Klein Kasteeltje

Native City: Brussels

Activities and mission of the organization:

Klein Kasteeltje is a reception centre for asylum seekers. There are two different types of centres in Belgium: open and closed. In closed centres, there’s no free circulation permitted outside the centre. We are an open centre, which means asylum seekers are free to enter and leave as they wish. They usually stay at the centre during the time the ministry of Foreign Affairs inspects their files and papers. Most of the refugees stay at Klein Kasteeltje for a minimum of three to six months. In some cases they may stay for a couple of years or even more.

We try to cooperate with all parties to guarantee the refugee a professional and respectful approach to providing shelter, we offer an appropriate framework and orientation to help them shape their future.

At the moment 400 asylum seekers are living at Klein Kasteeltje, which makes it the largest open centre of Belgium. The refugees sleep in dorms (if they’ve arrived alone) or in private apartments (if they’ve arrived with their family). Most of them are single men, but there are women, families and even minors without their parents. Their nationality is very divers, but a lot of people come from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and so on.

Sector of the organization: minorities

Location of the project:

Klein Kasteeltje is located at the heart of Brussels in a neighbourhood with a lot of nationalities. Our buildings are a former army base next to the canal of Brussels. The neighbourhood is a little run-down, but slowly begins to get renovated. Typically Brussels: at less than a 5 minute walk, you enter a historic quarter with renovated buildings and some of the most expensive shops of Brussels. Brussels is the capital of Belgium and of Europe. Nevertheless, it is still a city where one can live at ease. There’s a very developed cultural scene for which Brussels is much known. This patchwork of nationalities, professions and religions gives Brussels its unique character.

Office environment:

Klein Kasteeltje employs 120 staff members, both French as Dutch speaking. The volunteer will be in direct contact with 8 staff members (both French and Dutch speaking) from the team of Werk Opleiding Vrije Tijd (WOVT). Klein Kasteeltje offers the volunteer lunch (warm meal) every day.

Benefit from the volunteer:

The centre of Klein Kasteeltje is striving for intercultural contacts. We think it’s important that asylum seekers take part in cultural exchanging as well, by meeting other strangers in Belgium and comparing each other’s integration. Thanks to international volunteers, Klein Kasteeltje is able to organise activities that we wouldn’t be able to do otherwise. Since volunteers can spend a lot of time together with the asylum seekers, they feel more welcome and at ease.

Volunteers are better suited to express the peculiarity and values of each person because he/she doesn’t represent an authority or an institution. The volunteer is mainly an essential help and contributes to the quality of the asylum seeker’s stay. The voluntary service of Klein Kasteeltje states that “the volunteers make little extras possible in order to change the asylum seeker’s stay for the better and to help those in difficult situations”.

Tasks of the volunteer:

There are different ways to be useful as a volunteer at Klein Kasteeltje. However, the volunteer will mainly be working at the team of WOVT because the work demands the least competences upon arrival and offers the most possibilities of participation and innovation.

Possible activities at the team of WOVT:

- organising activities for adults and minors

- sport activities for adults (mainly soccer, volleyball, table tennis, fitness)

- language training: French, Dutch, English

- other trainings: sewing, dancing, painting

- IT: helping out with starting up computers, helping to find information about the country of origin

- daily life orientation: how to take a bus, how to read a card

- social help: trying to find an apartment, talking to the owners, helping out the refugees with administrative work, visiting ill people

A lot of activities can be organised at the centre, there’s enough choice for every personality with its unique competences. Every project from a volunteer will be welcomed. The activities will be looked at in detail to see what’s possible. Important to bear in mind though is that the proposed projects depend on the preference of the refugees. For example: the volunteer might be interested in organising a workshop about dramatic art, but if none of the refugees is interested, the volunteer should be flexible enough to put emphasis on other aspects.

Working hours during a normal day:

The volunteer will work at the centre from Monday through Friday, usually from 9am to 5pm. Sometimes there will be activities in the weekends (day trips).

Specific skills volunteer should have:

The project welcomes all sorts of profiles. It’s important however that the volunteer has at least a basic knowledge of French or English. However, not all our residents speak French or English, so communication is sometimes difficult. Because the high number of other volunteers and staff members, it may not always be easy to fully feel at ease. That’s why a volunteer with a lot of autonomy and sense for initiative has more chances to feel at ease. Refugees aren’t always too enthousiastic for the proposed activities. That’s why it’s important that the volunteer isn’t discouraged immediately when facing an obstacle. He/she should have some strength to keep going, some flexibility to adapt to the circumstances.

Level of language skills: basic knowledge of French or English

Preparation: vaccination hepatitis A & B

Volunteer’s benefit:

The advantage of Klein Kasteeltje is that so much is possible: leisure activities, administration, medical care, education,… We can discuss together which activity you feel most comfortable in. Apart from the intercultural exchange with the refugees, the volunteer will also learn to work in a bilingual team. He/she will learn to develop animation competences, a sense of organisation and a sense of autonomy. Finally, he/she will also get the opportunity to learn about the asylum policy in Belgium. He/she will get an idea of the long and difficult road asylum seekers have to walk.