



# Safety & Security

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The safety and security of our volunteers and staff is the number one priority of Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS). We are committed to operating volunteer programs that are safe for volunteers, and we maintain our record of safety through ongoing evaluations and rigorous staff training. From the decision to operate in a particular country to the design of the CCS Home-Base, we are dedicated to the safety of our volunteers; our entire infrastructure is designed around volunteer safety. CCS has been responsible for over 25,000 volunteers in 12 countries since 1995.

## Safety Assessments

We review, assess, and, if necessary, revise our policies and procedures surrounding safety and security in our program sites on an ongoing basis. CCS has developed set guidelines to ensure our Program provides the safest environment possible by mitigating identified risks. Our safety assessment strategy is comprehensive to include the responsibilities of staff at our Headquarters office, staff at the program sites, and all operating areas of our in-country programs.

Monthly reviews of policies and procedures concerning safety and security are conducted by the Programs Department, which is overseen by the Executive Team. The Programs Department also establishes, maintains, and monitors essential relationships with CCS Travel Medical and Evacuation Insurance, US, UK, Canadian, and Australian Embassies, the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) and the U.S. Department of State. Our strong network of experts within this field ensures that Cross-Cultural Solutions is in a position to respond quickly and effectively to any situation within the area.

Our In-Country Staff have received comprehensive trainings on the In-Country Operating manual which includes a chapter on *Emergency Procedures and Routine Illnesses*. As an essential part of the basic safety and security provisions for all CCS programs, our staff is also trained on emergency medical response including first aid and CPR.

All in-country staff has received comprehensive trainings on Cross-Cultural Solutions' emergency guidelines and participates in a monthly review or assessment of safety and security. Our assessments and reviews include the following areas:

- Home-Base Safety
- Fire Prevention
- Transportation Assessment and Policy Review
- Partner Program Safety
- Free Time Safety

- Incident Reporting
- First Aid and CPR compliance

In addition to the safety, security, and emergency guidelines, our in-country staff members have also created comprehensive evacuation plans for their respective site. The evacuation plan outlines the steps taken in the worst-case scenario when there is an imminent threat to our program and our Home-Base. This plan is supplemented by our travel medical insurance benefit of emergency evacuation and the support of the respective embassies.

### **Home-Base Safety**

Our Home-Bases are the cornerstone of a safe infrastructure for our volunteers. Each Home-Base is compliant with CCS standards and local government standards in the respective country. The locations of the Home-Bases are in safe, middle-class residential neighborhoods with the CCS office located in the Home-Base which offers unlimited access to the in-country staff and all they have to share. All in-country staff members—from Country Directors to cooks to drivers—are from the communities where our volunteers work, living and working there year-round. This gives them insight into the people and culture that only a local person could have and are therefore experts on the community and the country. Key staff members are bilingual and are able to communicate with our volunteers in English. At least three staff members in each program are first-aid qualified and CPR certified.

Our Home-Bases provide safe and healthy food and drinking water for our volunteers. The meals are prepared by cooks who have been trained to use techniques and ingredients that minimize the risk of volunteers getting sick due to a change in diet. Additionally, all volunteers are provided with an unlimited supply of safe drinking water.

Each Home-Base is located either in a gated community or is equipped with a security guard, dependent on the location. Only CCS staff and volunteers are allowed to be present within the Home-Base, and the guard monitors who enters and exits the Home-Base. Visitors are not allowed within the walls of the Home-Base unless they are a part of the scheduled activities and approved by the Program Director.

Our Home-Bases are maintained on an annual basis, or as needed. During this scheduled maintenance we address all aspects of the building structure including furniture, electrical, plumbing, stairs, railings, and security systems.

We also annually review fire safety in the Home-Bases. All Home-Bases are equipped with a minimum of:

- 3 smoke detectors
- 2 fire extinguishers
- 2 fully stocked first aid kits
- a comprehensive fire evacuation plan that is reviewed with each volunteer during orientation

### **Transportation**

Transportation is an integral part of the CCS program design. Volunteers are provided safe ground transportation to and from the airport, their placement, and all scheduled Cultural & Learning Activities. Our volunteers are transported by CCS vehicles with licensed CCS Drivers.

To ensure our transportation is held to the highest level of safety, our staff complies with guidelines set forth by CCS. Upon hire, drivers undergo comprehensive orientation and trainings on working with international volunteers and emergency response. All drivers are licensed and are responsible for proper maintenance of the vehicles as per government guidelines. All CCS vehicles are purchased with safety as the top priority. Our vehicles are insured and regularly inspected for safety.

