

Publisher

Continuous Action MTÜ
www.continuousaction.ee

Editor

Ana Trocin

Layout

Sirius Communications

Photos

Private Collections,
www.sxc.hu



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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 organizations 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 organization. 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 organization. In addition, there can be a coordinating organization which supports and helps the realization of the project in the hosting organization 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 organization 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, non-profit organization founded in May 2005 with the aim to provide lifelong learning and equal opportunities both in Estonia and at the international level for different target groups despite the age, social and/ or educational background, gender and/ or sexual orientation of the people.

Continuous Action in its everyday activity is aimed at:

- Spreading information about the actions of our organization in order to achieve the objectives;
- Development, promotion and coordination of voluntary service both in Estonia and at international level;
- Organization of seminars, study visits, trainings and events;
- Providing information and counselling services;
- Development, co-ordination and implementation of projects in social and education field;
- Developing lifelong learning opportunities for our targets.

European Voluntary Service sending, hosting and coordinating projects represent the main part of Continuous Action work. Along with it, the organization is also involved in working with other programmes such as Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig; the implementation of Amicus preparatory action project 'Sidur' which contributed to develop local voluntary actions and other local initiatives.

The everyday work in Continuous Action is run by a small team which consists of friendly and multicultural active people, working regularly in the office with projects involving cooperation with our partner organization in Estonia and abroad. We engage also many local and international volunteers as well as trainers in order to initiate and carry out different activities and projects and and whom we consider part of our team.

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

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

Word before the word itself



Ana Trocin
Project Coordinator at Continuous Action

A new series of European Voluntary Service projects is closed since the last published edition of our ContAct magazine. Other seven young people from France, Austria, Germany and Spain spent nine months in Estonia for their European Voluntary Service. The EVS projects "Sebra" and "Sebra II" represented the opportunity for Vera, Oscar, Pierre, Anne, Florence, Pauline and Maja to be hosted in Estonian kindergartens, youth and social centres located in Tallinn, Kehra and Saku.

Once again the process of an EVS project was entirely experienced by the volunteers with all the elements included: help of sending, coordinating and hosting organizations as; preparation during the pre-departure, on-arrival and mid-term trainings; plenty of intercultural learning opportunities in Estonia; working experiences in a foreign environment; emotions to deal with on an everyday basis; lot of friends; unforgettable memories... and the list can continue, everyone having something to add from personal point of view.

The truth is that this edition comes to describe the new experiences of foreign volunteers in Estonia, to reflect about Estonian culture through the eyes of a person from a different culture and to describe how EVS changed their lives.

"EVS – the way to myself" so simply and beautifully summarized by Florence, is the dimension of European Voluntary Service identified by all the volunteers of year 2010-2011. Most of them found out who they are and understood what they want to do next for their future. The year off of usual activities and occupations, but doing also productive work, is appreciated by our volunteers as the best way to learn about oneself.

The learning experiences the volunteers had, refer also to the own culture, about which they understood more only being in a new cultural environment, interacting with people belonging to another society. Besides this, they improved the communication skills, also foreign language knowledge, by using it in practice. Some of the volunteers learned even some Estonian language and this made them feel happier, finding it interesting.

The articles written by volunteers themselves and which

you can find on next pages will tell you more about what the EVS volunteers did in Estonia and how they lived; you will learn about their challenges and how did they cope with them; you will understand why is it worth to do EVS.

This ContAct magazine edition brings something new – supervisors' opinions! Continuous Action decided to ask and identify what and how do supervisors of the volunteers feel about their new activity. In this order we discussed with them, asked some 10-15 questions and found out about:

- Reasons to host EVS volunteers;
- Novelty in the organization brought by a volunteer;
- Challenges to cope with and ways to find solutions;
- Appreciation of the support system, etc.

These and other interesting ideas came out from the supervisors' stories. Moreover that Continuous Action is coordinating EVS projects for different types of organizations – kindergartens, youth centres – each of them having a diverse way of functioning and different needs. The details provided by interviewed supervisor are of value for future potential hosting organization helping to identify moments of great importance while working with a volunteer from another country. Besides, it also helps to understand why it is good to host a volunteer. We won't describe any longer why you are invited to read this ContAct magazine number. We will just encourage you to do it! For any comments you will have, any questions raised after the lecture and unanswered in the articles, you are always welcomed to contact us! Enjoy!

My nine months Estonian bubble



Òscar Pujol Pladevall
from Catalunya
Volunteer in Tallinn Männikäbi Kindergarten
EVS Project "Sebra"
September 2010 – May 2011

My name is Òscar Pujol Pladevall. I'm 25 years old and I came from Taradell in Catalonia to Tallinn in Estonia. I was a volunteer in Tallinn Männikäbi Kindergarten from September 2010 till May 2011. My EVS project included such tasks as: helping teachers in the kindergarten; taking care of children; organizing activities, games etc; bringing and teaching something new about my country, etc. Actually, it was everything I really wanted! :)

In June 2010 I graduated the university where I studied to become a teacher for kindergarten and pre-school institutions. Since long time ago I wanted to live in another country and do something different from the usual life I had. As a result of my search I found out about EVS as a possibility to achieve my aim and I started to send e-mails to many exotic countries. Finally I found the project in Tallinn where they accepted me and I didn't think twice. I made the decision and agreed to become the EVS volunteer for the project "Sebra" also because the project field was related to my studies. This opportunity allowed me to gain professional experience, to improve my English, to travel without stopping, to meet new people, etc. All in all it was the way to grow up on different levels.

