



**INSTITUTO BÁSICO MAYA "OCHOCH HIK'EEK"**

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## *INFORMATION SHEET: VOLUNTEERING IN CASA ESPERANZA*

### **What is Casa de la Esperanza?**

Authorized by the Ministry of Education, the Mayan Institute Ochoch Hik'EEK offers secondary level education to around 80 young students. The students are aged between 12 and 21 years old, and the majority of them is of Maya Q'eqchi' origins. Our school is a boarding school, hence allowing girls and boys who come from the rural areas, and live far away, to attend school regularly. More specifically, in-school periods of 14 days are followed by 14 days of vacation, when students go back to their communities. All of our students come from the rural areas and have limited economic resources; to be able to sleep and eat in the school is for them a great advantage. Some students can study thanks to scholarships from charitable entities, which cover their fee either totally or partially.

Casa de la Esperanza works in Spanish and in Q'eqchi'; however, although many of the students speak Q'eqchi' among themselves, the communication is mainly in Spanish. Therefore, we can only accept volunteers who have a decent level of Spanish, and are able to understand and make themselves understood. Keeping an open and patient mind, the school can be a great platform to improve your Spanish.

The Mayan Institute Ochoch Hik'EEK is an educational institution aiming to positively contribute to the formation of future leaders within and without the region of Petén. We are working to find solutions to community problems, fighting for the rights of the Mayan people and for the respect of their land, all in the framework of the multicultural and intercultural state of Guatemala. Our mission is to offer an alternative education that is not oblivious of the Mayan cosmovision. An education, moreover, that can influence the reality of the communities and well as making a contribution for the formation of a society that is democratic, just, intercultural and ecologically responsible, and that serves a sensitive and shared model of development.

### **What are the principles of Casa de la Esperanza?**

The fundamentals of our philosophy lie in the history, culture and cosmovision of the Mayan land. In Mayan terms:

- The respect of *Ajaw* (Universe Creator) and Mother Nature, as a fundamental base for life.
- The harmony that sustains the coexistence of all beings. The balance between one and Nature as an integrated whole.

- The complementarity between all dual energies that govern the world, and lead to the search for balance.
- The unity within the diversity that values differences and turns them into a unifying factor.
- The consensus in the search for common agreements.
- The prioritization of shared property and communal welfare over individual interest.

### **What are the goals of Casa de la Esperanza?**

- To develop the Mayan people using the comprehensive and systematic practice of the Mayan cosmogony culture.
- To promote the equal participation of men and women in the community.
- To promote the self-management of communities, starting with education.
- To develop a knowledge that is simultaneously technical, scientific and cultural.
- To strengthen a vision that primarily serves the social.
- To promote actions aimed at improving the quality of life in the community.
- To prepare the people for a political life that is local, regional and national, with the aim of constructing a multicultural, intercultural, democratic, participative and equitable state.

## **Which type of volunteers does Casa de la Esperanza need?**

### **1. *Teaching: giving classes to the students of the school***

This section is dedicated to teachers or support figures that are willing to put into practice an alternative education. It is possible to collaborate with the professors who are stable in the school (sharing knowledge and giving advice, as well as supporting in class), and/or give classes of certain subjects.

For this task it would be ideal to have a person who has good experience in the field and is knowledgeable about pedagogy and didactics. To be well trained in a certain subject would in fact help motivate and encourage the students. In this matter, it is necessary to have a good understanding of Spanish, in order to be able to prepare the classes and the written homework, as well as correct the exams, etc.

The number of hours per day depends on the school schedule, but it never exceeds 3 hours per day of class. The rest of the time can be invested preparing classes, developing other activities, or simply learning from/with kids and personnel in the school. The classes are either 60, 75, or 90 minutes long; the earliest is at 7.30am, and the latest at 5pm. The number of students in each class goes from 15 to 35.

At the moment, we need volunteers to be teaching the following classes:

- English
- Arts

It would be useful to have two people giving the English class, for them to collaborate and obtain a better outcome.

