

Comber Foundation 2012 Volunteer Programme INFORMATION PACK



Gabi Chiran, resident in Comber's homes at the Black Sea

Welcome to our information pack about the Comber Foundation – *our vision is for a future without orphanages* Volunteer Programme 2012. We are delighted you are interested in volunteering with us.

Comber was founded in 1990 and since then we have had the privilege of working with over 500 volunteers from the North and South of Ireland who have travelled to Romania. Comber’s work today has gone from strength to strength due to the continued commitment of its dedicated supporters, volunteers and friends and the ethos of volunteering remains central in our work. We are delighted you are interested in joining us and helping in a very practical way to realise Comber’s vision - that every person with a disability will have full participation and inclusion in society.

Comber is committed to providing unique 5 week placements, offering personal learning opportunities and giving our volunteers a wonderful experience of volunteering abroad. Spending time as a volunteer in Romania is an exciting and challenging prospect for the volunteer team. We at Comber are committed to offering you the support needed to ensure you have an enjoyable and rewarding experience in Romania. Don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about the programme. We look forward to hearing from you!

“For me the placement was extremely valuable both personally and professionally. It gave me great experience working as part of a multi-disciplinary team and ‘thinking outside the box” – past Comber volunteer

FAQs for Prospective Volunteers

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Comber resident in new day service with local staff member

What is the history of Comber?

Comber was established in 1990 in Comber, Co. Down as 'Comber Romanian Orphanage Appeal' in response to the appalling conditions in Romania's over crowded orphanages at the time. For many years, Comber worked to alleviate conditions in 4 orphanages for children with disabilities, particularly Gradinari Children's Home in Giurgiu County.

From 1990-2006 we

- Provided over 500 multi-disciplinary Irish volunteers to work with Romanian children and their carers.
- Completely refurbished four orphanages.
- Provided hands on development support to over 800 children, many with disabilities.
- Trained Romanian care staff in all aspects of caring for people with disabilities.

Huge changes have taken place in Romania since we started working there. Perhaps most importantly, Romania has joined the EU and is now able to tap into a large pool of resources to support the development of disability services at a national level. Most children's orphanages are closed, and now residential services for children cannot house more than 12 individuals. However, no specific plans were put in place at accession to deal with the ongoing problems of adults with disabilities remaining in poor conditions in large residential institutions.

Having initially focussed on aid and renovation work in orphanages, we grew to realise the limits of hands-on work in Romania. In 2006 Comber was re-structured and appointed its first paid Executive Director in Ireland. Since then, Comber has focussed on supporting Giurgiu Local Authorities to close its remaining adults institutions. We do this in the following ways:

- Providing homes in the community for adults with disabilities still living in institutions
- Helping families to keep children with disabilities at home
- Education & Training with our Romanian partners

The local authorities in Giurgiu County pay for staff and overhead costs of our group homes and apartments.



Casa Phare



Residents enjoying a meal in the Comber home

Why volunteer with us?



Opening of Casa Comber, 2007

Comber's services in Romania are expanding quickly and volunteers will play a vital role in working with local staff to develop their skill level to meet the growing demands of the service. We also see our volunteer programme as an opportunity to strengthen links between Ireland & Romania and we really hope you enjoy your time in this wonderful country. "I had a fantastic time and learned so much about the country and the culture" – past Comber Volunteer

Since it was established in 1990, Comber has sent over 500 professional volunteers to work in Romania. In recent years, we have re-structured our volunteer programme and focus on sending small groups for specific time-limited projects. We have a wide range of experience as a volunteer sending organisation and are committed to ensuring each volunteer is supported to contribute as fully as they can to the programme.

"I have made so many new friends and loved every bit of my time in Romania. I would love the opportunity to return and continue to work in the area as it is still so under privileged." – past Comber Volunteer

Comber believes that volunteering at home and overseas can be both a rewarding and challenging experience. We encourage volunteers to adopt a threefold approach to their placement including:

- Contributing your skills and experience to the project;
- Learning from Romanian experience and colleagues;
- Bringing your experiences home and using them to educate others

Who should apply?

Applications are being sought from professionals in the following areas. Applications from newly qualified applicants are welcome.

- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Social Care Work*
- Social Work*
- Intellectual Disability Nursing*

*Experience working with adults with intellectual disabilities essential

What qualifications and experience do I need?