"This opportunity allowed me to gain professional experience, to improve my English, to travel without stopping, to meet new people, etc"

Now that my project is almost over, I can say that this experience was one of the best ones during my life: I chose a beautiful city; had a good project for one who likes to work with children; have been lucky to have had also very friendly flatmates. We didn't have any prob-

lems, which is very important when you live abroad with people you didn't know before! Jajajajajajajaja! On the other hand, I think that it is still impossible to fully understand what I learned during my EVS project. For that I still will have to wait until I am back to



myself and think about my life... But at the same time I know that the things I did here for the first time will be forever unforgettable. Here I experienced new raises and descents of emotions, got acquainted with people important for me. Definitely... my Estonian bubble during 9 months!

"...it involved a lot of travelling, meeting new people every day, participating in the projects of other volunteers, confronting with the winter, having fun with locals and foreigners"

Catalunya and think it over again... During this time my life was very intensive and very different than my life in Catalunya: it involved a lot of travelling, meeting new people every day, participating in the projects of other volunteers, confronting with the winter, having fun with locals and foreigners, and so on and so forth. Basically I lacked the time alone when I could reflect about

As conclusion of my "speech", I must say that if you really like to live new experiences, to meet another culture, different traditions, people, styles of life, etc, you don't have to doubt a moment about the EVS possibility if you meet it on your way. Launch it in your life and take advantage of the whole moment!

Supervisor says

Kerli Aasa
Teacher
Tallinn Männikäbi Kindergarten
Since 2005

Supervisor of Oscar
"Sebra" EVS project

Tallinn Männikäbi Kindergarten
Opened 44 years ago
230 children in
12 groups of children,
3 nurseries and
NEW! 6 inclusive groups*

**In Inclusive groups are mixed children with and without special needs – mental and physical disabilities*

EVS history

In the past two years, we have already hosted two volunteers in our kindergarten class: Anna from Sweden and Oscar from Spain. At the moment we are planning to take the third volunteer starting with September 2011.

Main reasons to host EVS volunteers

There are two reasons:

- One of them is that there is a need for an extra pair of hands, as we do need more personnel. Only employed people are not enough because two people are working

in one group at the same time. And for example in my group there are fewer children, because I have an inclusive group. But in other groups are up to 24 children and if they are all present than it is quite difficult.

- As second reason is the fact that it is exciting to have different people and different cultures, to see different approaches. And of course because inclusive groups then we have it is natural for us to show to children that there are different people, appearances, ways to speak, to communicate.

Impact of the EVS on working environment and the volunteer's role

To talk again about the extra pair of hands than this would be as a first noticeable change, because I have an extra person I can rely on and from whom I can ask help and new ideas. One can be as creative as the one is, but when there are other people and when they tell how they see things and they reflect your actions, it influences a lot. Another aspect is the cultural moment. Both volunteers brought their own traditions and taught children about Swedish and Spanish traditions.

Now we have a EVS volunteer from Spain and there is a bigger difference: it refers both to gender and to the person. He has a beard and pierces – things that are not seen so often in the kindergarten. This moment was really challenging. We could explain to children that all people are different. And grown up people are different as well – situation we have to live with. If for example one is born with blue eyes and blonde hair, while another one with dark eyes, you can't change it. It took lot of lobby work at the beginning to explain why we have this person in our group because they have never seen a person like this.

Children and EVS volunteer from abroad, Oscar

Children reacted differently to the presence of Oscar in the kindergarten. For example, some children who are more outgoing, would go to Oscar and say 'Hi' even though he didn't understand English or Estonian. But there were children who were just sitting in a corner and telling a friend "I don't like that man!" But after the nine months of project he became a natural part of our group and if he was missing one day everyone was asking "Where is he?", "What is he doing?"

"After the nine months of project he became a natural part of our group"

Oscar, as well as Anna taught new expressions to chil-

dren, polite words from their own language.

Communication between Oscar and children is done through the mean of body language mostly! The activities Oscar did were mostly handicraft, where language is not needed. Of course he learned basic kindergarten things like: "Don't run!", "Sit!", "Be nice!", "Be quiet!"

Preparing parents and children for the new EVS volunteer

After we hosted the first volunteer, we told to parents that we are planning to take a second volunteer and he is from Spain. Many parents of children from other groups expressed their desire to have the volunteer in those groups also.

On the other hand, once Oscar arrived we had events in order to introduce him with the group. But as we have inclusive groups and there is diversity already, parents are used to the fact that things are happening in our kindergarten and in our group. So, it was not such a big surprise for them and I don't remember having had to give many explanations why the volunteer is there.

"Many parents of children from other groups expressed their desire to have the volunteer in those groups also"

EVS volunteer and his impact on the community. Integration of the volunteer in the life of hosting organization

The interaction with other teachers took place already in the beginning when Oscar spent one week in each group to decide alone in which groups he wants to continue the EVS work. This fact involved also work with other teachers, which contributed to building a relationship between the volunteer and the other members of the staff. If they met in the kindergarten, they had to communicate. Even though not many teachers speak English they were still trying to communicate somehow. At the beginning Oscar himself didn't speak English either so it was quite complicated. But we celebrated his birthday for example with the entire kindergarten which means many people and we were studying a little about Catalan – one of the biggest things I personally learned about his culture, as I didn't know that there is a difference between Spanish and Catalan culture, language. It is the same for him as it is for us if, for example, we go abroad and someone is calling us Russians. This was definitely a learning moment. For Oscar's birthday party we also learned about the colours of the flag and everybody was trying to dress up in yellow and red to surprise him.

