

2010

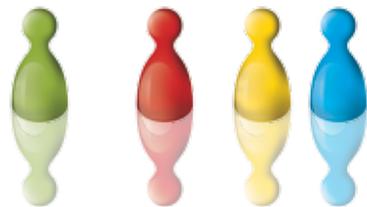
ContAct

M A G A Z I N E

YOUR
FREE
COPY



European Voluntary Service: Estonian impressions



„This project has been carried out with the support of the European Community programme Youth in Action. The content of this project does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Community or the NAG, nor does it involve any responsibility on their part.“

What is European Voluntary Service?

European Voluntary Service (EVS) helps young people to develop their sense of solidarity by participating, either individually or in a group, in non-profit, unpaid voluntary activities abroad which lasts depending on a project 2 to 12 months. It is open to all young people aged 18 to 30; EVS is a true 'learning service'. Beyond benefiting the local communities, by participating in voluntary activities, young volunteers can develop new skills and, therefore, improve their personal, educational and professional development. Volunteers can benefit from specific training throughout the activity and agree on their expected learning outcomes, processes and methods in advance.

For organisations EVS offers an opportunity to send Estonian young people or involve foreign volunteers in their everyday work by supporting their development and also bringing new ideas, energy and working methods to the organisation. EVS offers to young people a chance to experience working as a volunteer in Europe or some country outside of Europe in the field which is especially interesting to him/her. The topics of the activities are quite wide including educational, cultural, sports, arts, environmental activities, youth work, social work etc. EVS is a cooperation project with at least three parties - a volunteer, a sending and a hosting organisation. In addition, there can be a coordinating organisation which supports and helps the realization of the project in the hosting organisation which, while having enough working possibilities, might need additional support with practical questions and financial responsibilities. With the help of the sending and hosting (sometimes also the coordinating organisation being involved) and the support of the Youth in Action programme the young person's volunteer service will happen.

Read more about the Youth in Action programme from the webpage europa.noored.ee/evs or European Commission's webpage ec.europa.eu/youth

Continuous Action

Continuous Action is a non-governmental organisation which unites people interested in voluntary service, lifelong learning and equal opportunities. We cooperate with governmental, non-governmental, recreational, educational and cultural associations, societal organisations and movements, with other organisations both in Estonia and abroad which are interested and promote the same actions and values as we do. The aim of our activity in and through Continuous Action is to enable the possibility of lifelong learning and to act within the boundaries of equal opportunities irrespective of gender, social status and age both in Estonia and at the international level. In order to achieve the aims and tackle the objectives, we develop and implement initiatives, projects and diverse actions at local and international level. In our daily activities we tend to involve as many people as possible, irrespective of age, social status, economic situation, knowledge, education.

Don't hesitate to contact us with ideas for cooperation in the framework of the European Voluntary Service as a volunteer, hosting or sending organisation.

Please find the contacts on our webpage www.continuousaction.ee

Preface

Kairi Püss

Project coordinator of Continuous Action

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) celebrated its 10th anniversary in Estonia in 2010. Throughout the years hundreds of young people have got the opportunity to go abroad, give a helping hand as a volunteer, and explore the world and him/herself while living in a different environment. As many as there have been young Estonians going abroad with the EVS programme, there are also many nice and curious young people coming to Estonia every year to do the voluntary work and to influence the local communities which are surrounding them here.



In this magazine more than 15 young Europeans tell their EVS story and share the impressions about their life and work in Estonia. All of them were EVS volunteers during the years 2009 and 2010 and connected to Continuous Action, an organization located in Tallinn, Estonia either because we hosted or coordinated their voluntary work projects. Among the articles you will find four stories of the young people who worked in the kindergartens in Tallinn – the Tihase kindergarten, the Kullatera kindergarten, the Kiikohu kindergarten. And also several other articles about the projects in the German High School of Tallinn, local municipality organisations in small towns called Saku and Kehra and also in the office of Continuous Action. There is also a story about seven volunteers who worked during four weeks in the Kehtna Economy and Technology School which gave them the jump-start to try to take more initiative and be active in their lives.

"The journey of your life, no matter where it takes you or how long it lasts, can also change your life." - A thought I read from the in flight magazine while having my own short travel recently. This thought describes and summaries quite well the feelings towards the experiences the young people from various countries describe in this magazine. All of them consider the opportunity to work and live in a small country called Estonia, as a unique and memorable experience which in some of the articles is also described as life changing. To take this decision to go abroad for a while is itself very brave and not all young people are ready for coming out from their safe environment and start in a way a new life with the new friends,

new surroundings and community and maybe even with the first colleagues of their life. All of these young people whose articles you are about to read were brave and at the same time curious to discover something totally new for them, try out new things and learn from all of it that came and happened to them during their EVS project in Estonia. Living together with the other people, other nationalities, other volunteers, other developing personalities can be very challenging, but I am very happy that all of them managed to succeed and some of them maybe even made friends for a lifetime.

Most of the volunteers who describe their experience also mention the very cold and dark winter they had a chance to feel and now remember because of that. I, as a native Estonian myself, would give an award to each of them who survived the depressive cold and darkness, the longest winter in at least 20 years! To live and work here in our climate can be usual for the local people, but to come to Estonia and coincidentally have the chance to feel the real winter with all the challenges and pleasures it gives to the people, and especially when arriving to these conditions from your home country's warm temperatures, really, my respect! :)

Volunteer Anna: "You can always wish things were better, but then you sometimes forget to enjoy what you actually have." The time is short and limited. Make the most out of it during your voluntary service, experience as much as you can and have no regrets. Just later dream to return one day and see how life has gone in the meantime here and there and remember that there is always something new to discover and experience.

New Challenge!

Michael Williams from United Kingdom
Gian Pietro Lolli from Italy
Volunteers in Saku Municipality
May 2009 – May 2010

Interview by Gert-Kristjan Rung (Saku Sõnumid), article and translation to English by Kaisa Oim

Two young men: Michael Williams (21) born in Liskeard England, UK and Gian Pietro Lolli (29) born in Forlì (Bologna), Italy decided to take up their EVS project in Estonia. The common reason was the boys' curiosity of unknown and Gian Pietro mentioned his interest towards Northern countries in general.



Gian Pietro Lolli and Michael Williams

The volunteers liked their job. Michael was a sports teacher, a trainer for a Rugby team at school and a youth worker. He describes his experience in Estonian: "Väga hea!" Gian Pietro was working in a kindergarten. He finds it a new experience for him, a little bit strange but likable: "The people were mostly nice. I was keeping my eye on the kids, taught them maths and other things, introduced Italy. I was also working at school where I helped with English and gave some Italian lessons." Before coming to Estonia Michael was a construction worker: "I was a self-made construction worker!" he says humorously. Gian Pietro has an experience as an accountant and he has been working in a Pension Agency where he was making research about the companies that did not pay pension allowances.