## **2. *Teaching: giving classes to people from the village***

A project started in 2017, which consists of giving English classes to local people. This is usually done by the same person/s who are already in charge of giving English classes to the students.

The objective is to offer locals English classes for a cheap price, as such gathering money to improve the economic situation of the school. The price set in 2017 was of Q100 for four classes of one hour; the classes should only be available during the two weeks of the plan. The money must be invested in the school.

## **3. *Coordinating the volunteering***

The person in charge for this should organize the volunteer work during the academic year. This means replying to emails, conducting the interviews, and overall holding a managing role. For convenience reasons, this person should stay the same throughout the academic year, or at least be the one who has stayed in the school for the longest time.

This person should coordinate the other volunteers, organizing weekly/monthly meetings, welcoming the new volunteers and providing them with the necessary information.

## **4. *Project management***

One or two volunteers should be in charge of promoting the school at an international level, reaching out to other NGOs and organizations. This means, for example, tightening partnerships with other organizations or finding an overarching structure that the school could be of. It would be most helpful if these volunteers already had experience with project managing and fundraising. The ultimate objectives are to decrease the expenses of the school, and to enclose it in a more solid organization.

## **5. *The radio project 'Próxima Estación: Esperanza' (Next Station: Hope)***

The radio project is managed by a volunteer but consists of students (around 5). The local radio station Utankaj offers the school a 30-minute time slot per week, in which the students can discuss topics related to the values and teachings of the school. Do not worry if you do not have previous knowledge –there is a document that provides the necessary information.

## **6. *Sociocultural entertainment and workshops***

Every day after school, volunteers organize workshops, activities, and games, to improve the group dynamic as well as to teach skills. Previously covered topics are: group collaboration, sexuality, gender, equality, self-esteem, feelings, recycling, etc. In accordance with our belief that learning does not finish after classes, we expect enthusiastic people to be organizing and conducting the activities.

Because not too demanding, the organization of evening activities is typically shared and done on the side of core tasks. However, we think it is important to have somebody specific in charge, so that s/he can be responsible of the overall quality.

### **7. Library**

The volunteer in charge of the library is responsible for the organization, maintenance, and correct use of the documents and books available. Moreover, the library is part of the students' school work; hence, the volunteer should encourage its use, stimulating the students to engage with different sources of information and helping them do so. S/he should also promote reading, look for donations of books, and initiate activities related to writing, reading, theatre, and etcetera.

### **8. The shop ("la tienda")**

The school is provided with a small shop that sells food and drinks to the students during break time (at 10.30am and at 15.30pm). The volunteer in charge sells and keeps the shop well supplied. Usually, a resident in the school is in charge of the shopping (which is based on a grocery list made by the volunteer); if s/he is not available, however, one of the volunteers should do it. This task is not very time-consuming, and can be shared among the volunteers.

### **9. Psychological support**

On one hand, psychological support might be sometimes needed, due to several social, economic, and personal factors. This year, a so-called "Reflection Time" ("Hora de Reflexión") has been introduced. On the other hand, a series of changes happen during adolescence, them being physical, psychological, social, etc. Understandably, these can sparkle doubts and curiosity. Such concerns should be reflected upon, and dealt with individually, in groups, or during the evening activities.

### **10. Social support**

During the two weeks without classes, the volunteers at Ochoch Hik'eek can visit the communities (*aldeas*) of the students, in order to better understand their reality. This way, professionals in Social Work can obtain a bigger picture and prepare an individual intervention accordingly, in fact gaining a greater understanding of the problems at home and thus developing possible solutions.

### **11. Social media manager – informatics expert**

Needed as well is a volunteer skilled in social media managing. S/he would be in charge of making and keeping contact with the other volunteers, updating the Facebook page, the web page, and the blog.

The volunteer appointed could also teach his/her skills to professors and/or students, so for them to be able to complete this task themselves.

Spare computer pieces and other material is also available in the school, waiting to be reassembled by someone. A volunteer skilled in informatics could take on this task as well.