This occasion was a good start for the EVS project, as it happened already in December, Oscar being there since September.

Overcoming the language barrier

Oscar studied the language [English – n.r.]! He learned it quite fast. And the decision was that he would study English rather than Estonian. Even though later he was saying that he would have liked to speak Estonian as well.

Challenges/obstacles met in EVS and applied solutions

Emotional aspects definitely are challenging. We have to deal with the volunteer's emotions and those of other people. It has a direct influence on the group activity. Without a common language it is difficult to understand based on feelings only. For example, this year volunteer studied to be a teacher and I think it was difficult for him to be in an assistant role when actually he is ready to be a teacher. It is not easy to organize, to put together some actions only as assistant.

In this case we decided that Oscar would have every week one day to organize by himself the activities on a certain subject. For that day he was coming with an idea and we organized it together, being completely planned by him and I was assisting only. We switched roles. Also, he had a part to perform in the morning circle, even though it became a little bit of a routine after nine months, because he always had to ask same questions about the day, the month, the weather. But at least he knew these things in Estonian and he even could understand the answers, being able to react to the children's answers.

"We switched roles"

We also discussed about how he feels about his activity and Oscar told us which moments are less comfortable for him. Afterwards we made the necessary changes.

It is important for the volunteer to have somebody who knows the situation and is supportive enough, giving the necessary feedback on-time to make the volunteer feel safe.

EVS Support system – supervision meetings role

I enjoyed the monthly meetings in the office. From my point of view hosting a volunteer is different for different teachers. For example as I'm working in two kindergartens I face always a lack of time. The meetings were the proper moment when I could take time and reflect on the volunteer activity in our kindergarten, to hear others experiences and to find out how other supervisors are solving certain situations, ways to do some things. We could share experience and from this point of view they were needed.

In the case of extra questions I could always ask someone from Continuous Action. But it has to do a lot with the personality also and the ability of the supervisor to

find a solution in the hosting place. In any case if I had the need I always could ask someone: write, call and found out the answer.

Learning moments for supervisor and volunteer

The level of my tolerance has increased. Working in an inclusive group the teacher needs to be very tolerant in order to understand the special needs. This experience improved my explaining skills, my English language knowledge, while trying to help the volunteer. It took a lot of thinking and attention to make myself understood. Because for example we had a situation when we apparently understood each other at words level but the meaning was completely different for us.

"We decided to ask each other "Did you understand?" in order to reduce any misunderstanding between us"

We were discussing and planning the activity for one day and with only changing the place of one word in the sentence we resulted in understanding differently the same thing and we had different expectations. Later on we decided to ask each other "Did you understand?" in order to reduce any misunderstanding between us.

The volunteer has the opportunity of personal development. I think that Oscar learned a lot about himself and how to analyze himself, to reflect the feelings, to understand that he is the one who is living his life and not somebody else is coming and doing it. If one is not talking and saying what one feels, thinks, others don't understand. This is not about the language, it has to do with the personality. After a while if there was some misunderstanding Oscar was telling me always, explaining. This is one of the best qualities of a person: to understand when others can help and when they cannot, to know when to share as long as it is important for the own wellbeing.

Tips and secrets

Talking, talking, talking! Nobody is a mind reader. You have to ask and to talk yourself. You have to be open minded. It is important that one is tolerant. It is not enough if we only say that it is ok that people are different. One has to prove it also, to accept it, that people are different in actual situations, in real life.

"Talking, talking, talking! Nobody is a mind reader."

EVS or not EVS?

Of course I recommend hosting EVS volunteers and I have done it already many times. It is the same as I said at first question: it is cultural experience; it is an extra pair of hands; there are new ideas. You have so much innovation in the kindergarten because the person who comes to this kind of institution is like a learning material for children. It breaks the routine. But you have to be prepared and willing yourself to do it.



“It’s simply beautiful!”

Anne Larue
From Lille, France
Volunteer in Tihase Kindergarten
EVS Project “Sebra”
September 2010 – May 2011

I arrived in Estonia to be an EVS volunteer in Tihase Kindergarten. Why I chose Estonia? It’s exactly the question that my friends were asking me before I left France. They kept telling me that it is cold and dark. Actually the reason is that I was interested in knowing more about Russian history and to learn about the impact of Russian times on Estonian people. On the other hand I wanted to go as far away as possible from France in order to get the feeling of bigger cultural differences which I thought to be achievable only being at great distance from my own culture.



Before I left for my EVS destination country, I read that Estonian people are cold. Besides that during my pre-departure training I was told that I should be careful as I am a person full of energy, temperament which might shock the locals. I realized, once arrived in Estonia and after spending some weeks, that the touristic guide or the short travel period of one or two weeks to some new places, never give the real picture. There are, as in own country, different people. Now I think as being impossible for me anymore to give a general adjective for something. Therefore I decided that I will never travel in the same way I was doing it before my EVS project.

