

MCC SALT/YAMEN Service Opportunity

Assignment Title & Partner Organization: SALT/YAMEN: Children's Program Assistant – Florence Center

Term: August 17, 2021 – July 21, 2022

FTE: 1.0

Location: Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

Date Required: August 17, 2021

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

More information about the SALT or YAMEN programs and policies can be found at mcc.org/salt or mcc.org/yamen

Synopsis:

The SALT/YAMENER will serve children with disabilities in the “Kangaroo” program of MCC partner Florence Center. He or she will assist in developmental activities and play and will be a part of the Kangaroo and the overall Florence Center 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.

- Demonstrated experience and passion for working with children.
- Experience working with children with disabilities a plus, but not required.
- Excellent people skills.
- Listening and serving attitude, instead of being the ‘expert’.
- Mature, flexible, responsible, and punctual.
- Ability to work with little supervision, while also being a good team player.
- An active person, who gets energy from interacting with children.
- Flexibility in learning to work in a new organizational culture.
- Strong motivation to learn the Russian language.

Assignment Narrative:

Florence Center is a long-time partner of Mennonite Central Committee and was founded and supported by other Mennonite groups as well. Florence Center is committed to education and support of children, adults and families dealing with disabilities, abuse, addiction and mental health issues. One of Florence Center's community development programs, the “Kangaroo” program (<http://florence-eng.ucoz.ua/publ/1-1-0-9>), provides regular early pedagogical intervention for 15 children with disabilities (autism, cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome, hyperactivity) aged 2-7. The

Children's Program Assistant would be a part of the Florence Center team but would spend the majority of their time assisting in the Kangaroo Program.

The approximate daily schedule of the Kangaroo program is:

- 8:00-8:45 – children arrive
- 9:00 – morning exercises
- 9:20 – breakfast
- 9:40 – morning greeting time
- 10:00 – developmental activities
- 10:20 – craft time
- 10:40 – active game time
- 11:00 – outing to the park
- 11:40 – return and change clothing
- 12:00 – lunch
- 1:00 – nap time
- 2:30 – more developmental / fine motor skills activities
- 4:00 – children are picked up

An approximate Schedule for the SALTer/YAMENer:

- Monday
 - 8:30-1:30 Florence Center
 - 2:30-4:30 Russian Lessons
- Tuesday
 - 8:30-4:30 Florence Center
- Wednesday
 - 8:30-1:30 Florence Center
 - 2:30-4:30 Russian Lessons
- Thursday
 - 8:30 – 11:30 Florence Center
 - 12:00-1:00 lunch at MCC office
 - 1:00-3:00 Russian lessons at MCC office
- Friday
 - 8:30-4:30 Florence Center

It is a possibility that due to COVID-19 quarantine measures in Ukraine the SALTer/YAMENer may not be able to carry out their duties as expected. Should quarantine measures prevent the SALTer/YAMENer from working with the Florence Center, an “adaptive” assignment may be necessary. Ukraine program encourages any participant to stay flexible during this service year.

Duties:

Throughout the assignment and especially at the beginning, the SALTer/YAMENer will focus on learning Russian to fulfill the duties listed below.

At Florence Center/ Kangaroo:

- Assisting with every-day activities of the children (washing hands, using scissors, learning to dress and undress him/herself, bringing children to the toilet, feeding children who can't feed themselves, etc.)

- Working one-on-one with children on different developmental activities (putting shapes into correct holes, learning to zip a zipper, stacking blocks, drawing, etc.)
- Helping to prepare for upcoming developmental activities (preparing crafts, getting out needed materials)
- Helping to clean up after games/activities
- Accompanying a child (for example, to the park) who doesn't nap
- Helping to supervise and ensure safety of children, especially during outings, when staff/child ratio must be 1:1
- Eventually, potentially leading group developmental activities, depending on the skills and abilities of the volunteer (music time, crafts, etc.)
- Potential involvement in other aspects of the work of Florence Center (help in preparation for the yearly inclusion concert, regular staff meetings, etc.)

Connections/Duties with MCC Ukraine:

As an MCC worker seconded to Florence Center, the YAMENer/SALTer 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 SALTer/YAMENer will live in Zaporizhzhia, a city of approximately 750,000 in eastern Ukraine. MCC's legacy, while it hasn't been continuous presence, began in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) in the 1920s with material resources being shipped to help hungry Mennonites and their neighbors.

Ideally, the SALTer/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 Florence Center speak English, but the host family may or may not speak English. There are some contextual realities that may make it difficult to find a host family for a SALTer/YAMENer. We make every effort to place participants with families, but if one cannot be found we will provide alternative, appropriate housing.

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; 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 minibuses, have routes throughout the city, in addition to the trolleybus and tramlines. The system linking cities all throughout Ukraine is a safe, comfortable, and affordable travel option. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all passengers of public transportation are required to wear protective face coverings. Additionally, public transportation is often crowded and not all passengers will follow proper health-safety guidelines. MCC in Ukraine will brainstorm alternative transportation methods with the SALTer/YAMENer – and where possible, the SALTer/YAMENer should prepare to walk to many locations within a reasonable distance.

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 is a lot of factory dust on the ground and in the air. Many inhabitants of the city use indoor plants as a way to purify the air – and these plants are easily obtained at market or garden shop.

There are a number of Protestant church options, though most are conducted in Russian. MCC’s partners are mainly connected to the local Baptist, Pentecostal, and Mennonite churches. For women, modesty in dress while attending church is important, 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, but it would not be considered rude for a foreign woman to wear trousers. It may make most sense for the SALTer/YAMENer to be connected with the church of the host family or with the church of the partner. While some churches have begun to meet during reduced COVID-19 quarantine measures, MCC in Ukraine does not require SALTERS/YAMENERS to attend a church in-person during active quarantine. The SALTer/YAMENer is encouraged to nourish their faith by attending services and connecting with other Christians virtually either here or in their home church.

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 with regards economic instability, social tension, and political polarization. Those affected include: 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.

In addition to the Reps, there are six Ukrainian National Staff in the Zaporizhzhia MCC office. At the time of writing, 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 years even though ongoing violence continues there. 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.

As of August 1, 2020, anyone entering Ukraine from a country of high transmission rate designated by the Ukrainian government as a “red zone” will be subject to a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. Use of the Diy Vdoma app will be necessary and any SALTer/YAMENer should be prepared for the

realities of self-isolation for those first two weeks. MCC staff will provide support and protective masks to the participant throughout their service term in Ukraine.

Challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect countries around the world. While we remain hopeful that the pandemic will have stabilized by August 2021, to prioritize the well-being and limit risk to our participants and the local community, assessments of each assignment will continue on a regular basis. If it is deemed that an assignment is no longer viable, we will do our best to help you secure an alternative assignment.
- 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.
- There are currently 8 MCC workers in Zaporizhzhia (in addition to the Reps, there are six National Staff. 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.
- 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. MCC requires that all workers complete pre-term medical exams to ensure that the individual is healthy and able to 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.
- Significant cultural/religious differences may exist. The Christian context in Ukraine tends to be more historically traditional than many Christian communities in Canada or U.S.A. with exclusively male leadership. There is generally a strong emphasis on Bible teaching.
- Most services will be conducted in Russian/Ukrainian, however there are a small handful of local churches that offer services in multiple languages (or with English translation).
- 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".