

Project Lebanon

Summer Camp For Handicapped



- Project Description For Applicants -

Project Lebanon – Summer Camps

Introduction

Since 1998, the “Community of Young Maltese”, a youth organisation of the German Association of the Order of Malta, organises summer camps each year during 8 weeks in the Lebanon for severely disabled Lebanese (our “Lebanese Guests”). For this purpose, 2 teams of 35 young volunteers each from all around Europe are put together, and sent consecutively to the Lebanon for 4 weeks each. Each team is additionally joined by 10 Lebanese volunteers.

Location of the Camps

The camps take place at the Centre “Al Fadi ”, which is situated 60 kilometers north east of Beirut, and close to the village Faraya in the mountains. It is a holiday house specifically adapted to the needs of disabled people. The rough desert landscape, in some ways just like out of a book of the old testament is uniquely attractive. Being at a height of 1800 meters, temperatures and humidity are much more bearable than down in Beirut.

History of "Project Lebanon"

Centre "Al Fadi" used to belong to the Greek-Catholic monastery „Monastère de la Resurrection“, and was bought in 2006 by the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta. The idea for the project was born when the 20 year old German Francesco Heereman visited the Lebanon and the above mentioned monastery in 1997. He was told that the Centre “Al Fadi” was vacant as nobody had the money or time to care for disabled people there. He returned in 1998 with 27 young adults from Germany offering holidays for severely handicapped Lebanese. Since then the camps have taken place every year.

Our Lebanese Guests

Our Lebanese guests are between 6-70 years old, both female and male, both Christian and Muslim, and live in homes for the mentally and physically disabled in and around Beirut. Most of our Lebanese guests are orphans or children abandoned by their families. The degree of disability varies from slight retardations to severe mental and physical disorders. In most of the cases the disability is so serious that they are not able to complete the simplest tasks without assistance.

We are currently working with 4 such homes. All of them have only very little funds, and can therefore – despite being run by amazing and very devoted Catholic sisters - only provide the very basic care to their residents. Most of our Lebanese guests don't have any distraction or receive any individual affection in their daily routine of being fed and washed, and don't have

access to any education or psychological treatment whatsoever. Under these circumstances most of them become more and more autistic. In their holidays in our summer camps we hope that they experience something extraordinary that has the power to carry them through the whole year: acceptance, attention, joy, friendship and joint prayers, and much more.

Structure of the Summer Camps

Within 4 weeks the team stages 3 individual camps which last 6 days each. Different Lebanese guests will participate in each camp. During the camp the team has the complete responsibility for the care, food and entertainment of our Lebanese guests. Normally, a team will organize 2 all-boys camps, and 1 all girls camp.

Most of our Lebanese guests have witnessed rejection and unkindness in their lives. We want to show them that they are precious and loved. Every volunteer is assigned with one of our Lebanese guests, and will exclusively take care of him. This one on one relationship is one of the main principles of the camps as it offers our Lebanese guests the one thing they miss in their everyday life –absolute acceptance and total attention. The care includes sanitary care, feeding and entertaining. The degree of help needed during meals and concerning personal hygiene varies a lot. Some can eat and wash themselves with little or even no help, while others may be wearing diapers and in need of assistance all the time.

Since most of our Lebanese guests are only able to talk very little, the Arabic language does not pose a big problem in the work with them. However, since we always also have Lebanese volunteers in our team, there will always be someone around who can translate if necessary.

The camps are preceded by a 2-day “build-up” phase, in which the team gets settled in, and prepares the house for our Lebanese guests, and followed by a 2-day wrap up phase. For a very restricted number of volunteers, it is possible to participate for only a halftime (2 and a half weeks). These “Halftime” spots have been created only for those, who cannot participate fulltime due to family/university/job related reasons.

The work in the camp is physically and mentally very challenging for the volunteers. Many of our Lebanese guests need help with all the daily tasks. Also, the exposure to abnormal behavior is sometimes difficult getting used to. Moreover, dealing with the – in most cases very sad – life stories of our Lebanese guests can be very overwhelming. Therefore, recreational breaks of 2 to 3 days are scheduled in between the camps. These breaks are also an opportunity for the volunteers to get to know the country and the Lebanese culture, as they include several sightseeing trips.

Daily Routine during Camp Time

The camps are organized by a strict daily schedule. It is essential that volunteers are able and willing to fit in, accept the rules and schedules and listen to the team leader. Every volunteer is – as mentioned above - responsible for its assigned Lebanese guest throughout the whole day.

After all volunteers have come together for a short morning prayer, they will go to the bed rooms of their assigned Lebanese guest at around 7.15 a.m. and assist him in washing, and dressing, and getting ready for breakfast. 2 group activities per day will be organized by the team leader, in which the volunteer may participate with his assigned Lebanese guest. These activities are mostly very simple and short games, accompanied with music and colorful costumes. Once a week, a trip to the beach will be organized. During the rest of the day the volunteer himself has to think of activities which suit his Lebanese guest.