In France, I just finished my studies to become music teacher in primary school. It was a good occasion for me to make my first steps on a way with responsibilities. I wanted to know also how the educational system in a foreign country functions.

In Estonia I came with a lot of ideas: I wanted to teach children music; to be an important person in the Kindergarten and to play an essential role. In reality, when I first came, I didn’t feel myself so necessary, everything working very well without me also. I didn’t have so many

responsibilities and I didn’t know what I should do. After the first month – the period when everything was new and I felt like discovering the culture, the country, and the working environment – I started to feel bored. Moreover that in France the Kindergarten is called school already and it is very different from the way it is in Estonia. I even could say that it is more active with different objectives or different ways to tackle those objectives. Maybe this is the reason why I didn’t feel important and my ideas of teaching music as well. As a consequence in December, I was really sad, having had lost the initial motivation and energy. The weather can be one of the reasons as in December the sky is very grey ;-). Anyway, I didn’t give up completely and I think I found my motivation outside of the Kindergarten, with the music classes that I decided to continue during my EVS project. Finally I felt more and more far from my job.

“This kind of hug that you can never forget how warm and sincere it is”

But soon my attitude changed at 180 degrees, just before Christmas, when one of the teachers kept me in her arms with this kind of hug that you can never forget how warm and sincere it is. I would like to tell her “thank you” because that hug had returned to me the will again.



Maybe she doesn’t know what she did for me at that moment but the most important was that I left for my holidays with this moment in my mind.

I went to France for my holidays in a hurry as my grandfather’s health was not so good. Afterwards I returned in my Kindergarten, but it was difficult at certain extent to start over again eating the same soup and potatoes! But soon I realized that I had a better attitude though and different positive emotions which led me to the decision to try again and to take the best out of my project. I liked again my EVS which was a considerably improved approach towards my voluntary service.

Another important event which contributed to understand my EVS project was the meeting we had in February with my supervisor and two teachers from my main groups. That was the moment when I understood that my ideas are important and taken into account as well as my wishes to do something new in my project for the children. Then we decided that the cooperation between me and teachers will change also: I will be encouraged to come with my suggestions and proposals, while they will help me understand how to adapt for the children so that they would enjoy it; also teachers would give me more responsibilities so that I could help them as much as possible. I received the needed feedback only by discussing with the ones who could offer it to me which is essential in an EVS project and this changed the aspect of my project: now I had something to do and I felt myself needed.

Only after that, the nine months project which seemed so long when it started was approaching the end so fast! One question was on my mind: “Why should I leave already when it only begins?!”

“One learns how to teach only while practicing the work with children and spending time close to them”

My EVS project in the Kindergarten provided me the opportunity to learn a lot. Now, when I look back at the

time spent for it, I can say that I improved my knowledge and skills about working with children, which is actually strange to say because my studies were about teaching mainly for children. In reality, one learns how to teach only while practicing the work with children and spending time close to them. The project offered me the possibility to observe them and discover how great their world is. I learned how to be more patient. I learned also the diplomacy of communication. Working with a culturally different people compared to French people is not an easy process because one has to be flexible, to be tactful. Not everything is as you imagine or you want or you are used to be based on own cultural background. The local people may also have difficulties to understand the newly arrived person if the latter one is not flexible enough and open to understand the new environment, new community and to explain own culture.

I’m here already since seven months and I cannot say that I’m not bored by the snow falling again and again (yes, we are at the end of March and the snow started in the middle of October). But, certainly, I love Estonia and a big part of me doesn’t want to leave. Estonian people are strict, simple, and honest. If the salaries were higher, I even would consider staying for longer period after the end of my voluntary service. Unfortunately, there are always positive and negative aspects for every single country...

Now in the end I simply smile to myself. I just checked the Facebook where for a picture of me on the frozen Pirita beach added yesterday, one of my friends, who kept telling me before my EVS project that Estonia won’t be so amazing because it is cold and dark most of the time, he commented: “It’s simply beautiful!”

Yes, it is!

My EVS – the way to myself

Florence Valencuc

From Montpellier, France
Volunteer in NGO Koostöökoda, Anija manor
EVS Project “Sebra II”
October 2010 – June 2011

My name is Florence, I am 29 and I come from Montpellier, South of France. In the past, once graduated from university in Technical Translation, I lived and worked in several countries. In my last working position, I experienced a lot of stress and pressure. That is why I decided to finally take a year off, to travel as a backpacker and to reflect about the meaning of life. As I came back from my trip, I realized that I was not ready to look for a new job and that I want to dedicate myself to others. That’s how I came to the idea of doing EVS.



For my EVS project I was living in Kehra, which is a small town located 40 km away from Tallinn. I really like that lovely place!

“I shared my concrete experience, hoping to offer some inspiration or motivation to pupils”

I worked in a local NGO specialized on providing information for youth. Our main activity was to go to high schools and organize informative workshops about career opportunities. Sometimes we were also informing youth about danger of drogues, tobacco, alcohol, etc. I supported my team by talking about opportunities abroad, about European programs (including Erasmus and EVS) or about working possibilities in foreign countries. I shared my concrete experience, hoping to offer some inspiration or motivation to pupils. I was also helping youngsters in the application process if they needed. My team involved me in all smaller or bigger events, always supporting me and giving me a chance to feel integrated and develop myself. Besides this, the EVS project gave me a chance to share my knowledge and passions with local people. Every week, there were taking place several evening workshops in Kehra Youth Centre and Cultural Centre: Monday was for Yoga workshop, Tuesday was Chinese workshop and Wednesday was done French workshop, all organized by me with the support of my colleagues. Local people had the opportunity to discover new interests which allowed also me

to integrate in local community life.