- Post-secondary qualification (Degree, Certificate, Diploma)
 - Experience of working with clients with intellectual disabilities;
 - Experience of working as independent decision makers with clients
- Please contact us if you have any questions about your eligibility*

What kind of skills are needed?

- A sense of fun & ability to be flexible and adapt to new situations
- Enjoy meeting new people and working as a part of a team
- Motivation to contribute to the development of under-developed and under-resourced disability sector in Romania
- Able to manage the challenges involved in an overseas placement

When would I be going?

In 2012, we are running two 5 week programmes on the following dates:

Group 1: 2nd July- 5th August 2012

Group 2: 1st August- 5th September, 2012

Subject to the availability of flights, Comber reserves the right to adjust programme dates.

How long are the placements?

Placements are for 5 weeks. The programme includes an induction period when you arrive in Romania. Group 2 will receive a handover on site in Romania from volunteers in Group 1, facilitated by our Romanian staff members.

What will I be doing in Romania?

Volunteers with Comber will be involved in a range of activities. Volunteers will be working in one or more Comber supported services, which provide for adults with physical and intellectual disabilities. Past volunteer activities include:

- Working with Romanian adults who have recently been moved from institutional care into community homes, to develop independent living skills and employment opportunities.
 - Assisting adults with high level needs to access equipment and support needed for their imminent transition from institutional care to the community.
 - Assisting staff working with these adults in the community to further develop their skill level. Delivering day care services in the newly established day care centre for adults with disabilities, the first of its kind in the area.
 - Working with children and teenagers with disabilities, who are living at home, to help manage their acute needs in partnership with their parents.
 - Providing education sessions about disability to local high school students who are volunteering as interpreters.
- Specific roles and placement centres will be assigned after acceptance on to the programme, and **according to needs** closer to the time.*

Some examples of the types of roles in 2011 programme:

“Whilst in Romania I took part in many different areas including the day centre. I worked with the parents group and the interpreters doing education sessions. I did evening sessions in the Comber houses which varied every day. I also worked with the occupational therapist.” – past Comber Volunteer

“I was working full time with the parents group in the day centre. I was working with children with a range of physical and learning disabilities (majority of cases Cerebral Palsy). My role consisted of Occupational Therapy and worked closely with a Physiotherapist. We worked on gross motor and fine motors skills, alongside equipment provision. I devised home programmes for the parents and they were very open to continuing them. Also the Physio and I had devised 3 educational sessions (manual handling, positioning, and wheelchair safety) for parents.” – past Comber Volunteer

Who will I be working with?



Past Comber volunteers
in Romania

You will be working in a team (maximum 8-10 per group) of other Irish professional volunteers. You will also be working with clients, staff members of local services, parents, Comber’s staff in Romania & high school interpreters.

“I found it was great to work in such close proximity with the other volunteers who were coming from many different disciplines and it was an eye opener to learn about their professions. I was grateful for their willingness to share their expertise with me.” – past Comber Volunteer

Where will we be staying?

This depends on your placement. In 2011, all the Irish volunteers worked in Giurgiu city and lived in rented apartments. We aim to have the volunteers living together in 2012 also, though you may be asked to travel or spend some time in a more rural location if the role requires it. Volunteers are expected to share a room and manage their own cooking and housekeeping.

Accommodation provided is good by local standards but volunteers may find it more basic than what they are used to at home. Prospective volunteers should consider whether they will be able to manage living in close quarters with others without the comforts of home.

What is it like living in Romania?

We hope you will enjoy your time in Romania! It is an interesting & beautiful country and people are generally friendly and welcoming.

Comber will be providing all volunteers with subsistence to cover their food and sundry expenses during the placement. There are 4 large supermarkets in Giurgiu and many smaller shops. Eating out is relatively cheap and there are many cafes and restaurants in Giurgiu. In restaurants, main meals cost around 20-25 lei/ 5-6 euro.

Volunteers will be provided with a Romanian mobile phone for communal use. This is primarily provided for your safety and to facilitate two-way communication during the placement. Wireless Internet is available at various internet cafes in Giurgiu.

Do I need to fundraise?

