

MCC SALT/YAMEN Service Opportunity

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

Assignment Title & Partner Organization: SALT/YAMEN: GBV Project Assistant – WBVHA

Term: August 15, 2023 – July 13, 2024

Date Required: August 15, 2023

Location: Siliguri, India

Project Theme: HS Health Salt/Yamen

Job Synopsis:

The SALT/YAMENER will serve alongside West Bengal Voluntary Health Association (WBVHA) assisting with projects for victims of gender-based violence (GBV). There may be opportunities to be involved in other WBVHA projects as well.

Qualifications:

All MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to a personal Christian faith; active participation in a Christian community or church; and dedicated to nonviolent peacemaking.

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

- Post-secondary degree in social work, cross-cultural studies, peacebuilding, conflict resolution studies, or another related field.
- Strong English language skills and an aptitude and desire to learn a new language.
- Experience working with a program addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and/or peacebuilding is an asset.
- Research (data collection, data analysis), report writing, and administrative experience is an asset.
- Flexibility and adaptability in assuming a variety of job responsibilities depending on changing needs.
- Adaptable to basic lifestyle and lodging accommodations.
- Willingness to live as a member of an Indian household, learning a new language, ways of living, custom, foods, communication patterns, modes of travel and modes of worship.
- Willingness to be open to the mentoring and support of an Indian church community.
- Good communications skills and willingness to proactively make your needs known.
- Flexibility and openness to new experiences.
- Creativity and ability to take initiative.
- Interest in building relationships with the community.
- Maturity and positive attitude towards others.
- Strong self-care skills and healthy coping mechanisms.
- Ability to be independent in daily living and working situations, with backup support from MCC India staff.

Key Responsibilities:

- Provide support and office assistance for WBVHA projects.
- Help project participants work towards a peaceful society.
- Assist in project analysis and documentation of projects.
- Help in project reporting and other office work as required.
- Cooperate/build relationships with the staff and coach them in English as necessary.
- Attend church and relate to the local Mennonite/Christian community. Participate and connect with young adults from the Mennonite church.
- Live as a member of an Indian household, learning a new language, ways of living, customs, foods, communication patterns, modes of travel, and modes of worship.
- Follow the supervisors' guidance and support in personal and social matters.
- Participate with the MCC India Team in the annual retreat, workshops, and seminars as possible.
- Help MCC India or MCSFI as opportunities arise or according to one's interest.

Assignment Narrative:

Through living with host families and participating in host churches and service assignments, SALT/YAMEN participants will:

- Realistically test their gifts, limitations, and their call for further training and longer-term cross-cultural service.
- Grow spiritually as their faith is challenged and nurtured in a cross-cultural setting
- Broaden their understanding and appreciation of the lives of their brothers and sisters in their host country and further mutual trust, relationships and caring.
- Help to dismantle the stereotypes and prejudices that exist between cultures both during the exchange year and upon their return to their home communities.

To help meet these objectives, the SALT/YAMEN participant will:

- Participate in an in-county orientation of 5 to 10 days in Kolkata.
- Have six weeks of language study.
- Live as an adult "son" or "daughter" in an Indian family.
- Expected to be part of church and community life.
- Full participation and mutual support opportunities.
- Inclusion in all aspects of team life.

The SALT/YAMENers will assist the West Bengal Voluntary Health Association (WBVHA) was established in 1974 as a charitable, non-profit, and secular organization. WBVHA is a government-recognized state level health promoting organization providing support services for the promotion and implementation of universal health/primary health care services.

WBVHA operates with the active support and involvement of NGOs/CBOs and community groups like SHGs and cooperation from Government, both national and state, and the corporate sector as well. The primary objective of WBVHA is to promote community health related to the provision and distribution of health services. The motto of WBVHA is working together for health, education and WBVHA is implementing Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) 6th & 7th Module Training for Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri & Alipurduar districts through the District Training Centre Darjeeling & Jalpaiguri with the support from the Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal. They are also implementing a HIV/AIDS/STDs prevention program among female sex workers (brothel & non-brothel based) at Siliguri with the support of West Bengal State AIDS

Prevention & Control Society, and the Government of West Bengal. WBVHA has also been implementing an HIV/AIDS mainstreaming program among the HIV infected and affected people of Siliguri SMC & Rajgunj block, Jalpaiguri district since 2019.

WBVHA has implemented many more peacebuilding activities among different target groups in Darjeeling & Jalpaiguri districts since 2018. Recently they have implemented a program on “Reduction of Gender Based Violence through the promotion of Justice and Peace” among the disputed families of Naxalbari & Kharibari blocks of Darjeeling district.

