

CONCORDIA - INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER PROJECTS in UK

Concordia is a small not-for-profit charity that began after the Second World War. Our aim is to bring together people from different countries and cultures to work together towards a common goal which, in turn is hoped will help break down cultural stereotypes and lead to greater international understanding and peace. There are two ways in which we do this. The first is the long running farm scheme. This enables students from other countries to come to the UK to undertake seasonal paid work and participate in our educational training programme. The second is the volunteer programme which works on an exchange basis; sending UK volunteers abroad and receiving international volunteers to work on volunteer projects in the UK.

The volunteer programme began in 1993 when we hosted our first international volunteer project with the Countryside Service of Brighton. The project involved undertaking environmental work in the beautiful South Downs. Since hosting this project Concordia joined a network of other similar organisations known as the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations and it is through this network that we exchange volunteers. Today we send around 300 volunteers a year and place over 200 volunteers from abroad on short term projects in the UK. We also offer longer term opportunities for individual volunteers to assist our host organisations for several months called our Medium Term Volunteer Programme (MTV) and have a funded scheme which sponsors a small number of volunteers from the South (Africa, Asia and Latin America) to participate in a UK programme which usually runs for a month this is the Richard O'Brien Bursary Scheme (ROBBS).

Our projects in the UK are all short term and community based and can involve either environmental work, working with children or people with special needs or setting up events which need support from volunteers for example helping to run festivals. There are usually between 8 and 15 volunteers placed on a project and when necessary we place 1 or 2 co-ordinators to help the group outside the work programme.

General Information

Volunteers who participate in a Concordia volunteer project come from a diverse range of backgrounds, nationalities and cultures and have different abilities and experience. It is this diversity that makes the projects such a unique and fun experience. All volunteers that participate apply through our partner organisations abroad and must meet the following criteria:

- be over 18 years of age
- be open minded and flexible
- be able to communicate in English without difficulty. Volunteers applying to work on play schemes or social projects must speak English fluently
- be highly motivated if applying to work with children or on social projects
- playscheme, youth and special needs projects require volunteers to produce a certificate of good conduct (the equivalent of a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check)
- be prepared to participate in all aspects of life on the project including the domestic chores such as shopping, cooking and cleaning
- be physically fit enough to do the heavy work involved in some projects
- be prepared to carry out the work that is expected of them in a responsible manner, with due regard for personal safety and the safety of others

Work

Concordia Projects: Generally volunteers work 6-8 hours per day with lunch/tea breaks taken on site. Some social projects may require volunteers to work longer hours depending on the nature of the work. There are two days off each week though these are not always two days together and not always at the weekend.

Social Activities

Concordia: Projects do not offer an organised leisure programme and social activities will depend on the nature and location of the project. Concordia provides a small budget for one or two group based social activities on each project. The group is responsible for organising its own free time activities, with help from the group co-ordinators. Volunteers are expected to bring additional spending money.

Important! Leisure time spent with the other volunteers is central to the international volunteer experience. Therefore, volunteers are expected to participate in the group based leisure activities and are requested not to arrange personal trips away from the project at weekends or during the evenings.

What the project provides

- Food: Each group receives a food allowance adequate to prepare meals on a self-catering basis, i.e. volunteers organise the shopping, cooking and cleaning themselves. Where appropriate, alternative catering arrangements will be indicated in the brochure.
- Accommodation: This will usually be on site, or nearby in a local school, youth centre, in tents, etc. with basic cooking and washing facilities provided.
- Insurance: Concordia provides insurance for volunteers whilst on the project. This covers accident and illness as well as third party liability. Personal possessions are not covered.
- Group Co-ordinators: Concordia place one or two experienced volunteers (usually from the UK) on most projects.
- Information sheets including travel information: These are sent to volunteers approximately 6 weeks before the project is due to start.