Later, I started to organize many cultural events, mainly to promote French culture and Chinese culture by working closely with French Institute of Tallinn and Confucius Institute of Tallinn University.

On the other hand EVS Action of Youth in Action Programme is meant also to raise awareness among youth about European citizenship. National Agency organizes meetings all over the year for this purpose where there are gathered EU volunteers in order to share their experiences. As citizen of EU I was gladly participating in these meetings and interacted with local youth, telling them about my country.

“I am sure these friendships will last for a life time”

The project was a chance for me to get to know Estonia – a small country with rich culture. This country is very different compared to my home country; the climate itself can summarize this! But I met here very nice and open-minded people, and I am sure these friendships will last for a life time.

The EVS projects are a great chance being open for each European citizen aged from 18 to 30, looking for new experiences. It allows to open oneself to others and to discover our true self. I feel very grateful of what I was offered during these last months of EVS!



Supervisor says

Marge Aasalaid

Career Information Specialist
MTÜ Koostöökoda at Anija Mõis

Supervisor of Florence
“Sebra II” EVS project

MTÜ Koostöökoda

Located in Anija Mõis building
Anija vald

Offers career counselling and
information to different target groups:
children, youth.
Programs for adults
14 employees, local volunteers

Continuous Action: How long do you work with EVS volunteers as supervisor?

Marge Aasalaid: My first hosted volunteer came in 2008 and since three years I’m involved in EVS projects. Florence is the fourth volunteer for whom I am a supervisor and she is hosted in the organization where I am working at present, while the other volunteers were hosted in the organizations where I previously worked. So, we decided to take a new volunteer in the new organization also. We applied and received the accreditation, than we applied with the project which got financed and soon everything was ready for Florence to come.

CA: Marge, please tell us why EVS?

MA: The main reason is that we have so many different programs to run in our organization and I saw that there are so many opportunities to involve a volunteer. Another reason was that our area of activity is very big; we are going to many schools and meet with so many students that we thought we could have more persons sharing information to more young people.

“One thing is what we talk, and other thing is what we show as an example of EVS”

In this case we could go to more schools in the whole Harju county and youth centres. Moreover that the international subject is quite popular and even if we don’t have time to discuss international opportunities, we involve Florence to introduce her project and activities. Afterwards young people remember that they met that girl from France, and if they don’t remember much about EVS, they know that they saw at least a live example of it. Later on they can find more information. One thing is what we talk, and other thing is what we show as an example of EVS. Maybe even three years later they can turn to EVS opportunity.

Of course the volunteer could do her own workshop for

adults as well which we also saw as a reason to host a volunteer.

CA: Did the fact that Florence was hosted in your organization have an impact on the community, organization? Tell us more about it!

MA: We plan together with Florence our information events, discussing with her the way the activity will take place, which kind of information we want to offer to youth. But we consider it very important that she was present during the information events and shared her experience, in order to have a greater impact. We, teachers can also present to pupils different opportunities, but the volunteer presence adds more value to the information we offer by her presence, as I said before.

If children go to school and see the French girl who spoke Chinese, they will remember and tell it at home to their parents, who will probably talk to other persons about it. This means that the information circulates from person to person. This way our centre can promote EVS opportunity in a better way compared to other centres. .

CA: Which are the main challenges you met as a supervisor in this project and how did you cope with them?

MA: Actually for me as a supervisor is a little easier to do this job, because I am very motivated to do it. Besides I have counselling and social work background. Also it is easier to understand Florence, how she feels being in a new cultural environment.

“Sometimes it is necessary to understand different cultures, especially when we are working with emotional people from different countries.”

This is also possible thanks to my previous experience in hosting volunteers. Things I didn’t know in the first year of hosting an EVS project are now known as I learned what I could. Also I am trying to improve myself as a

supervisor. But sometimes it is necessary to understand different cultures, especially when we are working with emotional people from different countries. In this project we tried to do counselling things. For example this year once we did group counselling and also personal one when we reflected more the feelings, we talked about what is going on. If we wouldn't have done that, the motivation of the volunteer would have gone down and would have affected all the team work. We wanted to have a successful EVS project for both, organization and volunteer and not to let all the small misunderstandings affect the entire team work.

More challenges were at the beginning, during the first EVS hosting projects, when we didn't work together all the time with the volunteer as we do with Florence now. We were discussing different situations but usually these discussions were enough challenging because I had to explain why certain things happen the way they happen. Especially young people want to understand why a system functions the way it does. These explanations were taking a lot of time and one needs to plan time for them.

Also a challenge is the different ways I, my co-workers and the volunteer perceive a problem. For the former ones it can be a small problem or no problem at all, while for the latter one it is an important problem which requires solution. The lack of misunderstanding leads to a more difficult situation. But I always tried to discuss it in the initial stage.

If one wants to host a volunteer, one needs to be motivated and to have time to do it. Sometimes the volunteer can call at a busy moment for the supervisor and be very emotional about some situation, while the supervisor has to deal with a lot of other things. But he/she needs to be empathic and friendly, to say that they can discuss it later.