WBVHA has six staff members who are directly involved in this project, each with specific roles and responsibilities. The field coordinator visits the disputed families with the training coordinator/counselor, or sometimes with the field workers to deal with the difficult conflict cases and giving advice and orientation to staff in different topics related to the project activities. The field coordinator oversees all aspects of the project at the field and at the administration level as well as building networks with stakeholders to enhance the project.

The training coordinator/counselor regularly visits houses of the project beneficiaries to discuss their problems in detail with family members to better understand the key issues and to hear their opinions. This individual also maintains records of conflict resolution meetings and monitors field-related activities.

Field workers visit the houses of families experiencing disputes and reports to the training coordinator/counselor and field coordinator. They also conduct the field level awareness programs on “Gender Issues and Legal Rights of Women & Child,” and continuously work to make the community aware of the peace activities. Field support staff also maintain records of project activities, project participants, and other field-related documents. The accountant maintains the project accounts and monitors financial expectations and obligations related to activities.

Naxalbari and Kharibari are the blocks alongside the international boarder of Nepal. The major problem is that the communities of Naxalbari and Kharibari are mostly living in the rural areas and town of Panitanki. This area has been identified as the project area due to the proximity of the international border as well as the large demographic of the tea garden labourers who are vulnerable to drug use and addiction. Tea garden labourers often have lower levels of income, education, and awareness around gender equality and experience hazardous working conditions that may result in higher incidences of gender-based violence in these communities. Due to the proximity with international borders, these blocks have been identified as highly vulnerable to human trafficking and drug trafficking that disproportionately impacts women and girls.

WBVHA intends to reduce gender-based violence among families by raising awareness of people's solidarity, community education, and prevention of violence. Other activities include raising awareness about accessing healthcare, women's rights education, and accessing legal assistance. The main goal of the project is the reduction of GBV through the promotion of justice and peace activities among the 300 disputes family of 2 blocks (Naxalbari and Kharibari) located in Darjeeling District for 2020-2023.

WBVHA is also building skills and capacity to prevent GBV. Peace programs target primary and secondary school student and seek to create more harmony in families and sensitize them about the dangers of drug use. To maintain peace in society is the more challenging task because of the old tradition or the social system which has continued from the past. There is a further need to empower the community-based peacebuilders, who can mediate conflicts in their communities.

WBVHA have also considered a focus more specifically on domestic violence against women and the mistreatment of young girls at the household level. Families are also responsible for patterns of gender-based violence when family members continue to prioritize young boys over young girls in terms of education, nutrition, and the household division of labour. WBVHA is sensitizing families about the potential of educating young girls that would allow them to be capable of earning for the family. This seeks to motivate family members to invest in their education and protect girls from gender-based violence in the future.

WBVHA plans to set up three community-based peace clubs to get better and more effective results at the grassroots level. WBVHA will build the capacity of the peace clubs with skills and knowledge on GBV by providing family-level counseling and holding workshops, awareness programs, and conflict resolution meetings.

In the peacebuilding trainings, facilitators will also lead guided discussions about the importance of protecting the environment with the selected participants.

Location Description:

Darjeeling District has three international borders with the neighboring countries of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. This district of West Bengal is also referred to as the "Northeast Corridor" which links the Northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, and others.

Much of the population is engaged in trade and commerce. Tea, tourism, and forest products are the main economic sectors in the district. There are 26,244 hectares of land for agricultural production. Another important issue is the sale and consumption of inorganic food and vegetable items that have a serious effect on the different vulnerable groups of the population like PLWHIVs, daily wage laborers, rickshaw van pullers, and sex workers. Through experience and observation, it is seen that consumption of inorganic food leads to multiple opportunistic infections (OIs) like indigestion, diarrhea, allergy, fungal infections, and other internal problems as the inorganic food contains high amounts of chemicals, harmful pesticides that could even worsen the health condition of the PLWHIV. The Government of India is gradually planning to implement organic farming wherever possible to avoid health problems amongst the public. However, some states in India have already started organic farming.

Siliguri is chilly from November to March in the winter season and during the summer there are very hot and dry conditions of up to 43 degrees Celsius. The higher one gets in the mountains, the colder it is. A winter coat may be required for a couple of months. It is possible to purchase warm clothing in India. Summer starts from April to mid-June with a rainy season due to southwestern monsoon occurring from mid-June to the end of September.

Kolkata to Siliguri is well-connected by train, bus, and air. To get there, a person takes a train from the Sealdah (Kolkata) to New Jalpaiguri Station. The Sealdah station is relatively close to the MCC office in Kolkata. It is 600 km between Kolkata to Siliguri – an overnight sleeper train trip. The nearest airport is 20 minutes' drive from WBVHA's Office, which is then a one-hour flight from Kolkata where the MCC office is located.

