

Deployment of refugees as a volunteer through Present

**1. Introducing Present**

The mission of Present is to build a bridge between people who can offer help to others on the one hand, and people who need help on the other hand. Present as a national network of local organisations, grew a lot in the past few years. In the Netherlands there are around 75 local organisations, which are working in more than 100 municipalities.

Present can offer refugees to join voluntary work through partaking in projects, which are already being planned and carried out by other (permanent) volunteers. One of the main characteristics of Present is the way voluntary work is organised: in groups; individual projects; together with local social work organisations; careful guidance; aimed at helping vulnerable groups of people; focused on using the own talents and time of the volunteers. There are two types of projects that Present offers: 1) practical jobs at someone’s home; 2) social activities for a certain group of people, mainly at an institution (like elderly home).

**2. Impact**

Many local Present organisations have experience with organising activities of volunteers together with refugees. Besides, several Present organisations already organised voluntary work for refugees, for example in or around an asylum seekers centre. Joining Present as a volunteer can impact someone’s life or the Dutch society in different ways. Working in groups makes it easier for refugees to become a volunteer. Refugees who start working with Present, experience their work as a meaningful experience. In a short time frame you can really start doing something. You meant something to another person. In some cases people even keep in touch with each other after finishing the project. In carrying out the projects, it creates an opportunity to practice the Dutch language. Moreover, refugees start liking voluntary work, and are willing to see how they can contribute more. Finally, the image of refugees that people have, can change in a positive way.

**3. Mixed groups**

The most effective groups are ‘mixed’ groups of volunteers, so groups that consist of both refugees and Dutch citizens. Adding one or more Dutch volunteers is important due to cultural and language barriers. Unfortunately, it can also be that refugees are not regarded positively by the people who are helped or by their surroundings. Dutch volunteers can ‘protect’ the refugees.

Ways of voluntary work:

1. Refugees are added to existing groups of volunteers. Present has got three ‘flex groups’ of volunteers, which regularly go to help someone at his or her home. After some time the refugee can decide whether he or she wants to join a ‘flex group’ permanently. For Present it is important to keep an extra eye on this process.
2. Groups of volunteers, like students or church groups, can welcome one or more refugees in their group for their own project. In this way Dutch volunteers are activated to undertake an activity with refugees, while refugees can partake in voluntary work.
3. Refugees can execute projects under supervision of a Dutch volunteer. We prefer to find at least a few Dutch volunteers who will regularly execute projects together with a group of refugees.

**4. Registration of refugees**

In Ede Present offers refugees in the first place the opportunity to join the ‘flex groups’. These groups are groups of volunteers who do all kinds of practical jobs at someone’s house. Each group is scheduled once in two months. Refugees can partake in all three ‘flex groups’, but can also decide to join one or two.

When a refugee registered him-/herself, he/she is invited for an interview at our office. We would like to know what he/she likes to do, like gardening, cleaning, helping in moving, putting up wallpaper, painting, laminate flooring or other small jobs at someone’s house. We will ask someone’s help only when he or she likes the activity of the project that is planned. For example, when someone does not like gardening, we will not ask him/her whether he/she would like to join a gardening project.

The refugee will start working with other volunteers. This is a nice and comfortable way to start voluntary work, and it also gives opportunities to learn Dutch and to integrate more easily. When needed and when possible, we connect the refugee with one other Dutch volunteer (buddy). After joining several times in the ‘flex groups’, the refugee can decide whether he/she like to join the ‘flex groups’ permanently, or he/she likes other type of voluntary work with or without Present.

Registration through email via info@presentede.nl or by filling the form on <http://stichtingpresent.nl/ede/formulier-aanmelden-individu/>.