To ask the guys if they were homesick, Michael replies: "Nope, not at all. I even forgot my sister's birthday," and Gian confirms: "Not that much, only some days in the beginning, but now I would rather not leave from Estonia." Both of them had good relations with the local young people, which makes it even harder to leave after the project ends. Gian said he even had good relations with some of the youngsters' parents: "They invited me for a visit and they were happy to have me there." To talk about language barrier then Michael has the experience youngsters understanding him better than their parents, but in the beginning his native English accent

caused the overall difficulties to be understood. "But the people learned to understand me and after 11 months it was already better," he says. Gian Pietro adds: "The younger kids still needed the English to be translated but the older ones understood me. I also started to learn Estonian step by step... Michael demonstrates his Estonian skills: "Firstly, ma ei räägi eesti keelt hästi, then väga hea, vabandust and that's pretty much it." Gian agrees that he also knows some words but often it is difficult to remember the meanings and even more difficult to make up the sentences.

During their spare time, Michael and Gian Pietro were busy with different things. Michael remembers: "I am so busy that I don't have free time for anything and anybody. The beerfactory of Saku is nice and the pub as well. I am communicating with the youth, I like the gym and I also instruct the rugby guys." Gian Pietro spent quite some time in Tallinn with his girlfriend. "We met when I came to Estonia," he says. "I also went to the cinema and

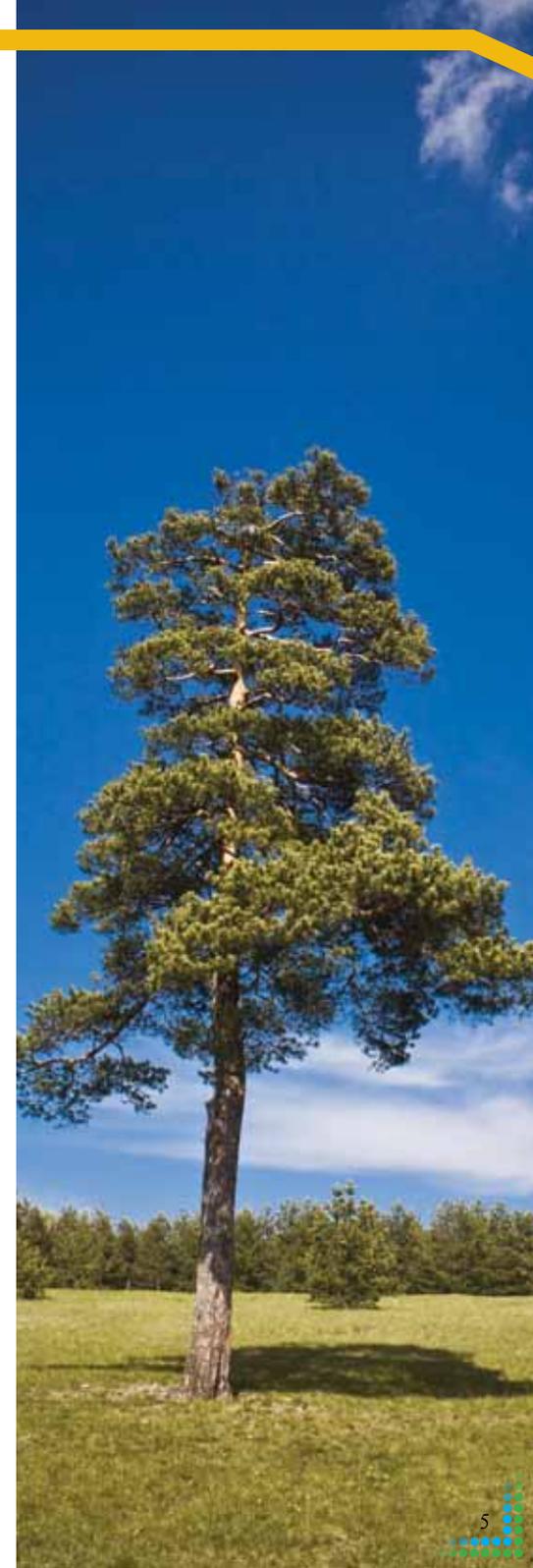
pubs, as people usually do," explains Gian Pietro about his free time activities.

Saku is a very small and calm place with a lot of greenery. Michael thinks that when you live in a friendly region, the integration is very easy: "It feels like everyone knows everyone and it's not difficult to bump into your friends in the streets." Gian Pietro mentions the politeness of the local people in Saku but compares them to be a lot more closed than in his homecountry. "I liked it in Saku because the living standard is good, it's close to the capital Tallinn, the transport is good and the place has a lot of greenery," he added. Both of the volunteers would like to come back to Estonia to visit their friends: "For sure, I would like to come to visit my friends," says Michael "I believe I would come back here, but rather for a visit than for a work," says Gian Pietro. Both of the volunteers' strongest memories from their EVS are connected to the weather. Michael tells it to be the extreme weather and Gian Pietro remembers his impressions when he first saw the Keila waterfalls in ice!

The first thing the volunteers would do when back at home would be to organize a gathering with their friends, rather a big party or a barbecue as well as meet their parents. For further plans Gian mentions to start working as lawyer's assistant. To ask if they would consider volunteering as another option in their lives, Michael says: "No, although it was a good experience, it's not enough to pay the bills ... and Gian Pietro thinks: "No, I think I am too old. If I were younger, I would go, because it's a good opportunity to learn about cultures and develop." If the volunteers would have a possibility to ask one question, Michael would like to know young people's future plans and Gian Pietro would ask our opinion about Italy. For people in Saku Michael wishes: "Live long, play hard! And young people – stop smoking!" And Gian Pietro hopes everyone will get a job.



Michael Williams and Gian Pietro Lolli



Experiences and a lot of praise to my job!

Christiane Maday
from Germany
Volunteer in Kehra Social Centre
September 2009 - June 2010

Since I was 10 years old, I wanted to go to Africa and help poor children. Right after school, just working in some place, feeding hungry people.

Then the school was about to finish, and no poor African child asked me to come to his place and help him cooking. I was desperate, so I started to look for some places which could need my help. Firstly, German volunteer projects about Africa and finally I found my sending-organisation. They were also dealing with European Voluntary Service, so I wondered: "Why Africa? There's a lot of work also in Europe!" and I applied for a lot of EVS projects, mostly taking place in youth centres all over Europe.

Kehra Social Centre was choosing me as a volunteer after a funny interview with Marge Aasalaid, and I started to collect information about that strange little country in the East-North of Europe. Capital? Size? History? I didn't know anything, but very soon I learned to see the beauty of the country. And I still see it, after 7 months in Estonia.

My job was about youthwork, playing guitar and doing some other workshops. As I already knew youthwork in Germany, I felt quite comfortable with it. Of course I was very nervous before my departure. I didn't think that life without my family and my friends would be possible.

