

MDS Volunteer Guide



What you need to know
about serving
at an MDS project





A look at what's inside



- 4 Welcome**
- 5 Five ways to be a good guest**
Experiencing a new culture
- 6 Work safe be safe**
Tips to stay safe while you serve
- 7 MDS fashion 101**
Dressing for the project site
- 8 Words of wisdom**
Past volunteers tell you what it's really like on an MDS project
- 9 What to expect**
What every volunteer wished they knew before serving
- 10 Crossing the Canada/U.S. border**
Six things you need to do before crossing the border
- 11 Are we there yet?**
Important information regarding transportation and accommodations
- 12 Don't be caught empty-handed**
Volunteer survival checklist

4 PILLARS OF AN MDS PROJECT

VOLUNTEERS

MDS relies on leaders and long-term volunteers who typically serve 4 weeks or more and weekly volunteers who who serve for 1-3 weeks.

ACCOMMODATIONS

MDS provides a place to house 20 or more volunteers, including cooking and dining facilities.

MEANINGFUL WORK

MDS coordinates clean-up and construction work that serves people who have experienced a disaster.

FUNDING

Partner organizations provide the majority of funding needed to purchase building materials.



Thanks for saying yes to MDS



MDS is the organized response of Anabaptist churches to the needs of neighbors in times of disaster, following Christ's example by giving time, talents and energies to help relieve suffering.

The aim of MDS is to assist the most vulnerable community members, individuals, and families who would not otherwise have the means to recover.

Volunteer leaders provide day-to-day management on each project site. Weekly volunteers serve on site to help clean up, repair and rebuild.

When you say YES to MDS you help bring people home after a disaster.

SPIRIT-LED

GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

CHRIST-LIKE SERVICE

Mennonite Disaster Service is a volunteer network of Anabaptist churches that responds in Christian love to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States.

While the main focus is on cleanup, repair and rebuilding homes, this service touches lives and nurtures hope, faith and wholeness.

mhs.mennonite.net

Follow us on Facebook / Instagram / Twitter / Youtube

MDS Binational Office

583 Airport Road
Lititz, PA 17543 USA
717-735-3536 Fax 717-735-0809
toll-free 1-800-241-8111

MDS Canada Office

200-600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2J1 CANADA
204-261-1274 Fax 204-261-1279
toll-free 1-866-261-1274



“You came as strangers, and now you leave as friends.”



WELCOME

TO MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

In response to volunteers' service, homeowners affected by disaster will often say, "You brought your hammers and your hearts, and you gave us hope. You came as strangers, and now you leave as friends."

As Anabaptist Christians, we believe in following Jesus by putting our faith into action, which translates into loving our neighbors and serving those in need. MDS is made up of people led by God's spirit to respond out of our compassion, obedience to the scriptures and gratefulness to God.

As you begin your time of service with MDS, come prepared to be stretched and challenged as you find joy in serving others. Be encouraged by the words of Jesus: "Whatever you did for these members of my family, you did for me." (*adapted from Matthew 25:40*)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keni King".

MDS Executive Director

And thank you in advance for your service!





Experiencing
a new
culture

5 ways to be a good guest

Speak with respect. (And take off your sunglasses.)

Listen with an open heart. Take the time to talk with disaster survivors and hear their stories.

See with new eyes. Take the attitude of a servant as Jesus did. Make an effort to enter the community in which you are serving with no preconceptions. Be aware of how racism or prejudice might affect what you see.

Think big. Don't assume that all members who live in a community have the same beliefs and practices.

Expect things to be different. We are all more comfortable with what is familiar to us. Consider your own culture and how it shapes your perspective.



Work Safe Be Safe



TIPS TO STAY SAFE WHILE YOU SERVE

1. Read and understand MDS safety information (provided at MDS site).
2. Understand your physical limitations.
3. Do not attempt a job alone that could be done more safely by two people.
4. Set a steady pace for the work.
5. Never work while ill or fatigued.
6. Be aware of extreme temperature risks.
7. Hydrate regularly.
8. Wear approved work attire and shoes.
9. Wear personal protective equipment (provided by MDS) whenever needed.
10. Keep job sites clean and neat at all times.
11. Learn the correct/safe way to do all jobs.
12. Report all accidents and unsafe conditions to the crew leader or project director.

**When it comes to safety,
Make
Do
Somehow
is NOT good enough**

Got tetanus?

MDS strongly recommends that you are up to date on your tetanus shots.

Insurance

Please bring your health insurance card with you. As a volunteer you are responsible for your own insurance coverage.