CA: Marge, how would you describe the support you receive from different parts in order to have a good EVS project?

MA: Usually I have worked alone. But if there was a big problem I knew that I could go and get some help. Of course also the coordinating organization [Continuous Action – n.r.] every year learns something and starts new things. For example before, for previous projects it was me and my organization that did the coordination and hosting work at the same time. But for the actual project I decided to ask the help of Continuous Action as coordinating organization and I could notice that it had improved during the last period.

One new activity was the supervisors meetings, when Continuous Action started to prepare and support more the supervisors, as we are the people who don't get much support in general. In the beginning the meetings

were together with the volunteers, but later I asked and very fast we received the feedback that the meetings would take place also separately only with supervisors, which was a good step. Many of us had different problems to face alone and we could discuss them at the meetings. Besides, quite often we needed personal approach, as we are all different hosting organizations and we can't share some types of problems.

CA: Share with us and the readers some of the tips and secrets for a successful EVS hosting project!

MA: To give some of your own time is one of the main secrets. It is hard as we, Estonians work a lot and hosting organization people are very active. Those who are not active don't want to host EVS also. Being busy, it is a challenge to find time for supervising. Sometimes if the schedule is too busy I recommend agreeing with the volunteer upon a specific time once a month or how often is needed for discussion. And this is helping.

But first one should ask oneself if one has time to deal with the EVS project.

"Enough preparation for supervisors as well, is one of the secrets for a good EVS project"

Also it is important to know why the volunteer came. In some organizations there are volunteers coming in order to run away from personal problems in own countries. It means they don't have an EVS motivation. So, it is important to find out the reasons in advance, prior to the project start. Otherwise the hosting organization has to do a lot of work in order to give that motivation to the volunteer.

Enough preparation for supervisors as well, is one of the secrets for a good EVS project. The preparation should concern such topics as dealing with emotional side of the volunteer, cultural differences, etc. Periodical group meetings are necessary and helpful, as they can meet and share problems, find solutions. A meeting once a year would be proper.

CA: Does it worth to host a volunteer? Why?

MA: Of course it does. In the beginning when I hosted first EVS volunteer, nobody could understand what it means. But then young people started to ask from which country is coming, what the new volunteer can do, etc. Also the parents are interested. Even the volunteers mention that everyone in Kehra know everything about them. For example if they go to shop they are observed what they buy, everyone knowing that this is the volunteer. Especially this happens because of the small community. On the other hand, hosting an EVS project had a good influence on me. For example I learned a lot. I learned English, I learned about other cultures. Especially the empathy I developed and how to deal with emotions, also I gained more experience in the field of counselling work.

CA: Do you recommend to other organizations to host EVS volunteers?

MA: I have recommended already to many organizations to host volunteers. Also I recommended to young people to go as EVS abroad.

"Many volunteers found out, learned about themselves, they got the motivation to study something later"

It is a really good idea and I am sad I didn't have this opportunity when I was younger. Later, when this opportunity was enabled, I had a daughter and couldn't go anymore. It is a good and safe experience. If I go alone somewhere I need to take all risks. But in EVS projects there are Sending Organization, Coordinating Organization, Hosting Organization, supervisor, mentor, agreement, many, many things. And if one doesn't help then

someone else will. But it is safe.

Financially it is also cheap and good way to go, especially for people who have no possibility to go otherwise. On the other hand many volunteers found out, learned about themselves, they got the motivation to study something later. Many went back to home country and went to university. Others also wanted to continue doing similar work as during EVS project, which means it was successful for the volunteer and for hosting organization.

Also in our centre we do more workshops and we have more to offer to schools, thanks to hosting an EVS project.

"Mulle meeldib töö noortega"



Maja Winkler-Hermaden
From Schleinbach, Austria
Volunteer in Kehra Social Centre
EVS Project "Sebra II"
October 2010 – June 2011

Minu nimi on Maja. Ma tulen Austriast. Mulle meeldib töö noortega. Ma tahan õppida eesti keelt – these had been my first Estonian sentences.

I left high school last June, when I graduated it. So it arrived a point in my life when I had to make decisions of vital importance for my future. As I didn't want to go to college straight away I thought about exploring the world in first place and collecting enriching experience, so I can broaden my horizon about life and about myself. This was the main reason for my choice to go abroad. From October 2010 till the end of June 2011 I joined the programme Youth in Action for the EVS (European Voluntary Service) project "Sebra II" which took place in Estonia. During my EVS project I lived in a small place called Kehra, next to the capital city Tallinn. The volun-

tary service took place in three organizations: Kehra Youth Centre, Day-care Centre and Alavere Youth Centre where I worked as a volunteer with children, youth and disabled people.

"Besides the activities in Kehra, I could go in other localities around Estonia as well"

The most specific activities for my voluntary service included: cooking lessons organized by me on a regular basis for children and teenagers in the Youth Centre; art workshops that I did in all three organizations. Furthermore I also taught German language to 14-years old girls with whom we played games in German and wrote together German letters to my Austrian friends. I actively



Other moments that I enjoyed as a volunteer in Estonia were spending time in Tallinn while meeting somebody for a coffee or going to a concert, to museum. The library in Kehra was another place I discovered and where it was nice to hang out.

participated in events organized by my hosting organizations when I also took photos in order to upload them later on the homepage and Facebook group of Youth Centre, which I created.