My arrival was, until today, the hardest day of my EVS time. The airports, all the new people and the strange language (I didn't take my mom's advice and learn Estonian in Germany as I should have) were confusing me. But my coordinating organisation helped me open a bank account, I was brought to the train and got off in Kehra. There Marge and Kadi (my co-worker) were waiting



for me. My very first impression: the sun was shining, Marge smiling and hugging me and the train-station - looked somehow familiar to me. „It's a good place, I can stay here 9 months.“

The next morning, I had to go to work at 12:00, Kadi was waiting in front of my house. In the Youth Centre, we made the weekly schedule for all the workshops I had to give. I looked around and the youngsters seemed so shy, they didn't talk to me for a week. That were not the kind of young people I was used to in Germany. All of them were behaving very well!

After a while, my workshops were starting, I had a lot of visitors and learned to know a lot of people in the Youth Centre. Since the beginning I have loved my job. I am completely free in giving as many lessons as I want to, in any sub-

ject. So I started with language courses, about 8 guitar lessons, cooking, science, art, sewing and a blog-writing workshop. After 2 months, only the half of them still existed, but therefore there was a lot of new things to do: there were some events about to be organised like Halloween, Discos, Nikolaus, Christmas evening and so on. Besides there were some new workshops developing like art-lesson in the school or the German lessons for adults.

And if there was a free hour, I just started to play UNO or MEMO with the little girls who are already all my "kõige parem sõber" (best friend in Estonian).

On Thursdays, I have been working in Alavere. That's a little village next to Kehra, there is a youth centre as well and a school. My tasks were again art lessons and guitar play. Besides I have had my Estonian courses in the morning with a very nice teacher at school. She speaks German fluently so we always had interesting and funny lessons. After half a year, I can have conversations with people around me. It's not enough to understand philosophical speeches, but I don't stop learning!

Besides the work in the Youth Centre, I have been working in the Day Care Centre one hour a week so far. In the beginning I was very scared of disabled people. Although the three visitors there are very nice! I just started playing guitar as fast as possible, when my hour was over I run away. Well that's not how I imagine to make the world a better place!

So after a weekend visit in Maarja-küla, my attitude changed. I started talking with the visitors, I found out how different they are, what they talk about and what is

important for them. So my music activities became very different, I am a lot more interacting with them and I like all of them very much.

But next to the work, there's also the free time to be spent in Kehra. In the beginning, I did all those "projects" that I took from Germany: unfinished books, sewing projects, some art and cooking. Besides I spend a lot of time writing mails and letters to "Home".

But after a while, I discovered all the cool things people can do in Kehra after work; I started to go to church and to a choir, I went to sport lessons and met with some new friends weekly. Besides we have a library, it also has German books and if it's very boring, I just go out and join the kids playing. Now I have a lot of unfinished projects left, but only 6 weeks to finish them.

And there are so many cool things going to happen!

After my project is over, I will go to Germany (and leave "Home") for 6 days, longer I won't stand without Estonia! So, I will be right back, living in a guest-family helping renovating and travelling through Estonia. Because if there is one thing that I didn't do that it is: travelling though Estonia! There is absolutely no time for it as Kehra volunteer. But that's what makes the job here so beautiful, working 24 hours a day by spending time with people, talking with them and doing free time activities. We will see how life without Kehra is possible. I don't think it is.

But: "Never say No!" (volunteer's rule No 1)



A challenge to learn from!



Anna Lindberg
from Sweden

Volunteer in Tallinn Männikäbi Kindergarten
September 2009 - May 2010

When I arrived in Tallinn in September I couldn't imagine that it would actually be such a long, cold winter coming in just a couple of months. I had only realized that I was going to a country with a different climate two weeks earlier at the pre-departure training in Stockholm, when the volunteers from northern Sweden feared a winter without snow in France and Spain. For me, living in the southernmost part of Sweden, snow that last for more than two weeks and temperatures that are lower than -5 is something exotic. But now I am here, getting used to wearing half of my clothes at once and not being able to see ground at the kindergarten playground.

My first weeks in the kindergarten were difficult in many ways, I didn't expect the children to be so wild and so mean to each other and to the teachers. The weeks seemed so long and the days did not end when I went home, because then it was all the difficulties with living together with people I didn't know. But after the on arrival training that we had in October, things started to go better. I started to feel comfortable at work, the children behaved better and it was fun to get to know some new volunteers. Looking back at the months that have passed now, there have been both good times and bad times. It has been difficult at some moments, there have been times when I just wanted to give up and get on the next plane home. For example when our washing machine was broken for several weeks, or when I lost my handbag with everything that was in it in Narva. Or all the times when I've felt like the loneliest person in the world because every-

one else at least has a language in common. But there have also been many days when I have left my work with a smile on my face because I get so much love from the children, just for being the extra person who can give them attention when the teacher doesn't have time. And there have been laughter and great nights out with my new friends of course.

To be here has been a challenge, but from challenges you can learn so much about yourself and it makes you develop and grow as a person. You can always wish things were better, but then you sometimes forget to enjoy what you actually have. To come here was a quite impulsive decision for me, I have always wanted to be a volunteer and live in a foreign country but only a year ago I didn't think it would happen so soon. But now I am here, and looking forward to the second half of my EVS, and to spring!

First impressions about Estonia



Kajal Kiran Mohanty
from India
Volunteer in Continuous Action
May - October 2010

With these difference the people of Estonia has a great acceptance towards individuality which make me easy and familiar to the new environment. I have completed Master In Social Work with specialisation Family & Child Welfare. After completion of my study I am searching for a good exposure where I can learn and gain experience. I came to know about EVS and interested to participate in it. Now I am happy to choose Estonia & Continuous Action for my voluntary work, as Continuous Action is a youth organization, it has good platform for the youth to understand and to involve in youth activities. It provides opportunity for youth participation which may lead better discussion for our society.

My name is Kajal and I am from India, the place where you can see unity in diversity (multiethnic, multilingual and multi-religious), the place being the largest democracy in the world with a civilisation more than five thousand years old boasts of multiple cultural origins. So it is quite new, different and unique experience for me to come to Estonia (Tallinn), as it is different from India in every aspect of society in life style, food habits, cultural & social values.

About Estonia (Tallinn), I am happy to see that the people are self-sufficient which is one of the most disarable assets in a human life. Specially here the women are so active and self-independent and there is a equal opportunity for both man and women, where in India there is seen male domination in society. So I feel Estonian women became ideal for all those women in the world who are not aware of their rights. So I wish to learn lots of things about Estonia and its culture in coming days of my staying here.