What the volunteer provides

Volunteers from the European Union should bring with them a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which will entitle them to urgent medical treatment. Volunteers are covered by our basic insurance policy once they arrive on the project. However, they are STRONGLY advised to take out their own insurance for travel, health, luggage

and other personal possessions especially for the journeys to and from the project. Neither Concordia nor the host organisation can be held responsible for volunteers' personal possessions whilst they are on the project!

- Volunteers must bring their own sleeping bags/roll mats unless otherwise indicated.
- Volunteers must arrive at the project equipped with the correct work wear and weatherproof clothing. This is particularly important for environmental/renovation and outdoor type projects.
- Volunteers must bring with them sufficient funds to cover their free time activities as well as their internal transportation costs.

Working with children or people with special needs

Under the terms of the 1989 Children's Act UK and in line with OFSTED guidelines on child protection, co-ordinators and volunteers working with under 16 year olds and vulnerable adults, must be checked to ensure that they have no criminal record involving abuse of children. Therefore, all volunteers participating in a project working with children or people with special needs will be required to produce a Certificate of Good Conduct or International Criminal Record Check. This may also apply if the project is not working directly with children but is based at a children's centre. A copy of the certificate needs to be sent to the Concordia office, by fax or email at least 3 weeks before the project is due to start. The original needs to be given to the host by the volunteer on arrival at the project. These certificates are generally obtainable from local police stations and in some cases the forms can be downloaded from the internet. The process usually takes 2-4 weeks and there may be a small charge.

Equal Opportunities

Concordia projects are open to people over the age of 18 and of any gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality or religion. All applications are treated on an individual basis and in cases where volunteers have specific needs Concordia endeavours to find volunteering opportunities suited to their ability. In addition to this Concordia strives to ensure that the volunteers on the project are part of a group that is as internationally diverse as possible and try to avoid having too many volunteers from the same country on the same project.

Confidentiality and data protection

In compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 Concordia will not pass on the details of any of the volunteers on our database to any persons other than the international partner organisation abroad or UK host organisation to which they are applying. Email addresses may be disseminated to other volunteers on the database as part of a contact group. If a volunteer does not want their contact details to be passed on to other volunteers, or to be contacted regarding further opportunities and activities with Concordia, they will have the opportunity to opt-out of this.

Complaints procedure

Complaints with respect to administrative procedures by Concordia should be addressed to the UK Volunteer Programme Co-ordinator directly. If a volunteer has a problem/complaint during the project they are encouraged to inform the project co-ordinator or the project host as soon as possible. If they do not feel that they can take their complaint to the project host or co-ordinator they should then contact the UK Volunteer Programme Co-ordinator. Volunteers are advised to make a complaint at the time of the problem and not wait until they leave the project. All volunteers are encouraged to provide full and honest feedback.

Registration fees

- *International Volunteers:* Concordia works on a basis of reciprocal exchange with international partner organisations. There are no additional fees on any Concordia projects based in the UK for volunteers applying through our International Partner Organisations.
- *UK based volunteers:* Volunteers resident in the UK participating in UK based projects who apply direct to Concordia will be required to pay a registration fee of £150. Food and accommodation is provided free of charge. UK based volunteers interested in joining one of the projects listed in this programme should contact the office for details of availability and for an application form.

Group co-ordinating

Every year Concordia recruits experienced volunteers to help co-ordinate the UK based projects. Group co-ordinators take part in the project alongside the international volunteers but take on the additional responsibility of helping the project run smoothly by: liaising with the project hosts, helping to organise the social programme and domestic rotas and looking after the food and social budgets.

Group co-ordinators do not pay a registration fee and travel expenses within the UK are reimbursed following the project. Food and accommodation is provided free of charge. Group co-ordinators should be aged 20+ and have experience of volunteering abroad or related volunteer experience. Volunteers from abroad wishing to co-ordinate in the UK must have experience of co-ordinating in their own country and be recommended by a partner organisation. Concordia runs a training event for co-ordinators at Easter each year. All new co-ordinators are encouraged to attend this training event.