Besides the activities in Kehra, I could go in other localities around Estonia as well. For example we have been together with three other volunteers in the "Juventus" Youth Centre from Põltsamaa where we presented our home countries. It was a very nice opportunity to see a very modern Youth Centre and to get new ideas.

Worth to be mentioned here as an important part of an EVS project, mine included, are the different trainings a (future) volunteer benefits from. It started with the Pre-Departure Training in Austria, than in October 2010 we had On-Arrival Training in Pärnu region in Estonia and in February we had our Mid-Term Training in North of Estonia in the middle of nowhere. All three meetings were meant to and did help me a lot every time. The trainings were the moments when I could talk with other volunteers about challenges in our projects. After every meeting I had new ideas and came back home with new motivation. Especially the skiing trip during the Mid-Term Training was something I will never forget.

Besides my everyday work as a volunteer, there were of course many other important things to do. For instance I interacted a lot with other volunteers. On one hand we visited each other in the localities where our EVS projects were taking place, which was always very exciting because we could see other volunteers' flat, village and workplace. On the other hand we travelled together both around Estonia in such places like Saaremaa, Tartu, National park Lahemaa, etc, and abroad: in Riga and in Helsinki.

"I learned a lot about Estonian traditions and beliefs"

Another free time activity that I would like to mention here was to spend time with an Estonian family in the neighbour village. During these visits I learned a lot about Estonian traditions and beliefs. It was very cosy to be there especially in the cold days of the winter. I always felt very welcomed and like a part of their family.

One important part of my EVS was to study Estonian language during the private language course which I had with a primary school teacher and which I enjoyed a lot because of the teaching method she used. We didn't concentrate so much on the difficult Estonian Grammar. Instead every week we met, we read one short text together and in the following lesson I had to talk about it. I have been always motivated to study and I had a lot of fun also during Estonian language learning process. Besides this it's great if one studies a language and at the same time has the possibility to practice it every day, which was my case.

"Thanks to my European Voluntary Service project I understood what I really want to do in the future"

Before ending my story I would like to recognize that the decision to do EVS in Estonia was a very good one. Although there were also some challenging moments as any situation, most of the time was great time as I developed myself already a lot and improved my independence; I gained insights that are essential for my life. Thanks to my European Voluntary Service project I understood what I really want to do in the future: to work in the area of social work.

There are still two months to go till the end of my project and three weeks that I am willing to spend more in Estonia. For this period I've planned already some more travelling activity and participation in projects where I want to take part. I am looking forward to the end of my stay in Estonia which is in the end of spring and beginning of summer, especially because of the nice weather after the long, dark, cold winter. I have never been so happy to see spring arriving and I noticed also changes in people's mood when this happens.

In the end of July I will return to Austria, but I guess that Estonia will always occupy a big part in my heart. On the other hand due to so long period missing from home I begun to appreciate more Austria as my country.

Maja's experience as an EVS volunteer is described in detail on her own blog which she started to publish once she came to Estonia and which you can read (in German) typing the following address: <http://9monateinestland.blogspot.com/>

Supervisor says



Kehra Social Centre

Opened 4 years ago

13 employees

Target group: youth, people with disabilities, elder people

25 active people visiting the centre

Kehra Youth Centre

Target group: children and youth

Up to 50 people per day visiting the centre

and participating in activities

Kehra Social Centre started to host EVS volunteers three years ago and since then there were four young people – Magdalena, Kristiane, Gustavo, the last one being Maja from Austria. The manager of the organization, Mariann Markna - a young lady who took over the centre shortly after Maja arrived - took over also the supervision of the EVS volunteer in "Sebra II" project. In this article she shares with us the main moments and ideas specific for an EVS project from her point of view.

Reasons to host EVS volunteer:

1. Fresh energy and ideas
2. Cultural learning opportunity
3. New contacts
4. Potential for new partnerships
5. Opportunity to learn new languages
6. Novelty brought by EVS volunteer

What did Maja brought new in the social and youth centre, and in the community?

Since Maja came, the activity of the centres became more popular among target groups, because young people were excited to play and participate in the new activities. Also the local community received her very well. Many elder people are fond of Maja, because they say she is young and came from Austria, which is something new for them.

"I heard only good words about Maja"

Besides she is a native German speaker and as many people of advanced age speak it too because of the old times, when they had to learn it, they enjoy the occasion to practice it with Maja. In general I heard only good words about her.

Novelty in the organization

Among the things that Maja brought new in our both, social and youth centres in Kehra can be listed:

- language lessons;
- ideas for art lesson;
- carnival activity;
- a lot of small everyday activities enjoyable for children and youth.

Moments to overcome

One challenge for me was to find time for discussions

with Maja. Also at one point there was a language barrier. Even though I speak English, sometimes it was still difficult to explain some ideas, concepts. But, at the end of the day, it was a very good opportunity to practise the language. Better time planning was another improved aspect of my everyday work.

"Communication with your volunteer, support provided to him/her, understanding him/her are essential in an EVS project."