“Mõisad põlevad, saksad surevad!” Ühe sakslase mõned kogemused Eestis

Felix Anlauf
from Germany
Volunteer in Tallinna Saksa Gümnaasium
October 2009 - May 2010

Felix Anlauf is 20 years old and came from Herdecke in Germany to Estonia. From October 1, 2010, till May 31, 2010, he did EVS in the Tallinna Saksa Gümnaasium (German High School of Tallinn). His working tasks were mainly assisting in German lessons, preparing projects and organizing free time activities, mostly connected to the German language and culture.

Why should one do EVS? Take my voluntary service in Estonia for example. You are living in an unfamiliar country in Eastern Europe doing a job you are not even getting paid for. This country doesn't even have a word to word translation for the movie "500 Days of Summer". Guess why? The winter is cold, dark and especially long. You live in an old tiny flat with a lot of other people who you cannot choose before and you even have to share a room. I had my first contacts to the local community when Estonians pushed me into a bus and it was not even enough to learn one language because half of Tallinn speaks Russian while the Estonian part uses, of course, Estonian...

Well, I kindly beg every Estonians pardon for this beginning. Of course it was a little bit ironic. Nevertheless there is some truth in it: EVS is no long-term holiday and everyone who expects a luxury apartment in the city centre with sea view and sauna should think about it one more time. Usually you have to lower your living standards and your expectations of private sphere. You should be able to adapt to live under unknown conditions, for example the long, cold and very dark winter in Estonia - thank god for the three, four almost bright hours per day in December and for the fact that Estonia does not have movie synchronization. By the way, I have never enjoyed a spring so much...

What EVS has to offer is time: time to read, time to chat with new friends in cafes, time to discover the country. Voluntary service is definitely like taking a break, whatever you have done before and whatever you will do afterwards. It offers you a possibility to look inside into

a foreign society and to reflect on yourself at the same time.

Living abroad will make you complain about all the foolish tourists you see but this does not mean that you are automatically integrated into the society. The first contacts and friends you'll get will be volunteers because they are in the same situation and need to build up completely new social structures, too.

I recognized that the best precondition is probably to have no detailed expectations. You cannot be disappointed and you are gratefully taking everything offered. You will gain positive as well as negative experiences and it is up to you to judge upon them.

I will refer to some of my experiences in Estonia which could be interesting for Estonians - who are maybe a little bit angry on me after the first lines...

Estonia definitely broke up with a lot of prejudices which still exist in Western Europe. There are people who have this image of a poor country that is not as developed as Germany. They have never heard of all the free(!) Wi-Fi-spots, electronic ID-cards, computers in every classroom or E-Kool Systems. And they do not have any idea that Skype was developed in Estonia.

Another point is that Estonia has definitely much more expressed national pride than Germany. All those flags on holidays and the military parade on Independence Day were quite new for me. On the other hand the people are not suffering from overestimation.

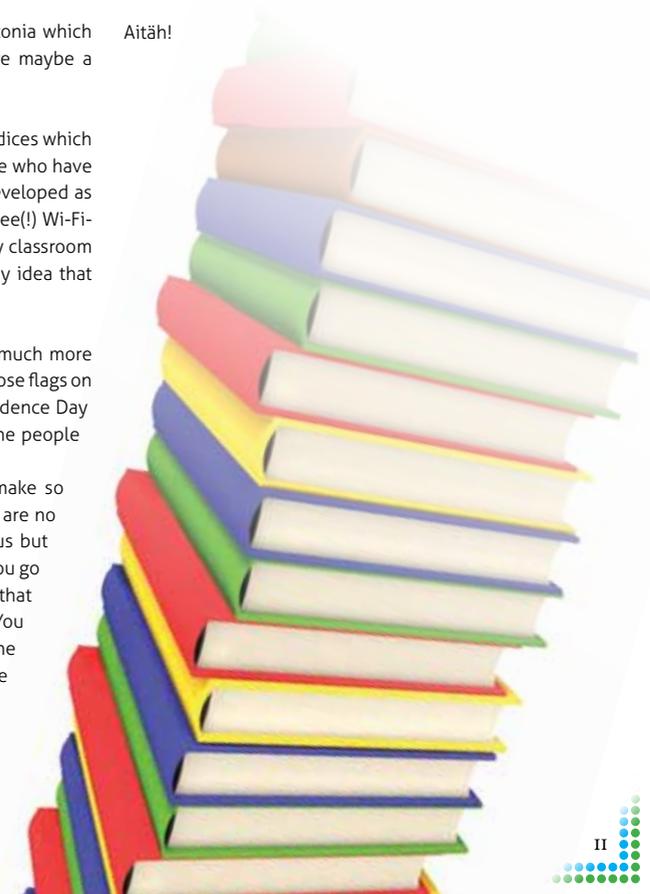
I have experienced that Estonians do not make so many differences between each other. There are no stars that live in an Estonian kind of Olympus but everything is connected like in a big family. You go to a concert of Arvo Pärt and you recognize that this famous composer is sitting next to you. You hear of the popular Revalia Meeskoor and the next day you recognize their rehearsals take place in your school and one of your students is a member. You walk through a usual street in Tartu and your Estonian friend points out: "By the way, this is the house of our Prime Minister Andrus (Ansip)."

I was impressed by the fact that Estonia seems to me like one big orchestra which got by singing what others only got by guerilla war: independence.

The only thing that was a bit scaring was a student who sang in the school "Mõisad põlevad, saksad surevad". Nevertheless I was very interested in the traces of the Baltic Germans.

Those points are only some experiences I made during my time in Tallinn, a city which I appreciate very much. I am happy that I got here. Besides my great working place, the Tallinna Saksa Gümnaasium, and the interesting people I met, the city was one big reason why my time here was very enjoyable.

Aitäh!



A modern fairytale – a rainbow

Justina Gintutyte

from Lithuania

Volunteer in Tallinn Kullatera Kindergarten

January – May 2010

“After the rain you can sometimes see one of the most beautiful natural phenomena - a rainbow with 7 colours: purple, dark blue, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. These seven colours were painting my life during all those 5 months very bright and interesting...”

Once upon a time there lived a very active, curious, energetic and tidy Lithuanian girl in a small country of 3 million people. She was pretty clear about what would happen with her after graduating from secondary school - she was planning to go to study in Lithuania. Plans are changing in the very unexpected ways. Aren't they? So, when she had decided to start her studies, she realised that it was not for her. Afterwards her life was very boring, she was looking for a job, and she couldn't find anything because of lack of experience. She needed to wait for one more year to think, understand and decide what she wants from her life. But there was still one thing that didn't give her peace. She remembered people saying: "Life is too short, time is not waiting. Study until you are young!" These words were killing her softly. "It's my life, why do I have to study, if I don't know whether I am ready to start this very re-

sponsible step?"

She was quite stubborn and gave no attention to what people were thinking. Afterwards, she decided to fight for her happiness in life, and she said: "Enough! Enough of sitting at home and doing nothing! I should find a way to spend half a year to benefit not only for myself but also for the society."



