

## MCC Service Opportunity

**Assignment Title & Partner Organization:** SALT/YAMEN: Program Intern – New Hope Center

**Term:** August 14, 2019 – July 11, 2020

**FTE:** 1.0

**Location:** Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

**Date Required:** August 14, 2019

Program information and policies can be found at [mcc.org/salt](http://mcc.org/salt) or [mcc.org/yamen](http://mcc.org/yamen)

*MCC is an equal opportunity employer, committed to employment equity. MCC values diversity and invites all qualified candidates to apply.*

### Synopsis:

The SALT/YAMENER will help children and adults to improve their conversational English, work with children in the areas of crafts and sports, help to realize events for children and families, and work as part of the New Hope Center staff team.

### Qualifications:

*All MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to: a personal Christian faith and discipleship; active church membership; and nonviolent peacemaking.*

*An invitation to an assignment is contingent on the successful completion of a criminal background check.*

- Ability to play with children and experience in work with children (such as baby-sitting).
- Excellent people skills.
- Professional training as a teacher is not required.
- Listening and serving attitude, instead of being the ‘expert’.
- Maturity, flexibility, sense of humor necessary.
- Ability to be a good team player.
- Demonstrated organizational skills.
- Flexibility in learning to work in a new organizational culture.
- Interest in networking with other organizations and with individuals.
- Comfortable with being alone and working on a team.
- Strong motivation to learn the Russian language.

### Assignment Narrative:

New Hope Center (NHC) is a local charitable organization, founded with the collaboration of Mennonite Brethren Missions, that works with a range of socially and economically disadvantaged children and families, including orphanage graduates, internally displaced persons (IDPs), families in crisis (parents and children), and single mothers. NHC also works with foster families, and sometimes adoptive families.

Current programs include:

- Center of “child development and intentional parenthood,” in which we work with children from socially disadvantaged families and their parents. Groups of children and their parents participate in programming two evenings a week, and once a month get together for an event or celebration on a Saturday
- Professional Training Center: occupational training program with different tracks of study (hairstyling, nail service, cooking, computers, etc.)

Given that most of New Hope Center’s programming goes on during the afternoon and evening, this is a mostly second-shift placement. Some activities (for example, preparation for upcoming courses/events) can be done during the daytime before evening programming. The SALTER/YAMENER would be expected to participate in Saturday and Sunday events, but would arrange with his or her supervisor appropriate comp time during those weeks. Below is an approximate schedule (subject to change).

Monday

Russian Study

3-8pm Participation in New Hope Center programs

Tuesday

12-3pm Office time (English conversation prep, event prep, putting up decorations, writing articles, etc.)

3-8pm Participation in New Hope Center programs

Wednesday

Russian Study

3-8pm Participation in New Hope Center programs

Thursday

12-3 Office time

3-8pm Participation in New Hope Center programs

Friday

Russian Study

12pm – 3 pm Staff Meeting

Saturday and Sunday – generally, days off.

Throughout the assignment and especially at the beginning, the SALTER/YAMENER will focus on learning Russian to fulfill the duties listed below. Learning Russian is important for this position, and this will require time, patience, and lots of practice in order to be able to communicate. Thankfully, in this position there will also be many ways to contribute while language is in development.

**Duties:**

*Required duties at NHC:*

- teach conversational English to at-risk children / youth who are involved in New Hope Center programming
- help with leading sports activities, crafts, helping to make and clean up snacks, etc.
- help to prepare needed materials / equipment for upcoming larger events and celebrations
- help to run larger events and camp(s)

- help to tell the story of New Hope Center's kids and families by taking photos and videos and by writing up English-language articles about programming
- participate in staff trainings and meetings

*Based on the skills and interests of the participant, other duties at NHC may include:*

- Lead new professional training or personal development courses for youth, depending on SALT/YAMENER's skills and talents (for example, guitar lessons; chess club; computer courses; cooking club, etc.)
- Help NHC staff to improve their conversational English
- Play music (guitar/ keyboard) for Church gathering
- Support parents' group by watching children during their meetings
- Help with some ongoing interior decoration / seasonal decoration in New Hope Center's building
- Help to maintain (water, etc.) plants outside the building

*Connections/duties with MCC Ukraine:*

As an MCC worker seconded to New Hope Center, the SALT/YAMENER is expected to:

- Communicate regularly with the Ukraine Representative(s).
- Attend all regional retreats and meetings called by the Ukraine Representative(s)
- Link with other MCC workers in the region, using these ties to promote reconciliation and multi-ethnic cooperation as possible.
- Host MCC visitors, such as staff and board members.
- Interpret the realities of the region to the broader MCC constituency through regular written reports and occasional articles for Mennonite publications.
- Develop connections with related local organizations and represent MCC through these interactions.

