

**The Reprieve Volunteer Programme places enthusiastic volunteers in capital defence offices in the United States (US), where they work assisting with the representation of impoverished defendants facing execution and/or on research and litigation directed towards systemic reform.**

Volunteers are placed for a minimum of three months at nonprofit law offices dedicated to capital defence work in the US, predominantly in the Deep South. The volunteer placements are completely self-funded, that is, the volunteer must pay for all costs of travel, accommodation and living expenses while in the placement.

The work performed by Reprieve volunteers has proved vital to the legal offices to which they are attached. Each of the offices supported is a non-profit organisation working in a notoriously under-funded field. Reprieve volunteers play an important role in helping these offices meet the demands of their caseloads.

In addition to the benefit to the host offices and their clients, volunteer placements are a richly rewarding experience for the volunteers themselves, offering the unique experience of working in a foreign country and providing humanitarian relief to those in need while learning about another legal system.

### **Types of Work**

On arrival at their placement, Reprieve volunteers are given in-house training and more basic tasks designed to make them familiar with the host office and the requirements of the work. Thereafter, the work of volunteers can be extremely varied depending upon the needs of the office at the particular time. Tasks may range from record collection and analysis to ferrying clients' family members to death row to visit their loved one, to providing courtroom assistance in capital hearings or trials. The abilities, skills and willingness of the volunteer combined with the workload of the host office largely dictate which tasks volunteers will perform.

As Reprieve places volunteers at a number of offices, the nature of the work and the work practices will differ. However, some of the common tasks include:

- **File Management:** Some of the most useful work performed by a volunteer is file management. Volunteers will often find themselves either organising or updating a file, including organisation of a file (paginating, preparing annotated indexes etc.); preparation of team documents (address lists, timelines, case status sheets etc.); preparation of notebooks for use in court (witness statements, pleadings, exhibits); preparation of trial summaries involving lengthy transcripts; as well as scanning or copying file documents.
- **Investigation:** The investigation of a case at the guilt or penalty phase of a capital trial or in post-conviction proceedings includes fact-finding involving interviews of potential witnesses and collection of documents. The bulk of investigative work for volunteers involves work with documents. This may include requests for records such as medical and educational records, requests for public records, as well as news media and social media research. Volunteers may also accompany staff members to client or witness interviews and draft memos memorializing what was discussed.
- **Research:** Drafting motions or appearing in court is the exclusive domain of the practicing US qualified attorneys. However, a volunteer may be requested to research a certain legal issue and draft a memorandum outlining the results. Other research may include research on issues of

psychology or forensic science. Reprieve volunteers in the past have also engaged in research and litigation directed at systemic reform, rather than just individual cases.

### **Workloads**

The average working week in these offices for volunteers is 40-50 hours but may involve longer hours and work during weekends for certain projects. During times of high demand, such as during a capital trial, some volunteers have chosen to work 7 days a week, upwards of 16 hours a day.

### **Person Specification**

Reprieve volunteers must be opposed to the death penalty. Maturity and self-sufficiency are critical given the demands of the work and the placement in a foreign country.

A Reprieve volunteer is placed into a busy office with staff stretched to their limits in terms of what can be achieved in a day and it is important that the volunteer's presence be a help rather than a hindrance. Due to limited resources, volunteers must be able to work independently when staff members are unavailable.

Volunteers must respect the host office environment and be sensitive to the personal impact of death penalty work on the lawyers and investigators who do it every day for years on end. Volunteers should also be aware that they may not receive the praise or acknowledgement they deserve for their work, simply because of the extreme time pressure their supervisors are forced to operate under.

Volunteers must respect the social environment in which they are working. The southern United States is a socially and politically conservative region. A volunteer needs to bear this in mind, and not assume that his/her views are shared by the people he encounters in the course of the work.

It must be stressed that a great deal of the work that a volunteer is expected to do will be simply to provide administrative assistance to attorneys working on active cases.

### **Applicants will be considered against the following criteria:**

#### Essential

- Be over 21 and fluent in written and spoken English;
- Be available to volunteer for at least three months and able to financially support yourself for the duration of the placement;
- Be committed to Reprieve's aims, in particular, assisting in the provision of effective legal representation and humanitarian assistance to those facing the death penalty at the hands of the state;
- Be opposed to the death penalty;
- Have a commitment to volunteer charitable service for the poor, including a willingness to perform repetitive and unglamorous tasks;
- Have a commitment to performing volunteer service with humility and with respect for both those served and others working in the field;
- Be mature and independent, with a strong sense of personal responsibility;

- Be able to manage living in a foreign country and navigating the workplace;
- Have an ability to work well with others and fit in well in the placement offices;
- Have excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including clear written and oral expression;
- Be willing and able to work long hours including weekends and evenings, if necessary, while working under pressure and meeting deadlines;
- Be proficient with basic computer skills;
- Be familiar with and agree to abide by Reprieve's volunteer policy statement.