### **Safety at the Partner Programs**

Our CCS in-country staff have established relationships with many local grassroots organizations where our volunteers work. As we select our partners in the community, safety is the most important component. Our staff has also determined on-site security measures based on the cultural norms of the country.

Our staff members maintain regular contact with the Partner Organizations via phone and visit each organization once a week to ensure any issues that may arise have been rectified. The Partner Programs are required to keep CCS contact information on hand and have a full understanding of established safety procedures in the case of an emergency.

In addition, each Program Director has established comprehensive procedures to address safety issues and emergency situations for each portion of the volunteer experience including the time spent at the Partner Program. They have also addressed in detail such topics as general safety procedures, communication with the Partner Organizations, protocol for effectively handling emergencies and volunteer injuries which may occur while volunteering in the Partner Program, Partner Program neighborhood and location safety, health precautions and awareness of potential health risks such as HIV, Hepatitis, etc.

### **Policies and Protocol**

Policies and protocol are put in place by our expert staff to handle any kind of personal, local, or national emergency. To ensure the safety of our volunteers, CCS staff members always register volunteers with their embassy, stay attuned to local happenings, and monitor all news and information. As an added precaution, CCS maintains a toll-free, 24-hour hotline in the U.S. for friends and family to reach CCS staff regarding any urgent matters home or abroad.

Any major events in the local area or country are monitored by CCS, with the expert advice of External Organizations. CCS will not hesitate to close a program for future start dates, or evacuate a program site in the case of any emergency which poses a danger to our volunteers.

### **Relationships with External Organizations**

CCS has built and maintained relationships with outside organizations such as Embassies, Peer Organizations, the U.S. State Department, and the Overseas Security Advisory Council. These organizations collaborate on the safety in each of our locations and are available to assist and guide us in a large scale event.

CCS is also a member of both the International Volunteer Program Association (IVPA) and UK based Gap Year. In order to complete membership, CCS is in compliance with principles and practices set forth by these organizations. To access a list of principles and practices please reference: <http://www.volunteerinternational.org/principles.html>.

Our staff members have also established relationships with the best medical professionals available.

## **Medical and Health Concerns**

Medical and health concerns are an important part of our focus on safety. CCS offers a comprehensive Travel Medical and Evacuation insurance plan to each of our volunteers. Each volunteer will receive up to \$50,000 in coverage. Our CCS in-country staff have built and maintained relationships with each of the hospitals and clinics used by our volunteers. The relationship is ongoing and is closely monitored by both our staff and our insurance company.

Focus on volunteer medical and health concerns begins prior to departure. In order to participate each volunteer completes a Health & Emergency Contact Form which provides a full profile of the volunteer's medical history, including current treatments, mental health issues, medications, and food allergies. This form is reviewed on an annual basis and is in compliance with industry standards. In order to provide the safest experience for volunteers the headquarters staff and in-country staff fully review and take any necessary precautions prior to the volunteer's arrival.

As a standard, in each of our Program Sites at least 3 staff members are fully trained and certified in CPR and First Aid. CPR and First Aid courses are renewed on an annual basis.

## **Travel Medical and Evacuation Insurance**

All participants in a Cross-Cultural Solutions volunteer program automatically receive medical insurance through Starr Indemnity and Liability Company. Each volunteer is covered for up to \$50,000 of in-country medical expenses, medical transportation insurance, and unlimited Medivac insurance. Starr Indemnity and Liability Company is the administrator and Europ Assistance is the insurance provider. Upgrades and extensions are available at a nominal charge.

When there is a medical emergency in-country Europ Assistance can:

- Coordinate transportation details with the attending physician/medical facility and air evacuation company
- Determine most adequate mode of emergency transport (commercial carrier or charter)
- Determine appropriate medical facility for treatment; secure a hospital bed
- Contact client's family/home physician (if approved by client)
- Relay contact numbers
- Coordinate information with all parties (client, traveling companions, family member, home physician, attending physician, attending medical facility, air evacuation provider)
- Provide continual updates on client's medical situation
- Monitor evacuation until completion
- Coordinate return transportation home once medical situation allows for return
- Provide direct payment to the hospital for any costs upwards of \$100

CCS also has a comprehensive Foreign Liability insurance plan, through ACE American Insurance Company, which covers up to one million dollars. Any university or group who is interested may request to be named on the policy.