

FOR PARENTS: Are gap years a good idea?

(1) IndependentGapAdvice: who we are:

A voluntary organisation offering free and impartial information and advice on:

- taking a gap year (which in practice lasts 15 months);
- shorter breaks from formal education (usually in summer vacations).

We suggest that for most young people the full gap year is the more rewarding option.

(2) The gap year scene:

- about 100 established, reputable organisations, many of them registered charities;
- hundreds of other organisations found on the internet which for a variety of reasons we do not recommend.

(3) Our database of recommended gap year organisations:

We monitor the gap year scene, and include on the database those organisations that we know well, often through working with their past volunteers, or we know them by reputation. The database is on the website and available on request by email.

(4) The potential benefits of a *well-spent* gap year:

- they grow up fast;
- they gain skills and experiences that employers value;
- they may change their career and university plans in the light of new experiences;
- they contribute more to university life, and they get more out of it;
- they have fun and make new friends.

(5) A possible plan for an overseas gap year:

- fundraise until the end of the year (typical target: around £4,000);
- work on a project, minimum 2 to 3 months, volunteering and/or career experience;
- independent travel;
- if going to university, return to UK in June/July to earn more money.

(6) For parents of disabled young people:

A gap year or shorter break is as beneficial for young people with disabilities as it is for the able-bodied. However, there may be some additional challenges and expenses. In some cases a shorter time abroad may be appropriate. Applicants need to be open-minded and flexible, and accept that sometimes not all their individual needs can be fully met.

Our experience is that most of the gap organisations that we recommend welcome applications from disabled young people, but a full and frank discussion at an early stage may avoid disappointment later.

Please look at some of our case studies written by disabled former gap volunteers, and refer to other sections of the website on choosing gap projects and travel safety.