MDS fashion 101

DRESSING FOR THE JOB SITE



MODESTY PLEASE

Wear durable clothing and follow these fashion rules when serving on MDS project sites:

Closed-toe shoes

Shirts with sleeves

Covered midriff

Modest necklines

Knee-length shorts or long pants



Why do you need to dress modestly?

- You are a witness to the communities in which we serve.
- Respect for the diverse groups that serve with MDS.
- Safety: Exposed skin is more likely to be sunburned, bitten by bugs and scratched while working. Exposed toes are more easily injured.



Dress for the season.

Did you check the weather at your destination? Layers work best for winter and wet weather.



You feel like you're making a difference.



A typical day for an MDS volunteer

So, what's it like to be part of an MDS crew? The day starts around 6 a.m. when the alarms go off. Lunches are made and then a hearty breakfast is eaten. After morning devotions, you gather your tools and head off to your job site.

At the job site, expect a short morning and afternoon break, with a longer break at noon for lunch. When it's hot and humid, then additional water breaks may be needed.

Volunteers pack up tools and clean the job site before returning to the MDS camp by 5 p.m. Gear is unloaded, and then it is time to wash up and have dinner. Meals are prepared by the cooks who volunteer with MDS. And, yes, the food is great!

After dinner, there is time to share about the day's events. Most evenings are open for the volunteers. The leadership team continues to meet, planning for the next day. On most Wednesday evenings, a homeowner or someone from a partner agency or local recovery committee shares stories.

Bed comes early, around 10 p.m. No one really feels like staying up late; most are too tired. But it's a good tired, the kind of tired that says you had a hard and worthwhile day and you made a difference in someone's life.

Words of Wisdom

PAST VOLUNTEERS TELL YOU WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE ON A PROJECT



Be willing to be flexible.



You will be a blessing and you will be blessed.



What to expect

WHAT EVERY VOLUNTEER WISHED THEY KNEW BEFORE SERVING



DAILY SCHEDULE

- 6:00 Wake up
- 6:30 Make your own bag lunch
- 7:00 Eat a hot breakfast
- 7:30 Group devotions
- 7:45 Get your job assignment
- 8:00 Load tools & head to job site
- 12:00 Eat lunch
- 4:00 Clean up job site
- 5:00 Return to camp or home
- 6:00 Eat supper
- 7:00 Wash dishes
- 7:30 Free time or sharing time
- 10:00 Bedtime

Wednesday evenings are set aside for worship, fellowship and sharing. Local residents are often invited to share their stories with volunteers.

Weekends for those who stay around may include time for rest, preparation for the following week, camp maintenance and group activities. Church attendance is expected Sunday morning.

THE BASICS

1. Be prepared to be flexible.
2. Serve 40-45 hours a week on the job site.
3. Commitment to quality work.
4. Be willing to work as a team and take direction from project leadership.
5. Take time to listen to homeowners and community members. (Do not make promises to homeowners that you cannot personally fulfill.)
6. Serve and share accommodations and meals with other individuals and groups.
7. All meals are provided Monday through Friday when overnight stays are required.
8. Participate in orientation, devotions and Wednesday evening sharing. You may be asked to lead a devotional.
9. Help with nightly and end of the week cleanup (vehicles, building, camp maintenance, dishes).
10. Alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, illegal substances and firearms are not acceptable at MDS projects and job sites.
11. Pets are not permitted in MDS buildings or vehicles, at job sites or volunteer gatherings.
12. Be sensitive when taking or using photos. Some volunteers or clients prefer not to have their picture taken. Never share any photos without permission of the subject(s).

ESPECIALLY FOR RV VOLUNTEERS ...

- ▶ Serve four 6-hour days a week.
- ▶ Live in your recreational vehicle (must be self-contained).
- ▶ Make your own meals.
- ▶ Commit to a minimum of four weeks.



CROSSING THE CANADA / U.S. BORDER

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO BEFORE CROSSING THE BORDER

- 1 Don't forget your passport.**
Make sure it's up-to-date. You will need it when crossing the border.
- 2 Get your border crossing letter.**
Whether you are registering online or using a paper copy, complete your travel and border crossing info, and then submit to the MDS office in your country (Lititz, PA for U.S. residents and Winnipeg, MB for Canadian residents). Forms **MUST** be sent no later than one month before departure.
- 3 Buy travel insurance if necessary.**
Check whether your plan has international coverage. As a volunteer, you are responsible for your own insurance coverage.
- 4 Use the right words.**
When crossing the border, use the words 'volunteer' and 'serve'. Do not say 'work' or 'job', as this implies being paid.
- 5 Be prepared to show documents.**
You must show your border crossing letter when going through customs. Failure to do so could mean that you are not able to cross the border.