And there she was – starting her work as a volunteer in a kindergarten in Estonia!

Without any fear she spread her wings and with a wide smile she arrived to the cold, windy and snowy city in Estonia, Tallinn. The next day, the Lithuanian girl came to work and met lots of little children with sparkling eyes, clapping their small hands and inviting her to play. The children were asking a lot of questions: "Who is she? Who is that tiny, slender girl with blond hair?" And continuing with more: "Will she take care of us? Will she help to prepare for the school, laugh and play? Will she do handicrafts with us? Shall she wipe away the tears, when we cry, or care, if somebody would try to hurt us? Will she read fairytales? Hey, but why isn't she answering to our questions? Why is she so silent and just smiling? Where is she from? Does she live alone?"

Oh, no! Definitely not alone...

She lived with five people from different countries. It was interesting, funny, crazy, extraordinary and unique experience! They shared daily concerns, news, joys, tears, problems, food, friendship, warmth, laughter and peace. In a small flat, with 6 windows, four rooms, toilet, bathroom and a corridor, a loud laughter could be heard almost every day together with music and conversations that were very open, fun and useful. Life with these people was good.

During the long winter evenings she heard the sounds of the wind and snowstorm, but even when it was cold she was going out to see the night life. Finally, the spring came, the rain drops were knocking at the windowsills - and when the rain got heavier she was hiding in her own room. Nevertheless her curiosity didn't stop her to be interested in everything that was happening around her. She improved her English, found activities for children, made new friends from other countries, cultures. She was living independently and her life was interesting. "Carpe diem!"

Every morning she was walking on the slippery, wet and finally dry and clean streets to meet with children always having wide smiles on their faces. All her days with children were unique! They took up many interesting activities e.g. various handicrafts, games, theater plays, museum visits, sport activities, and Estonian courses!

And so it is! One of the most funny hours during the week were the hours she was spending on Estonian lessons. A vocal language just as if a bird song. Estonian

is spoken only by 1.1 million people worldwide, mostly in Estonia. Estonian belongs to Finno-Ugric language family. It has interesting letters such as: Ä, Ö, Ü, Õ and 14 cases(!), no articles, and no gender. Can you imagine that? Imagine an interview - you are listening, discussing, but do not understand what gender you are talking about (male or female :D). People say that Estonians are very cold in communicating. Estonians have been called "a singing nation", and they are very proud of it! Their favorite hobby is growing the trees. Unbelievable, but being in the forest, you can use the Internet! Lithuanian girl and her friends couldn't believe it neither until they tried it. People also say that Estonians are very slow, so after a month her Lithuanian friends started to ask questions: „Have you become slower like Estonians are?"

"Leedu tädi" - that's how children

were calling her. At the beginning it was quite strange to be called like that, but she got used to it and started to like it. She was gently calling children with names as Minu Konnake, Ingel, lõvi, kiisu, princess of a pea. She was so happy, she was getting knowledge and experience from colleagues who have been very creative, smart and gentle to children and to her. Leedu tädi became more patient when children were crying, she wiped their tears and said: "Pole viga minu suur poiss / tüdruk." Those children change in a good way as well as the JOY in her life, as well as the first sun rays after a very cold winter. The sun ruthlessly beat her face, but snow didn't want to melt, and then the rain, marshes, in which children were jumping without any fear to get

cold or wet and dirty - oh, that carefree childhood and carefree laughter...

Finally her eyes got used to the sunshine and without the cold and rain she could go out and look around... and then she saw one of the most beautiful natural phenomena: a rainbow! But hey! What does red mean after all? Love, without a doubt! In all tales, even in the modern ones, there must be a happy ending. Yes, this girl met a guy, but this was not her main aim in volunteering service. She loved the environment, the people with whom she communicated, lived and worked. Her heart feels that the 24 children whom she took care of, played, and laughed with - they will remember the best and positive example what a volunteer should be like.



If the wind never tousles your hair, you never shrivel in the rain, never feel the cold and the sun never blinds you - you will never see the rainbow! I'm so glad that I have chosen the half a year failure, to be a volunteer! How is it so that there is no black color in the rainbow? The same as it was in my project. In a pot of gold, I found many ways to be happy and enjoy everything as children do, even the very small things. Thank you!



5 shots of my 9 months in Estonia!

Laura Mewes
from Germany
Volunteer in Tallinn Kiikhobu Kindergarten
September 2009 - May 2010



Task: Write an article about your EVS in Estonia.

Shot 1: I arrived in Estonia in September – 18 years old, fresh out of school, so naive and full of plans. Looking back I can barely recognize the child that came to Estonia. Working with amazing children and teachers, living in an international flat, meeting so many different people, organizing my own life and solving a lot of different challenges made me develop and grow up very fast. No, that does not describe the turmoil of feelings and the challenges I faced.

Shot 2: Oscar Wilde said: „To regret one’s own experiences is to arrest one’s own development.“ I do not regret coming to Estonia, doing EVS or all the things which went wrong during my stay abroad. I rather see the potential for learning, the force with which conflicts make you look for solutions, question yourself and everything else and change your life – to the better. No, THAT sounds as if I was only crying during my EVS. Actually the opposite is true.

Shot 3: I laughed so much with the children in my project because of their innocent and naive way to see the world. I was very happy whenever I was able to help and support them, to show a little bit more of this fascinating world and to make my little friends smile for no reason. Because I was the first volunteer in my kindergarten, I was very free to work the way I wanted to. No one had an idea what this whole EVS-thing is supposed to be like. Hopefully I have been a motivation for all the people working in Kiikhobu Lastaed to continue with EVS and intercultural learning and exchange. But my life did not only consist of work. So next try.

Shot 4: EVS is a great chance to meet very different people. I shared my flat with very diverse people which was not only easy but amazingly interesting and instructive. I met lots of volunteers from all over the world. I found some local friends who showed „Their Estonia“ to me. Not many people invite foreign people over for Christmas with their family but I had this great chance which I am very grateful for – Christmas would not have been a real Christmas without a family to spend it with. One of the great things about EVS is also the chance to travel a lot as there is a whole volunteers’ network – quite helpful for budget travelling. Now I can say that I have seen quite some capital cities. Just as I saw a lot of those cute, tiny villages and a lot of the really beautiful nature of Estonia.

But actually I’m convinced that you still have no idea what I’m talking about. So there is only one thing left to say.

Shot 5: Do it yourself. Change your life.

How to describe nine months full of changes, perfect moments, total depression, friendships, loneliness and so many challenges?

From winter to spring...

Cold...Cold and darkness! These were the first feelings I had when I arrived to Estonia. It was 21st of January, and the snow was covering everything around me. Nobody was walking down the streets, it was normal: minus twenty degrees and with a deep darkness it isn’t the best invitation to take a walk outside.

