

De Appeltuin

Native City: Leuven

Activities and mission of the organization:

De Appeltuin is one of the 40 Freinet Schools in Flanders. The Freinet Pedagogical concept is part of the larger pedagogical project of Community Education in Flanders. Its aim is the total development of a person, with attention for the optimal development for each child personally. De Appeltuin is a kindergarten and primary school.

The aims of the school are:

- to have a constant attention for natural learning, based on the experiences and world of interest of the child, keeping in mind the established development goals and school terms.
- To work together, based on cooperative and democratic consultation instead of one sided authority. Children are one of the three stakeholder groups in our school. This way, we want to stimulate independency in children.
- To experiment and learn-by-doing instead of applying rules and regulations, because the learning effect is much larger when a child can convert self-discovered material into new relations.
- To work usefully and functionally. Working useless in a school leads to following without thinking and a lack of satisfaction.

The groups of children are structured in a way that there are always 2 age groups together. This stimulates that older children learn from the younger ones and the other way around.

There is a lot a thematic approach – so called projects – especially in the kindergarten. Their kids can explore together different themes that are of interest in their world. In primary school, these projects are larger and more elaborated in time and space. The learning area of ‘world orientation’ is treated in these projects.

Sector of the organization: children - education

Location of the project:

The school is located in the centre of Leuven, at 20 min. walk from the train station. Leuven is one of the most popular cities in Flanders for students. It is one of the oldest university cities of Belgium and has a wide range of cultural and social activities. Students from all over Belgium and Europe live here during the academic year. Leuven has a very rich history and possesses a lot of nice historical buildings and sites. Leuven has a small centre but counts several parts, which are nearby and are more quiet and green. It counts about 90.000 inhabitants.

Office environment:

De Appeltuin has a staff team of approx. 23 people, which includes kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, pedagogical support team, after care, administrative staff, coordinator,...

Another important factor in this school is the involvement of parents and thematic working groups within school the education of the children. This can be in the classroom (projects, practical work,...), class responsible, working groups in the school (reading support, logistics, music, communication,...).

Benefit from the volunteer:

The school sees project education as the important working method. Having an international volunteer could in this context be a perfect challenge for everyone involved to apply this form of non-formal education. The presence and cooperation of a foreign volunteer can mean a serious surplus value in our school. One of our goals is to form our children to be active citizens with respect for every other human being and for other cultures.

Tasks of the volunteer:

The tasks of the volunteer will evolve from practical help in the classroom to the setting up of a specific project. The velocity of this evolution will depend on the growing language and practical skills of the volunteer.

The volunteer will:

- Assist in mainly one classroom (3rd-4th grade). This can be individual guidance of children who can't follow the lessons as good as the others. It can also be to assist when the teacher is using a method where they need assistance, for example when they want to do an educational game to teach them something; then the volunteer can help in preparing this and guide it. It can also be to help with the classes when they are drawing, making something creative, or doing workshops, such as drama and theatre or teaching them new songs.
- Take part in out-door activities with the children: go swimming with them, excursions, thematical workshops, ... For example, going to the forest in autumn to learn about this season, going to a museum and they have interactive work-shops, going to a theatre or a movie and later in class having a de-briefing about it, going to the seaside and learn about the typical vegetation there, going for a week somewhere together...
- Next to that, the volunteer will organize own activities and workshops, depending on the interests of the volunteer. For example, to set up a project about her home country, to teach the children about the differences and similarities between cultures. A lot of time of the volunteer's work will go to this aspect.

Working hours during a normal day:

The volunteer will do voluntarily work for 4 days a week from 9AM until 4PM. School holidays are free. Obviously, the summer holiday the school is closed, but we strongly wish to offer the volunteer ongoing activities that are linked to the tasks that s/he will have done during the school year. De Appeltuin supports this and provided us with useful contacts. A lot of children that attend the school visit "Speelpleinwerking" during summer. This is a common setting in Flanders, where children can attend holiday activities under the supervision of experienced monitors. Activities include outside group games, art workshops, spending time in the playground, games, ... At this stage, we don't have a concrete practical outline of the tasks of the volunteer during summer, but we started negotiating with "Speelpleinwerking De Pit" and "Speelpleinwerking Groene Zone".

Specific skills volunteer should have:

For De Appeltuin **motivation** and **interest** in the themes the project is working with, namely education and children, is the biggest criteria. The learning-possibilities of the volunteer are also

important. Since it is needed in the work with children, the volunteer needs to like to work with children and should have interest in pedagogical methods.

Level of language skills: motivated to learn Dutch

Volunteer's benefit:

The volunteer will be as an extra in the team of the teachers of the school. She/he will get the opportunity to assist in different classrooms (mainly one, but some others) and to get a close look on the educational tools and methods of a 'Freinetschool'. The principles of the Freinet-philosophy are related to 'non-formal education' and 'experimental learning'. This means that the children have to work on a variety of projects with different themes.

