International Youth Volunteering with the Icelandic Red Cross

The International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is the largest humanitarian organisation in the world. It promotes humanitarian values and provides emergency help to people in short-term crises throughout the UK and around the world.

The British Red Cross has ambitious plans to increase the engagement of young people to take action as humanitarian citizens. In joint partnership with our sister National Society, we are able to offer a unique long-term volunteering opportunity in Reykjavik, Iceland for one young person from the UK.

THE CONTEXT

The Reykjavik Branch of the Icelandic Red Cross was founded in 1950 and works with and for a variety of people. There are two sub-divisions, or leagues, inside this Branch: Women’s League and Youth League. Projects are varied and include running an abused women shelter and night shelter for homeless women; operating a help line and first aid courses; running a shelter for people with mental health issues; and, a visiting programme with the elderly.

By offering this volunteering opportunity, the young person will experience working with the Icelandic Red Cross and become integrated with Icelandic society through the workplace and through the youth organisation ‘AUS’. The volunteering experience will provide a mutually beneficial experience for the volunteer and for Red Cross staff, clients and volunteers through getting to know each other’s culture and by discovering new ways of thinking. The volunteer will be able to engage with the local community, develop new skills and broaden their perspective. Their involvement with the youth organisation AUS will include activities to raise awareness of volunteering in Icelandic society and take part in trainings and social events.

AUS is an international non-profit youth exchange organisation promoting youth mobility, intercultural learning and international voluntary service. It has over 50 years of experience of organising long and short-term exchanges combining home stays with voluntary service in a variety of community service projects around the world. It is also an educational organisation with the aim of giving people the opportunity to experience the culture and society in different countries. There are two full time staff members and one EVS volunteer. The board of the AUS consist of 6 young people who work for the organisation as volunteers on
various aspects such as social life, culture events, school introduction and policy making for the organisation,

AUS has been active in EVS since 1996 and receives on average 14 EVS volunteers for various projects each year and around 8 volunteers through the ICYE Long term project. AUS also sends around 6-10 individuals through EVS each year and 10 long term and 30 short term placements through the ICYE programme. The organisation thus works with many active young people and offers training, social events and companionship. The Icelandic Red Cross has been involved with EVS projects for many years but for the first time will host a volunteer in the office and various other projects.

THE ROLE

We are looking to recruit 1 volunteer for the Reykjavik branch of the Icelandic Red Cross in Laugarvegur which is situated in the centre of Reykjavik. The branch has 13 full time staff but 32 people work overall for the offices that cover two floors. All projects are in Reykjavik even though their location may vary depending on what project in particular is in discussion.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND LOCALITY

The volunteer will take up this 12 month placement and either live with a host family or flat share with other volunteers through AUS. The flat is centrally located and only 15 minutes’ walk from the town centre and the Red Cross office.

The flat is on two floors in a semi attached house. There are 2 other flats in the house – one on the ground floor and the other in the basement. The flat that the volunteer will share has 8 rooms, one kitchen and one small area upstairs with a fridge, toaster etc. There are two bathrooms and one Laundromat in the flat.

The biggest shopping mall in Iceland is within 10 minute’s walking distance of the flat where there are food markets, clothing shops etc. There is also a small food market, bakery, doctor’s office and a bus stop within 5 minutes walking distance of the flat.

Reykjavik has about 100,000 inhabitants. The economy of Iceland is recovering post-2008 and the living conditions of young people are rather good. The language is Icelandic, but English is the foreign language that most Icelanders are able to speak.

The cultural scene in Iceland is blossoming in many areas such as music, literature and theatre. The city bus system, Strætó, is the cheapest public means of transportation. Bicycle paths are spread all over the city, making it easy and quick to reach all destinations by bike for those who are prepared to cycle up and down hills in all sorts of weather (wind, rain, snow and sometimes sun!).
REKJAVIK BRANCH PROJECTS

The Rekjavík branch runs various projects and is the largest Red Cross branch in Iceland. It has on average about 600 active volunteers working across these various projects. Some examples of projects are detailed below.

- Helpline;
- First Aid project;
- Various youth projects: for immigrants, disabled youth, homework assistance, mentoring;
- Variety stores in Hospitals;
- Mobile Harm reduction unit for the Homeless / Drug abusers;
- Shelters include:
  - Konukot - shelter for homeless women; and,
  - Abused women shelter.
- Shelters for people with mental disabilities:
  - Vin – Reykjavík;
  - Dvøl – Kópavogur; and,
  - Lækur – Hafnarfjörður.

The projects that the Reykjavík branch of the Red Cross in Iceland can offer to an incoming volunteer are very varied. The volunteer will have an opportunity to work in any of the projects and can apply to work in specific areas or decide after his/her arrival in Iceland where they would like to devote their time and how.

The volunteer will be provided with lunch in the project and will receive a food allowance for meals outside of the project. He/she will also receive ‘pocket money’ allowance on monthly basis and a bus card. The volunteer will be provided with up to 35 hours of language training on arrival in Iceland. On-going support and training will be provided by the staff and co-workers of AUS-ICYE Iceland; daily training by the staff of the Reykjavík branch of the Red Cross; and, personal support will be provided by the volunteer’s mentor.

All volunteers will be recruited at the selection day in June and have similar pre-departure training in July/August.

QUALITIES WE ARE LOOKING FOR

The successful candidate will be aged 18-28, and will demonstrate the following:

- An interest in working in the social and/or youth fields
- Committed, mature and independent work ethic
- Excellent communication and social skills
- Sensitivity to service users’ needs and an understanding of working with vulnerable people
- Flexibility and an ability to deal with challenges in a constructive manner
• Creativity and willingness to take the initiative
• Realistic expectations regarding the benefits and challenges of volunteering overseas for 12 months
• Be prepared to live with a modest allowance and accommodation
• A good level of spoken English
• And most importantly, a commitment to the Red Cross, volunteering and global humanitarian issues

PRACTICALITIES

The placement will run from September 2014 for 12 months until the end of August 2015. The successful candidates will be funded and accredited through the European Voluntary Service (EVS) scheme of the European Commission. More details about EVS can be found at http://www.britishcouncil.org/connectyouth-programmes-evs.htm

Our priority is to recruit young people who would otherwise not have access to such international opportunities. Accommodation will be provided as well as food or an allowance for food. Travel to and from work will be via public transport or by bike. In addition, each volunteer will receive a small allowance of 105 Euros per month.

Volunteers will work an average of 7 hours per day, 5 days per week. Some flexibility is required to accommodate activities that run in the evenings or weekends. There are also 24 days of holiday during the placement (not including national public holidays), which can be taken with prior arrangement with your supervisor.

Volunteers at the Red Cross are highly valued for the skills and energy they bring to our work. The successful candidates will receive pre-departure and on-arrival training from both the Red Cross and the European Commission, as well as have access to confidential support and supervision throughout the duration of the placement.

Location: Laugarvegur, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Reporting to both:

• Relevant Reykjavík Red Cross staff member in Laugarvegur;
• Katherine Smart: Programme Coordinator – International Youth Volunteering, British Red Cross.

Applications: Interested individuals should complete the application form and return it to Katherine Smart ksmart@redcross.org.uk by 1st May 2014.

Interviews: Suitable candidates will be invited to a selection day at our office in London with Katherine Smart (British Red Cross) on 10th June 2014.