aims that you will be a part of during your time with Think Pacific.

Helplines:

If at any stage, with or without your leader's guidance, you would like to contact a local or nearby helpline, please find some recommended below...

Lifeline Fiji

+679 132 454 / Facebook @lifelinefiji

- A 24/7 toll-free service that can be contacted via call, text, facebook messenger and also offers face to face counselling, community based crisis support through promoting emotional well-being.

Samaritans Australia

+61 135 247

- A 24/7 helpline, which can offer emotional support and crisis support to individuals via phone.