Gustavo Rivilla Cuevas
from Spain
Volunteer in Kehra
Social Centre
January - June 2010



In the airport my boss and my future co-worker were waiting for me, really nice people who helped me every day in Estonia. Barely in two hours they managed to help me with my baggage, they took me to the supermarket to buy something to eat. In the beginning, the food that I bought was only according to its appearance, because I didn’t understand anything in the labels (such method to buy food was very wrong, because many times it happened that I had to throw the food away being uneatable). They helped me to open a bank account and buy a phone card. They gave a little pocket money for me as well. In short, in two hours I was ready for my life in Estonia. I just needed one thing: some heating in my body, because I was unable to stand that cold.

The next step was to get to know my new home. How will it be? I had many ideas about my new home, but as I am a sceptical person my ideas were not very good about it. However I was finally surprised when I arrived home. It was an old communist building in Kehra up-town, it didn’t look very pretty, the building didn’t keep any harmony with its environment, but it didn’t matter

because the heating system worked properly, it was the most important thing for me. I didn’t want to wear any jacket all the time inside my home. I didn’t know if the heating system was able to work with extreme temperatures, but it worked, I had a safe and a warm place for the next months.

At home I met my flat mate Christiane and other co-workers, we had a little snack, and we talked about my first sensations, about my first cold sensations; I knew Estonia was going to be cold, but not that cold.

I was afraid about my English. I don’t speak fluent English and I expected many communication problems, but it was completely different: people around me have been very patient and I haven’t had big problems to talk. The first day in Estonia was a day full of sensations, I didn’t make any photos but I didn’t need it because I will remember that day the rest of my life. It was hard but one of the best experiences ever in my life.

And now, four months later when I look through the window or I take a walk outside with 20 degrees, enjoy the sun and remember my first day here and I think: how different everything is right now. But one thing never changes in Estonia - the beauty of its landscapes.



I will never forget my EVS in Tallinn



Mohamed Awes Abdulkadir
from Italy (originally from Somalia)
Volunteer in Tallinn Kiikhobu Kindergarten
January - May 2010

My EVS started on the 4th of January 2010 and it finished on the 31st of May. My name is Mohamed Awes Abdulkadir, I come from Somalia and I lived there for twelve years but now I have been living in Italy for the last thirteen years. I am 27 years old. In Italy I finished the Technical School for Building,

muslim or black. The only important thing is to be yourself, and show what you really want and what you want to give to the host country, because it is important to give something from your culture during EVS, and then get something from the new country. I received a lot from EVS.

I think the people I knew during this experience accepted me for who I am. It didn't matter that I am muslim and black. Sometimes these origins are not easily accepted, but here in Estonia, I found more space to explain my diversity and I consider this as a really positive aspect. When I was living in Italy I had to endure some prejudice. What I found interesting in my stay in Estonia is the contrast we can notice in the country. Estonia was the country who answered me first when I applied for an EVS project. I think because it is a really young country, it wants to be open to the outside, because for a long time it was closed. Sometimes it can be difficult to know what the people think or feel, but I know that they want to be more open to new cultures, and I think that's one of the reasons they chose me. On the other hand, I felt that people are quite scared by new things and new people. There are few black people in Estonia and sometimes I felt that Estonian people are not completely welcoming towards difference. The Estonian society is contrasted: in a way it is really modern but in the other way it is still traditional.

During my EVS, I took part in a youth exchange in Romania. It was really interesting because the topic of this exchange was discrimination and the problems that minorities have to face because of prejudice and intolerance. It was also nice because I represented Estonia, so during this project I had three origins! I met new people from different European countries and it was really nice

to discuss and share the different points of view of these young people about some society questions such as racism or sexism. It was a good experience, I discovered new cultures and it broadened my mind in a way. Now I understand more why immigrants have so many problems in the host countries. I feel that I am more open. I also understood that racism and the problems that immigrants have to face are clearer, I know more about the roots of this hatred and why people can be mean to persons from Africa or Asia. And it was important for me because I come from Somalia, and I had to escape the country and go to Europe. So now I want to change things about how the immigrants are treated and explain to European people how difficult the life of immigrants can be. I want to show that immigrants are not strange and dangerous people, they are just people who have the same wishes and dreams than the others and want to help and be integrated in the European society. Integration is something really important, but people from both sides have to be open in order to help immigrants to be accepted in the society of the foreign country. During EVS it is possible to come for a project without being European, but after in the host country it can be difficult to really be accepted, because for example

Estonia has only a few applications for immigrants. So for me it was a bit difficult to obtain my Estonian ID card. In Europe, there is a union of the countries, so it's easy to travel and stay because of the continental partnership, but outside Europe it's more difficult and the borders are less open. I realized this during this 5 months stay. I am satisfied with all I experienced here. I will take with me every kind of experience rather positive and negative. I would like to thank my sending organization in Italy (CSV Biella), my coordinating organization in Estonia (Continuous Action) and my host organization (Kiikhobu Kindergarten). I would like to thank every people who helped me during my project, especially the teachers with whom I worked for 5 months. I will never forget you, you have a big place in my heart; this EVS was an important moment which happened in my life. I want to say that here I found a lot of respect from all the organizations, people, friends. People took care of me and were nice with me, and on the other hand I gave a lot to the people, because I only found friendship and love here. Everyone was happy to know me, and it was very important for me.

I really needed to get out from Italy for some time and be confronted to another part of Europe. I found a very nice project from the Youth in Action program in Tallinn, Estonia. I am working in Kiikhobu kindergarten. I help the teachers to organize some activities and I assist them when they are playing with the children. I also play games outside e.g. football. I organized some drawing activities about different cultures. For me, to work with children was really interesting and stimulating because if I think about my childhood, I realize that it was totally different. I have bad memories about it, because I just remember war and the fact that I had to move from one place to another. Here I understand that having a good childhood is more important than everything. My first impression of Tallinn was that the place is really cold! In the beginning I was confused and lost, and I really wanted to go back to Italy. But afterwards, step by step everything became normal especially when I found some friends. I think the most important in EVS is to have a friend who can understand you, and I am very happy about this because I found one and I do not want to lose this friendship.

In my EVS I understood that it is not problematic to be a



Experiences, Exchanges, Smiles, Travels, Ideas: an EVS year in Tallinn

Here we are, the last month of a one year EVS project. An unforgettable time for me, a really big change in my life for sure. I spent almost 12 months now in Tallinn, Estonia, volunteering in the office of Continuous Action, an Estonian NGO who works mainly with the European program Youth in Action. It was a cold, sunny, interesting, learning, funny, joyful, cosmopolitan, travelling time, that I recommend to everyone between 18 and 30!