### **Location Description:**

The post-soviet era has been difficult in Ukraine, encompassing growing issues of poverty, economic collapse, the weakening of the family structure, alcoholism, drug addiction, and homelessness. Many people have been affected by the current armed conflict in the eastern part of the country, including Internally Displaced Persons who have moved from the conflict region to Zaporizhzhia and other cities in Ukraine, soldiers and families of soldiers, and the general public with regards to economic instability, social tension, and political polarization.

The SALT/YAMENER will live in Zaporizhzhia, a city of approximately 800,000 in eastern Ukraine. MCC's legacy, while it hasn't been continuously present, began in Ukraine in the 1920s with material resources being shipped to help hungry Mennonites and their neighbors.

The SALT/YAMENER will be placed with a host family, who will include them in their everyday activities and fellowship. Living with a host family can be a big advantage in terms of connecting, understanding a culture better, and learning a language faster, though it does mean some loss of independence. Some of the volunteers at New Hope Center speak English, but the host family might or might not speak English.

Zaporizhzhia is a large city with most amenities. The vestiges of Communism are evident in the huge boulevards and enormous monuments scattered throughout the city, though a recent de-Communization process has seen some of those monuments taken down and re-naming of streets and

locations previously dedicated to Communist politicians. Most of the food that Europe, and even the world, has to offer is available in restaurants in Ukraine, besides the delicious local specialties. Zaporizhzhia boasts an amazing fruit and vegetable market that is just a few minutes' walk from the MCC office. Downtown, there are good walking streets with enormous sidewalks, with kvass and flowers and ice-cream available on street corners in the summertime, and shwarma available all year round.

Ukraine has four distinct seasons; much like the prairies of Canada and the USA; winters can be cold (with temperatures well below 0 degrees Celsius) with snow, and summers can be hot, and humid when a storm is coming.

There is great public transportation in Zaporizhzhia. "Marshutkas," or small mini-buses, have routes throughout the city, in addition to the trolley-bus and tram-lines. The system linking cities all throughout Ukraine is a safe, comfortable, and affordable travel option.

The Christian context in Ukraine tends to be more strongly patriarchal than many Christian communities in Canada or the U.S. There are a number of Protestant church options, though all are in Russian. Modesty in dress is important across the board in churches, though fashion and being well put together is also valued. In many of the churches with whom MCC is connected, women wear skirts or dresses (and little or no jewelry) to church or church events. MCC's partners are mainly connected to the local Baptist, Pentecostal, and Mennonite churches. For relationship building, it may make most sense for the SALT/YAMENer to connect with the church of the host family.

In addition to the Reps, there are six MCC workers in the Zaporizhzhia MCC office – five from Ukraine and one international. There are currently two GSL volunteers (two SALTers) placed with partners in Zaporizhzhia. As of October 2018, areas to the east of Zaporizhzhia have been undergoing continued armed conflict. Peace agreements signed in Minsk have had very limited success, but it is important to note that the front line has essentially not moved for the last three and a half years. The safety of all our MCC workers is a top priority and MCC has pro-active security and emergency plans in place. At the moment, Zaporizhzhia is quiet, and the MCC workers there feel safe. The situation, of course, will continue to be regularly monitored with regards to safety.

### Challenges:

- Though Ukraine has 4 distinct seasons, not all buildings have central heating; as such, in certain locations it can make sense to layer clothing well in the winter.
- Zaporizhzhia still has some heavy industry, and regulations around environmental standards are not always adhered to; it is often easier – and cheaper – for a factory to pay the fine incurred by violating regulations and pollution can sometimes be a serious issue.
- There are currently 10 MCC workers in Zaporizhzhia (in addition to the Reps, there are five national staff and one service worker who are office based, as well as two SALT/YAMEN volunteers placed with partners). While other MCCers will certainly be available for support, the reality of living with a host family and working in the community in a new country can feel somewhat isolating. Having a mature individual comfortable being on their own will be important to thrive in this assignment.
- MCC requires that all workers complete pre-term medical exams to ensure that the individual is able to healthy and carry out the assignment responsibilities within the specific context. Those with existing health conditions are strongly encouraged to discuss the implications that living in such a context may have for their care and well-being with their health care provider.

One of the challenges to remaining healthy that would be important to keep in mind is the pollution due to the heavy industry in the region.

- In Ukraine, perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals are generally negative, and more strongly so in Christian communities. An openly LGBTQ+ Christian would face significant challenges with acceptance in this context.
- Managing frustration when things don't turn out as expected can be hard. While we do our best to determine and outline job responsibilities with our local partners, assignments really come alive based on the passions, skills, and giftings of an individual. Responsibilities may change or be refined over time in communication with supervisors to meet the ongoing changes and needs within a local context. As such, the greatest characteristics a participant can bring to an assignment are adaptability, flexibility, patience, a willingness to get your hands dirty, and humility to complete even mundane tasks.
- For those who are very task oriented, it can be a challenge to recognize the importance of "being" instead of always "doing" as building healthy relationships and mutually transformative learning is an important part of the participant experience. We hope participants will come with a desire to walk alongside our local partners, rather than see the assignment solely as a way to "get things done".