There are several hospitals in Siliguri metropolitan city including a government hospital and several other hospitals. There are also many private, multi-specialty hospitals that have 24-hour, 7-day a week service. Private clinics are also available. For serious medical conditions, patients are

referred to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital which is 15 minutes from WBVHA's Office. Dental and eye care is available, but physiological or mental illness facilities are available. This is a growing city in India, so all international standard big shopping malls are available in Siliguri.

The MCC office is situated near Entally market, one of the most interesting and exciting indoor/outdoor markets in the city. One will not be bored with a walk through the market, or in the streets surrounding the office. The SALTER/YAMENER will discover a variety of shops including pharmacies, tailor shops, outdoor barbers, food stalls, temples, shrines, and even clothed men washing at open pipes. Streets are congested with rickshaws, pedestrians, motorcyclists, taxis, and private vehicles vying for space, sleeping street dogs, and even families living and/or sleeping in front of buildings. There is a cacophony of noise at most hours of the day or night. At night the street is brightly lit, and activity abounds until 10pm or later, depending on the season. The MCC Office itself is considered an oasis of quiet in a sea of busyness.

MCC is ultimately accountable to the Mennonite church and works closely with MCSFI. MCSFI was founded in 1964 and is the service arm of 8 Mennonite and BIC church conferences in India. MCSFI provides fellowship and teaching opportunities within the church community for youth, women, pastors, and leadership workshops. MCSFI also engages in service through churches in the community. Presently MCSFI is engaged in projects involving food security, HIV/AIDS awareness, as well as peace and conflict resolution. The head office of MCSFI is Kolkata but the administrative office is in Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh. Rev. M. K Masih is the Director of Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India.

Indian culture is extremely complex with its layers and layers of unspoken rules pertaining to social protocol. Young people must follow complicated rules that show respect for the elderly, those in authority, men, and teachers. In many ways Indians are extremely reserved. Nothing is quick or simple, black and white – but on the streets one experiences a fresh bluntness, vitality and an energy that defies description. India is a land of sharp contrasts and contradictions, and those who can spend a year in the rich tapestry of this pluralistic society called India are most fortunate.

Friendships between men and women are understood differently in India than in other parts of the world. To avoid misunderstanding, participants will need to spend time in mixed groups or with friends of the same gender and be very sensitive to cultural cues. Following the lead of Indian friends of the same age and gender will help to prevent cultural blunders.

Challenges:

- COVID-19 remains unpredictable both at home, and around the world. MCC strongly recommends vaccination against COVID-19. Safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 are a vital part of prevention, by reducing individual risk of disease and risk of transmission to others. Vaccination is particularly important for those who are interacting closely with members of the community, those staying with host families, who are traveling, who live in contexts with limited healthcare resources, or who are at higher risk of serious disease. Proof of vaccination may be required in individual cases to fulfill job expectations, for example, if it is required for travel by an airline, a government requirement to enter a country, required by a local partner organization, etc.
- While all SALT/YAMEN assignments are dependent on the granting of visas, obtaining a visa for India can be particularly challenging. If the participant is denied a visa, every effort will be made to find an alternative assignment.
- To live with an Indian host family might be challenging due to cultural differences. Indian

families feel more responsible for guests and would certainly be very protective which might be very unusual or considered controlling for someone coming from North America.

- Indian food, although very delicious, can be very spicy. It may take some time to adjust to this. Yoghurt is frequently served with meals and is cooling when eating spicy food. Digestive upsets are common, especially during the first 2-3 months of the assignment. Differences in diet and water sources take time to adjust to.
- Learning language and building cultural understanding requires time, patience, and dedication. Willingness to practice, make mistakes and an ability to laugh at oneself is important.
- The hot climate can be quite uncomfortable. Most of the Indian families do not have air conditioning and use locally made air water coolers to cool the houses.
- Train travel should be viewed as an adventure and is an integral part of experiencing India to the fullest. With limited language skills, the participant may be nervous about travel, especially travelling alone, but they will find people to be kind and helpful.
- Perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals are generally negative, and more strongly so in Christian communities. An openly LGBTQ+ Christian would likely 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".

Benefits:

For all SALT/YAMEN assignments, MCC provides:

- All basic needs related to assignment i.e., travel to and from assignment, food & household costs, housing, in-country transportation, etc.
- Modest monthly personal allowance
- Modest monthly worker care allowance
- Full medical coverage—no co-pay
- Educational loan reimbursement
- Vacation days
- Orientation and Re-entry Retreat costs
- MCC in-country meetings and retreat costs
- End-of-term benefits

For more information, see mcc.org/salt or mcc.org/yamen