Yes. We ask that volunteers raise €2,000 euro (minimum) in order to take part. This includes the costs of insurance, accommodation, return flight and a contribution to Comber's ongoing work. We are happy to support your fundraising efforts & can provide:

- Advice & support
- Comber Tee-shirts
- Posters to advertise your event
- Sponsorship cards
- Advertise your event on our website & through Facebook page
- Personal fundraising page at MyCharity.ie/charity/comber

"I found that people are very generous when the cause of the charity is explained. I organised small fundraisers and it brought in the target and more." – past Comber Volunteer

"MyCharity site was very good. Big events like bag packing seem to be most effective and take minimal effort to organise." – past Comber Volunteer

Are there other costs?

Volunteers are provided by Comber with a weekly allowance for food costs, in line with current prices in Romania. All costs related to work and accommodation are included in your fundraising, including transfer from airport, accommodation utilities, materials for programme etc. The cost of living in Romania remains relatively cheap, but prices have risen since Romania joined the EU. The average salary in Romania is 400-500 euro per month for a professional worker. You can live cheaply in Romania but be prepared to spend more if you want to go for meals, shopping or travel at weekends.

"I really enjoyed my experience in Romania and gained so much from the 5 weeks I spent working there. I think if anything the programme exceeded any expectations I had. A brilliant experience" past Comber volunteer

What else is involved?

Volunteers must also take responsibility for the following pre-departure requirements and costs involved:

- In order to take part in the programme, we require that you get a certificate of general good health from your doctor.
- We strongly advocate that volunteers use universal precautions in dealing with clients; and consider getting appropriate vaccinations. Clients you work with may have Hepatitis and/or HIV/AIDS. While volunteers are not expected to work in direct care provision or health management with clients, you may choose to consider vaccinations in consultation with your doctor such as: Hepatitis A & B; Typhoid, Tetanus, Polio, Diphtheria.

How will I be supported?

We are committed to ensuring you have a safe and enjoyable volunteer experience in Romania. We provide:

Pre-departure support: introduction to Comber's work; history of Romania's orphanages and disability services; induction to the role.

In Romania: Comber staff in Romania are available for ongoing support and supervision. Additional support from Irish volunteer co-ordinator, including onsite support from a returning volunteer during the settling in period.

Post-placement: debriefing

Comber will also be happy to put you in touch with previous volunteers, or to help you access relevant experience in disability sectors post departure if required.

How will we communicate with clients and staff?

Interpretation support will be provided for volunteers by local high school students who volunteer for the opportunity. Romanian is a Latin-based language and you will be able to recognise many words and hopefully learn to say the basics quite quickly.

“Language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of resources are a challenge. Comber will have an interpreter available to help. Your non verbal communication skills will be very useful!” – past Comber Volunteer

How do I apply?

1. First of all familiarise yourself with our website and literature and decide whether you would like to apply with Comber. A good source of information is also available on www.volunteeringoptions.org which gives a good overview of the challenges and rewards of an overseas placement, or read the Comhlámh Volunteer Charter available on our site.

Next, self-select by asking yourself **are you....**

- Qualified and experienced as required for the role?
- Able to raise €2,000 to cover programme costs and sponsorship?
- Available to travel to Dublin/ Laois for interview?
- Available to attend pre-departure induction in Dublin on 26th of May?
- Available for a full 5 week period on the dates listed?
- Interested in and supportive of Comber's mission and work?
- Motivated to contribute to the development of an under-developed and under-resourced disability sector in Romania?
- Able to manage the challenges involved in an overseas placement?

2. If you are interested, then we would love to hear from you! Please complete the application form and email to us by **January 27th 2012**. We will close the recruitment process when we have filled the available places on each programme.

3. Applications will be short-listed and successful candidates invited for interview. The format will include an individual and group interview where possible.

4. If you are accepted on to the programme, you will need to return a €200 deposit within 2 weeks.

5. If you are accepted on to the programme, you will need to raise a minimum of €2,000 towards the costs of the programme before you leave. This covers the costs of your flights, insurance and accommodation, as well as a donation to Comber's work.

6. You will also need to attend one full day of pre-departure induction before you leave with your group.

Where do I find out more information?

More detailed information about the conditions and practicalities of the placement will be provided on the Interview & Induction Days. Meanwhile, if you have any specific questions, please contact Triona Collins on triona@comber.ie or 086-3177616. To apply to the programme, please complete the Application Form www.comber.ie/volunteer and return **by January 27th 2012**.

We do hope you'll consider applying & we look forward to hearing from you!