My name is Olivier Bernard, I come from the Alps region in France, and before going to Tallinn, I was living in Lyon, the second largest French city. I decided to go to EVS for a long time but I crossed the step last September, when I attended a meeting about the program at the Mission locale de Villeurbanne, a youth information center who

Olivier Bernard
from France

Volunteer in Continuous Action
December 2009-November 2010

works also as a sending organization in my region. After meeting the person in charge there, I began to make my research about projects. I contacted more than 120 organizations in 7 countries! I was highly motivated! Finally I got a positive answer from Kärda, in Hiiumaa. But I found the project was too isolated. Finally, one week later I got a positive answer from Continuous Action. I was so happy, the project seemed perfect, located in Tallinn, exactly what I was hoping! I had to change my sending organization and be accepted by one in Marseille, in the south of France, called Eurocircle, because Continuous Action has a partnership with them. I spent the best birthday of my life last year thanks to Estonia! It was a great gift this opportunity to go to EVS in this little country! I was supposed to arrive in Estonia in the middle of November, but finally I had to postpone to be more prepared, and I arrived on the 1st of December 2009.

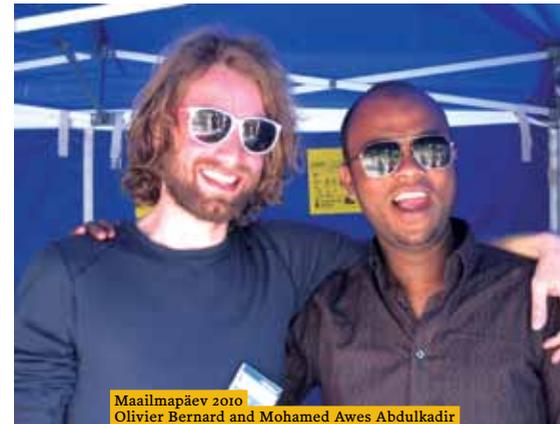
Everyone in Continuous Action was very welcoming and I had a private visit of Tallinn on my first day, by Leenu an Estonian volunteer in Continuous Action. It was really nice to explore Tallinn with a local person, and I started to understand the country, the people and its customs. My work in Continuous Action was quite various. My first task was to send EVS open calls to the youngsters in our EVS mailing-list. I also took care of the TECA folders (project with boxes about partner countries, with information collected about these countries). Later on, I was taking in charge of the preparation for the youth exchanges, which means meet the groups, be a contact person for the host organization, tell the group leaders the different tasks they will have to do, etc. I was myself a group leader for a youth exchange in Romania. It was a so

nice experience! I couldn't have imagined before coming to Estonia, that thanks to my stay here I would have the chance to travel to a town close to Transylvania!! This exchange was about discrimination. We had a lot of talks about different types of discrimination during one week. I met many nice young people from 5 different countries (Estonia, Italy, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania). I am very thankful to Continuous Action for having giving me this chance. Besides these tasks, I also went to some Estonian cities in order to promote Continuous Action and our projects in student fairs or other events. I have been to Pärnu, Viljandi, Narva, Kehtna for this purpose, but also stayed in Tallinn during the Maailmapäev (World Day), which was a great event, gathering organizations working for international activities or promoting foreign cultures. It was in May, during a bright sunny and hot day, a very good souvenir! Some other tasks included organizing meetings in Continuous Action office about some Youth in Action programs for Estonian youngsters. I introduced to them youth exchanges and EVS. I also made the Google Map about Continuous Action projects, write articles, made Continuous Action events' reports. I also helped sometimes at the Tallinn Food Bank with whom Continuous Action has a partnership since March, amongst many tasks.

This year in Estonia was full of adventures and new people. I met many foreigners, EVS like me, and Estonians. For

some months, there was a real EVS bubble! A lot of events were organized and we met many times in different areas of Estonia. For example, I spent Jaanipäev in Haapsalu, pulling ropes, jumping above the fire (okay I didn't, but don't tell anybody that I lied!), sleeping in the garden of someone I didn't know, it was a lot of fun! I also really enjoyed my time in Viljandi where some other EVS people were volunteering, hosted by a very nice Estonian family (I blessed the Visnapuus!). Thanks to that, I saw the famous Viljandi Folk Festival, it was bloody great (free concerts and free spirit!). I really liked discovering Estonia. I knew some things about the country before I arrived. In a way, it fascinated me, because it seemed mysterious, with this weird language and these old traditions, the pagan spirit mixed with super new technologies (Internet everywhere, Skype, etc.). I was very curious to explore this part of Europe. I realized the nature of Estonians, the society issues, the recent history and the pride for this country, who sang for its freedom. Unfortunately, I missed the Laulupidu, because it was last year, but definitely I will try to do my best to come back in 2011 for the junior festival, I want to shiver like all the Estonians when the choir will start singing the national songs!

And Tallinn... A very charming city, with this quiet, medieval atmosphere in the Old Town, one thing that I will keep in mind forever. For me it doesn't look like a capital. I was always amazed by the calm in the streets, not so much agitation, no traffic jams. It's very cute and unique, it's very different from big cities in France (especially Paris and Lyon). One thing I really liked was to walk in the narrow streets of Vanalinn, stand in the platforms, look at the city, with the old battlements, towers, everything look like a Middle Ages village! A kind of melancholic peace took me everytime I was standing there, especially at night. One of my favourite part of Tallinn is definitely Kadriorg. This park is really gorgeous. I spent time there for the first time during winter time (very snowy and long this year, a real Nordic experience!). I was slipping on the pond (and fell, not used of the Estonian winter games!). At every season, the park is beautiful, changing. I really liked to visit KUMU, and discover Estonian art, see the presidential house (the Pink House!) and also joining the beaches (Russalka and Pirta a bit further). I experienced a lot of things here. The main thing is sauna



Maailmapäev 2010
Olivier Bernard and Mohamed Awes Abdulkadir

Jump-Start!