Since our Lebanese guests differ a lot in character and level of disabilities the personal entertaining ranges from just sitting beside them on the terrace all day, to running after him through the countryside all day long, or dancing to the same song over and over again. All of this can be very challenging for the volunteer. Another important rule of the camps is that the Lebanese guest himself decides what he wants to do. As long as he is not a threat to himself or to others, he may do whatever he wants, and his volunteer will always stay by his side, no matter how exhausting. We want each Lebanese guest to enjoy their “holidays”, and have them know, that during the time they spend in the camp, one volunteer will devote his entire time only to him. Since back in the homes one caregiver is responsible for often more than 20 disabled residents, having the full attention of one volunteer to himself, is a precious gift for every one of our Lebanese guests.

Every afternoon volunteers and our Lebanese guests celebrate Holy Mass together. After dinner they always sit together and sing a few songs. Music forms a very important part of the summer camps, as even our most autistic Lebanese guests seem to respond to it. Bed time is at 8 p.m. During night the volunteers on night duty are responsible for our Lebanese guests. Every volunteer will be on night duty at least once during his stay in the Lebanon.

For the volunteers, the day ends with a short evening prayer and some chill-out time on the terrace.

Team Structure and requirements for being a volunteer

Each team is led by a team leader. He is accompanied by a priest, a doctor, a logistic and 2-3 kitchen helpers.

We are committed to forming strong and balanced teams. It is essential for every team to include almost the same number of male and female volunteers, different age-groups and a range of experienced volunteers as well as newcomers.

The requirements for being a volunteer in this project are high. Climate, limited space and the service we provide for our Lebanese guests require stamina, creativity, tolerance and empathy. Volunteers also need to be robust and healthy, since the physical work in the camps is very demanding. In midst of all the fun the volunteers have during their stay in the Lebanon, it is important that the main priority is to serve our Lebanese guests.

Previous care taking experiences are an advantage, but no precondition to becoming a volunteer. Lectures on caretaking will be given, and the team leader, the doctor and the experienced volunteers will have an eye on the less experienced ones.

Every applicant will have to fill out an online registration form, and will have a conversation with his prospective team leader before a decision concerning his acceptance into the team is made.

In case of violation of the camp rules, the team leader reserves the right to send volunteers home. In that case the volunteer's payment will not be refunded and the flight back home will be at the expense of such volunteer.

Catholic Nature of the Project

Being Catholic is not a precondition for becoming a volunteers. Since we will be praying and celebrating mass, it is however important to at least bring along an open mind for this dimension of our service.

Security

We are constantly observing the political situation in the Lebanon in close cooperation with the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta and the German embassy in the Lebanon. In case of disturbances during the stay of a team, the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta would immediately take all necessary measures for protection of the Team.

The various works of the Order of Malta throughout Lebanon (alone and in cooperation with many different Christian as well as Muslim groups) have proven that the Order is accepted and trusted across all political and religious borders.

However, we will only accept volunteers who are aware of the political and security situation in the Lebanon and who agree to sign a paper in which they state that they participate at their own risk.

Financing the Project

The overall costs of the summer camps, i.e. the costs of both teams, amount to about 70.000 EUR every year. We ask every European volunteer for a donation of 700€. This already includes the costs for the flight. Those who will book their own flight (only after having talked to the team leader!), we ask for a donation of 220€. Contribution receipts can be issued.

The inability to make the donation shall never inhibit the participation as a. If someone is not able to pay the whole amount we ask him/her to let us know in order to find a solution. Since the donations of the European volunteers only cover part of the expenses, part of the costs is financed by the Order of Malta and private donations. Therefore, we are also very grateful, if somebody has the possibility to find private donors.

Health issues

Tapwater can't be drunk and quite a few volunteers may struggle with diarrhea and the like. It can be helpful to take preventive measures and discuss this with the family doctor. If an applicant has any kind of serious illness, like e.g. diabetes it's very much recommended to discuss this with an expert. Since some of our Lebanese guests have infections, vaccinations against Tetanus, Hepatitis A&B, Diphtheria and Polio, Salmonella, Typhus and Cholera are indispensable.

Other Projects

“Project Karim” supports our Lebanese guests during the year by financing therapies, school attendances, essential surgeries and other necessary treatments.

Since 2005 the Community of Young Maltese organizes a benefit theatre play every year in Germany - “Lebanon on stage” - with former camp volunteers to raise money for the summer camps.

Since 2009 “The Order of Malta CARAVAN” offers a special 10 month Program taking place in Beirut. The program offers a combination of service in the homes of our Lebanese guests and university courses in Arabic and on Lebanese culture and history. Please find more information for these subprojects under www.libanonprojekt.de.