Especially for Canadian residents crossing to U.S. projects:

- ▶ You will be paroled into the U.S. (photo taken, finger-printed) and given an I-94 card which must be returned to U.S. or Canadian officials when leaving the U.S.
- ▶ Allow plenty of time (2-3 hours) at the border. Take at least \$6 cash (U.S. dollars) with you as border officials might ask you to purchase a visa. (They may not accept credit cards.)

Contact us:

MDS Canada Office
200-600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2J1 CANADA
toll-free 866-261-1274 fax 204-261-1279
mdscanada@mds.mennonite.net

MDS Binational Office
583 Airport Road
Lititz, PA 17543 USA
toll-free 800-241-8111 fax 717-735-0809
mdsus@mds.mennonite.net



ARE WE THERE YET?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING TRANSPORTATION AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Weekly Volunteers

(1-3 weeks)

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Volunteers are responsible for travel to and from the project.
- ▶ Volunteers are expected to cover their own travel costs.
- ▶ Volunteers may be asked to use their personal vehicles to travel to job sites.
- ▶ MDS vehicles are for project use only.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- ▶ Lodging and meals are provided at no cost. (Local or daily volunteers typically go home at night.) Weekly volunteers are expected to provide their own bedding, pillows, towels, etc.
- ▶ Overnight accommodations vary at each project site: weekly volunteers typically share dorm style quarters by gender.
- ▶ Most MDS sites have Wi-Fi connections for volunteers.
- ▶ Laundry facilities are not available.

Project Leadership

(4 weeks or more)

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ MDS will assist with travel arrangements if requested.
- ▶ Travel expenses will be reimbursed according to the current travel policy.
- ▶ Volunteers may be asked to use their personal vehicles to travel to job sites.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- ▶ Lodging and meals are provided at no cost. MDS provides bedding and towels.
- ▶ Every MDS project site is different. Accommodations vary: private quarters are provided for leaders when possible.
- ▶ Laundry facilities are provided.
- ▶ Wi-Fi connections are available.

**FINANCIAL GIFTS ARE ALWAYS
WELCOME TO SUPPORT THE
MISSION OF MDS.**

RV Volunteers

(4 weeks or more)

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Volunteers are responsible for making their own travel arrangements to and from the project site.
- ▶ Travel expenses will be reimbursed according to the current travel policy.
- ▶ Volunteers may be asked to use personal vehicles to travel to job sites.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- ▶ Your self-contained RV is your lodging. MDS provides the RV parking site with full hookups at no cost.
- ▶ Volunteers are responsible for their own meals.
- ▶ Where possible, laundry services and Internet access are provided.
- ▶ Wi-Fi is available at the RV project office.
- ▶ Pets are allowed if the location MDS RVers are staying at allows pets. Pets are not permitted in MDS buildings or vehicles, at job sites or volunteer gatherings.

Don't be caught empty-handed

VOLUNTEER SURVIVAL CHECKLIST

PLAN AHEAD

- Schedule your date and location online at mds.mennonite.net or call MDS.
- Each person joining the group should complete the online registration or paper form before service.
- Volunteers should arrive at the MDS project base no earlier than late Sunday afternoon. Volunteers are expected to serve the full 5 days on the project site (Monday through Friday), leaving after the work day on Friday evening, or on Saturday morning.
- Plan your travel arrangements.
- Learn about the community in which you will be serving.
- Take a skills training course on how to drywall or paint (Home Depot has classes) or have someone skilled show you.
- Share your plans with your church family.
- Make sure your tetanus shot is up-to-date.



Tools: MDS has tools on project sites for you to use. You may wish to bring small tools and personal tool belts.
Check with the volunteer coordinator for tool requirements at your location.

PACKING LIST

Everybody needs:

- Durable clothes that can get dirty (lots of them) and that meet the MDS dress code
- Closed-toe shoes for the job site
- Hat and sunglasses
- Sunscreen lotion
- Photo ID
- Health insurance card
- Water bottle (optional—MDS usually provides)

For overnight stays:

- Towels
- Toiletries
- Bedding and pillow
- Flip flops for showering
- Flashlight
- Bible
- Favorite devotional
- Musical instrument to help with worship
- Cards or games
- Camera
- Nice outfit for special events (long-term volunteers)
- Favorite recipes and cooking utensils (if you're the cook)