### **12. Artist**

It would also be good to continue with the decoration of the school. Volunteers skilled in the arts could come for one/two months or more to decorate the school. In 2017, for example, the following was completed: several mosaics, a Mayan calendar, two classrooms were painted, and more. Some of these works (such as the Mayan calendar) were done with the help of the students (as part of the evening activities). To keep in mind is that all this was realized with very limited materials and almost no money. We used recycled materials, such as stones, bottles, other cans, wood...

### **13. Maintenance and other communal activities**

Another thing one can do alongside core tasks is to help with the general maintenance of the school (electricity, water, construction). There always are cables to set up, leaking tubes, or rooms that can be cleaned, painted, and more.

If you have any suggestion or proposal which we have not mentioned... do not hesitate in letting us know and we'll see what we can do!

## **What do we offer?**

### **Food and shelter**

Shelter is provided in the school during one's volunteering time. The volunteers will share a room with 4 bunk beds, for a total of 8 people maximum. The room is equipped with a small bathroom with just a toilet.

During the plan (the 14 days when students stay at the school) breakfast, lunch, and dinner are offered. Meals are offered since the first Monday up until the breakfast of two Mondays after. The food is beans and corn tortillas, usually with cheese, egg, cream, or pork (*chicharrón*). More rare are soup, pasta with tomato sauce, boiled chicken. When the students go back to their communities, meals are not provided anymore; therefore, volunteers are in charge of cooking their own food in the kitchen (which is equipped with stoves and fridge).

### **Other costs**

The costs during the 14 days of plan mainly consist of toilet paper and water (*agua pura*), which are paid by the volunteers. It is about Q30-50 per plan.

Moreover, there are to be taken into account one's personal costs. Usually, it consists of extra food and drinks, fruits and snacks, soap, etcetera. It is viable to live off Q100-150 per plan.

The school cannot give money to cover extra material or necessities. Being smart, however, one can recycle many things or share with others in order to optimize the expenses.

### **Visiting the communities**

During the two weeks of vacation, the volunteers of Ochoch Hik'eeek can visit the communities and get to know the reality of the students. To visit the students is a way to understand their reality, help them with their daily tasks, create a bridge between the school and the family, and just have an enriching experience. The costs cannot be covered by the school, yet are minimal; only 3 or 5 euros for the transportation there and back are needed.

### **Travelling around**

During the two weeks of vacation, the volunteers can travel around beautiful Guatemala and other places in Central America. However, it is advisable for those who have office tasks to proceed and take advantage of the tranquility of the school without students.

## **What do we ask for?**

The volunteers must be energetic, flexible, excellent team-workers, be optimist, creative, patient and ready to adapt to a new life and a new rhythm. What each one of us can bring in is fundamental, and can sincerely make a difference when it comes to tackling problems and finding solutions. Each contribution should be accompanied by a willingness to teach both professors and students about it.

As already mentioned, each volunteer can take on more than one activity, for some of them do not require much time and many are the things one can help with. These issues are evident in the school, and can be talked about and solved after having gotten to know the reality of the Ochoch Hik'eeek.

### **Minimum stay**

The minimum stay is three months, although it is highly recommendable for the volunteers teaching and giving psychological support to stay longer, in order for their contribution to be more efficacious.

## **Age**

All volunteers must be 20 years old or older.

## **Language requirements**

With regards to the technical and manual tasks, one's knowledge of Spanish can be basic. For all the other positions, however, a good level of Spanish is necessary. The whole school works in Spanish, and everyday activities happen in Spanish.

It without saying, the English teacher must have an optimal knowledge of English and speak a minimum of Spanish, for none of the students is fluent in English.

## **Looking forward to meeting you!**

**PS:** If you have any of the following objects that are spare and left unused, please bring it. By doing so, we can slowly contribute to increase the material available in the school:

- Computers. If possible with Windows and the Office package.
- Books. Essays, novels, and technical manuals, to contribute to the school library (preferably in Spanish, and/or English).
- Board games, cards, etcetera.
- Flutes, harmonicas, maracas, whatever musical instrument.
- Balls, rackets, skipping ropes, nets, frisbies, etcetera.
- Colors, markers, colored pencils, regular pencils, etcetera.
- More!