### **Non-essential (but desirable)**

- Have a driving licence and driving experience;
- Have previous volunteer experience;
- Have experience in any of these areas: mental illness, mental retardation, criminal justice, prisons and prison visiting, poverty, race or class;
- Have additional computer skills, e.g. spreadsheets, databases, and on-line research tools;

### **When to go to the US**

Reprieve volunteer placements generally last for 3 – 6 months, between August and May.

During the summer period, many US host offices tend to fill their volunteer positions with American law students. The application process for this time of year is therefore extremely competitive, and Reprieve receives many more applications than there are available placements.

It is also worth bearing in mind that Reprieve volunteers who choose to go out for the summer may well find that the more advanced (and thus more interesting) work is undertaken by the US interns as they are more qualified.

You should make clear on your application what your proposed dates are so that they may be considered. We strongly recommend that you apply at least four months in advance of your commencement date.

### **Costs**

The volunteer pays all costs associated with the placement, including visa fees, travel costs and living expenses. Reprieve is not able to provide any funding to volunteers.

Travel costs associated with being a Reprieve volunteer can be high. The cost of airfares to the US is variable but in the range of £700-£2000. It is also a requirement of the program that volunteers take out travel insurance including health insurance that provides coverage at the highest level, due to the high cost of private health treatment in the US

Past Reprieve volunteers have provided estimates of the cost of spending three months in the United States. These estimates of course depend upon location and lifestyle, but a basic cost for three months is estimated to be approximately £4000.

Finding accommodation in the US is relatively straightforward and host offices generally provide information to help you find a place and settle in.

## **Visas**

You will need a US visa to participate in the program. Participants in the Reprive Volunteer Programme are eligible to apply for a business visa as members of an organization providing volunteer, charitable work. This is called a B1 visa.

Obtaining a visa is the sole responsibility of the volunteer. Acceptance into the Volunteer Programme is required before you can attend any visa interview with the US Embassy. If you are accepted as a volunteer, Reprive will provide the supporting documentation required for the interview.

## **National Police Check**

As part of the application process we require you to have a criminal records check. This is essential as you will be unable to visit any prisons without it. The way to proceed is to apply for a Subject Access Request. This is a request that must be made to your local police headquarters.

There is no standard application process, as it varies from force to force. Therefore, you will need to contact your local police headquarters and ask for a Subject Access Application, which you are entitled to under Section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. You will only need what is known as a PNC (Police National Computer) check.

What do I need to provide?

This will vary from force to force. However, there is a standard fee of £10 that you will need to pay, and in addition to this, you will be required to provide them with some form of identification. To find out what ID is appropriate, please check with your local police force.

How long will it take?

You should receive a reply from the National Identification Service (NIS) within 40 days of them receiving your application.

Can I apply for a volunteer placement before I have my Criminal Records Check?

Yes – you can, although you will not be accepted until we have a valid copy of your criminal records check.

## **To apply, you will need to send the following to [applications@reprive.org](mailto:applications@reprive.org)**

- An application form completed and saved with the following filename: name.application.doc. (E.g. If your name was John Smith, the application form would need to be saved as johnsmith.application.doc)
- Current curriculum vitae [name.cv.doc]
- A sample of your professional or academic writing [name.sample.doc]
- Recent digital photo (head and shoulders only) saved as a JPEG [name.photo.jpg]
- Scanned copy of photo page of passport [name.passport.pdf or name.passport.jpg]

- Scanned copy of national police check [name.policecheck.pdf or name.policecheck.jpg]

Applications will be assessed on match of skills and ability of the applicant to the work to be performed in the US. All the information given by each applicant in his or her application form will be considered. Unfortunately, we are not able to offer everyone an interview, and as a result, some applications will be considered unsuccessful without progressing to the interview stage. There may be a delay between applying and the interview stage.

If you are accepted we will pass your file to the US Reprieve Volunteer Coordinator who determines where you will be placed in the US and provides a consulate letter for your visa interview.

If a successful applicant becomes unable to take up the placement for personal reasons, prompt notice to Reprieve is appreciated.

### **US Volunteer Application Form (73.0 KB)**

- [US Volunteer Application Form \(73.0 KB\)](#)