Maailmapäev 2010



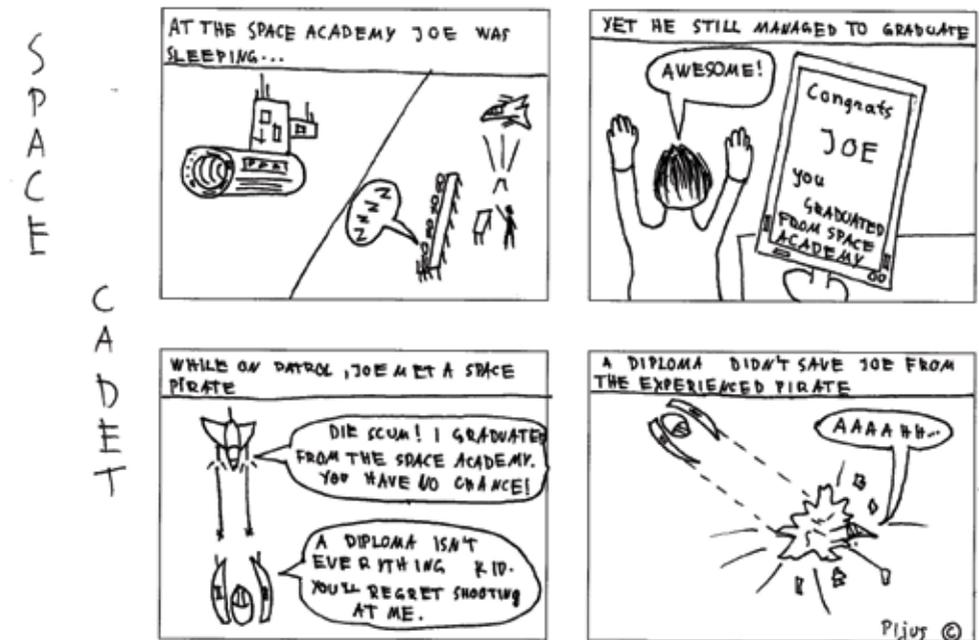
Volunteers:
Andrius Tarasovas from Lithuania
Pijus Antanavicius from Lithuania
Arturo Palomera from Spain
Emil Andersson from Sweden
Leo Jago from UK
Mareks Asmanis from Latvia
Antonino Fedele from Italy
 Volunteers in Kehtna Economy
 and Technology School
 August - September 2010

for sure! I never tried before (yes I swear!), and I love it! I tried different types: from the electric one to the smoked one (the best Estonian say, I quite agree with them). When I tried this one, it was during New Year's Eve, spent in the middle of the forest (-17 and I forgot my gloves and my hat!!). At night, we went to this smoked sauna. I was totally black! (because of the carbon). And after heating ourselves, we had to jump in a hole dug in frozen water!! The funniest thing is when you have to go back to the sauna, running, with steam around you!! One of the best experiences I had here.

Of course, during one year, nothing is perfect all the time. I was homesick sometimes, especially during the dark days of winter, where you barely see the sun. But I think it's a part of the EVS to feel up and down. I was talking about that to Kristi, one of the two trainers of my mid-term evaluation, spent in Värskla (in Setomaa during one special day for this people, trying to dance traditional dances with old ladies, but not very successful!). One important thing is not to give up, and realize that it's normal to feel a bit bluesy sometimes, and the sunny days are coming anyway! By the way, I really enjoyed summer. It's true that Estonia is changing completely at that moment. No night, brightness everywhere, a kind of permanent good feeling, with the people more open, happy to stay with friends outside, having parties and barbecues. I even swam two times in the Baltic Sea, one time taking a midnight bath!

An important year for sure. I will never forget Estonia and want to keep in touch with all the nice people I met during my stay. I have also good Estonian friends, and I

really want to meet them all again (some say that they will visit me in France!). Thanks to EVS, I also could travel to neighbour countries and discover the other Baltic States and a bit of Scandinavia. I had a good time here, and I don't realize that I will leave soon and start a new life. I have now a lot of energy and projects and the will to achieve many things. I think I really needed this experience to understand what I really want in my life, what is good or bad for me. I thought a lot during my time here and in a way, Estonia give me strength and hope for the future. One French EVS friend said one time that he will see if he succeeded in his EVS, if he will cry when leaving the country. I think, for sure I will pour tears. But for the moment, let's enjoy the few times left before saying goodbye to everyone, and anyway we will meet again, this world is so small!



During one month, 7 young men aged from 17 to 25 years, were working as EVS volunteers in the small town of Kehtna. This short-term project, called "Jump Start", was coordinated by Continuous Action. It gave chance to these unemployed men to be active in the frame of European program. 6 of them told their stories: Emil from Sweden, Leo from England, Mareks from Latvia, Andrius and Pijus from Lithuania, and Arturo from Spain. Let's discover them!

The project was about being active, and for the volun-

teers to "increase their understanding around the subject of employment and to help them in their way to labour market and active participation in general". The activities proposed were construction and mechanic work (painting, taking off old paint, repairing, putting new floors mostly). The volunteers had two Estonian supervisors: Kaarel and Imre. For many of them, this job experience was new. They all have different background, and they are looking for new things and a job in their lives.

The volunteers all liked the experience and find this EVS



Arturo Palomera



Mareks Asmanis and Antonino Fedele

project a good opportunity. For example, Arturo told me that he got more mature thanks to it. Pijus confided me: "The job itself was not so interesting, but the project was very good. Now I know what I want to do. When I will go home, I want to be a volunteer in my sending organization!". Mareks who is just 18 has the will to be more active and take up new projects. One thing that he really enjoyed was to meet new people and be in contact with a new environment. Emil really likes to be a volunteer and he wants to find new projects while back in Sweden. The EVS experience was a new challenge for them. Leo is the only one who has been EVS volunteer before. He was participating in a short-term project in Innsbruck, Austria. All the Jump-Start volunteers got informed about EVS in different ways. For Andrius and Arturo, they contacted their sending organization thanks to relatives. Mareks was in contact before with his sending organization. For Emil and Pijus, they got to know about it through a course and a conference. Some of them had less preparation - they got to know about being accepted to the project just a little bit before actually travelling to Estonia - some more.

Of course during one month, there were good and bad times. Sometimes, living together was not so easy. But most of the time they had fun. Besides work, they had many nice activities: riding a bike to explore the countryside, playing volleyball in a swamp (!!), football, rappelling, camping in the forest, watching movies and also going to Tallinn to enjoy its nightlife. They were all happy to make new friends and they are very thankful to Dorus and Kaisa who helped them during their stay. About the location, one thing remains: it was calm! Kehtna is a really small town, "without entertainment", as Leo says. They felt bored many times because of that. But on the other hand, they also liked it, because they needed this kind of atmosphere, really different from their usual environment. Emil told me: "I will miss this place."

In addition to the project, the volunteers also had a chance to get to know a bit about Estonia. They had



Leo Jago, Pijus Antanavicius, Andrius Tarasovas and Arturo Palomera

language and culture lessons, given by Kaisa. They were very proud and happy to say "ma olen vabatahtlik!". They managed to practice Estonian with local people, although they didn't get involved so much in the Estonian society during this short time. At the end, they were all thrilled by their time in Estonia. They said that they will recommend the program to their friends and talk about it around them. They know more about themselves but also about the others. For example, Mareks told me: "Now I know more things about England, Spain, Lithuania or Sweden. I think it's really good to have some knowledge about other countries and how it is, because if I want to work in these countries later, I will be aware about them, and it will be easier to live in there." Also, most of them were not native English speakers, so they agree that it was good to practice the language, even if it was sometimes difficult, especially for Andrius and Arturo.

The volunteers are really thankful to Continuous Action and the hosting in Kehtna. They will never forget this experience. They learned many new things and they agree that it will be a new (jump) start for them, for sure!

Interview and article by Olivier Bernard,
comics by Pijus Antanavicius and
pictures on the last page by Leo Jago.