The previous manager of the Kehra Social Centre – Marge Aasalaid- is helping me a lot to overcome the difficulties. For example she helped me to understand how to manage better some moments of the EVS project about what I didn't know anything, this being first time for me to supervise an EVS volunteer and to have to deal with EVS in general. She encouraged me to always ask her if I have questions. Big thanks to her!!!

Main secrets of an EVS project are...

... to have time and motivation for dealing with hosting EVS project activities. Communication with your volunteer, support provided to him/her, understanding he/she is important for an EVS project.

In the end

I would like to mention that we will definitely host more EVS volunteers because they bring here so much. I don't know how exactly to describe it, but I know that youth likes this idea very much.

And of course I recommend hosting EVS volunteers. Both, organization and volunteer will gain a lot from this kind of project: new experiences, new people, and friends for a lifetime, new ideas.

My EVS story in Saku

My name is Pauline Rolland. I am from France and I am 22 years old.

Pauline Rolland
From Roanne, France
Volunteer in Saku Youth Centre
EVS project "Sebra"
August 2010 – June 2011



After the graduation in 2008 I decided to go au-pair in Scotland for more than a year, since September 2008 until December 2009. Once I returned to France, I did not know what to do next. At the same time a friend told me about the EVS program, and I thought: "Why not? It is a great opportunity for young people to go in different country and do some voluntary work."

It is unknown for me the reason why I chose Estonia! One explanation might be that I love the winter. Also Estonia is a country less known in France, we having little knowledge about life, community, and reality in this part of the world. It is very exciting to go to a country which one doesn't really know about!

"I believe it was a great opportunity to live with her, because she taught me many things about Estonia"

In Estonia I arrived on August 17, 2010. My future supervisor and the ex-EVS volunteer in the same hosting organization – Saku Municipality – were waiting for me at

the arrival doors in the airport. During the first few days, I visited Saku, different places, like the kindergarten, the youth centre and school. Later I met my roommate – one Estonian girl – fact which made me feel a little worried as I did not know anything about the person with whom I will live. At the end of the day I believe it was a great opportunity to live with her, because she taught me many things about Estonia. We had a real exchange and sharing moment of our two different cultures.

Living in Saku was wonderful, first of all because it is very close to Tallinn. There are available many buses or the train at any time one wants to move towards the capital city. On the other hand Saku is a quiet town and as I love to live in the village, Saku was perfect for me.

A part of my EVS project included activities in the kindergarten in Saku and this kind of work was very interesting because I could learn about a different type of organization and about the way of working in such institution. Moreover that it was for the first time in my life that I



worked with so young children of only 2-3 years old. During the voluntary service period I could learn and use also Estonian language which is very difficult one, but children didn't care about my wrong pronunciation and grammatical mistakes: they were just happy to have a new friend.

"I met also wonderful people in my French class, who enjoyed learning French"

Another activity I had the possibility to organize was to teach French lessons. It is not easy to do something completely new you have never done before, like it was for me to teach French. So, it was a challenge for me. But it was absolutely interesting as I had the possibility to learn a lot about myself. I met also wonderful people in my French class, who enjoyed learning French, fact which in my opinion is very important for a teacher.

The other part of my activities involved helping the staff of Saku Youth Centre in working with teenagers. But I think this type of job is not for me as I prefer working with small children.

Being part of a European Voluntary Service project is the right opportunity to learn about oneself, to spend a longer time abroad and to become independent. One of the most positive aspects of my EVS projects was that I met many people from different countries and with different cultural backgrounds.

Finally, even though there are a lot more things to tell about my EVS which I forgot now, I would like to mention that Estonia is a very beautiful country with its culture, its traditions, its history, and language. It is true that the



winter is very long and cold, but when spring arrives, it's just fabulous!

These 10 months here have been very beneficial for me; I know now what I want to do later and what I like. I will return to France a little sad, but one day I will come back to Estonia :)



Supervisor says

Saku Youth Centre hosts EVS volunteers already several years having acquired a great experience in this field. On the other hand hosting a volunteer in a youth centre involves different types of activities compared to the ones in kindergarten: there are different target groups, different challenges and diverse approaches, etc. Külli Kiiika, the youth worker from the same youth centre is the person knowing the subtitles of the work with young people from abroad doing their EVS, having been the supervisor of several volunteers, and of Pauline Rolland.

Our organization started its activity 10 years ago. The field of work is wide but mostly we focus on youth work. The target groups are children and young people at the age between 7 and 19. We don't have registered members but the number of people visiting us everyday varies between 35 and 50 persons a day. And the number of employees is five persons.

"Having volunteers raises the interest of young people to learn more about other countries, cultures"

In 2006 we started hosting EVS projects and since that we have had already 6 EVS volunteers. There are quite many reasons why we decided to host volunteers, but the main ones were: having volunteers raises the interest of young people to learn more about other countries, cultures, adds colour to the life in the youth centre. On the other hand it is a learning opportunity for youth workers about dealing with different problems. Of course the practice of a foreign language, English mainly comes as a bonus.

EVS volunteers in Saku: impact, changes, challenges

Since most of the EVS volunteers were working in the youth centre and/or kindergarten, one could notice larger impact on the young people in the youth centre, compared to the impact on the community. Many children and young people want to visit now countries the volunteers were from and learn languages the young people who came from abroad, speak.

What concerns changes, all the hosted volunteers taught youngsters new things: firstly about their countries and culture; then they brought new games specific for their countries. Also young volunteers carried out plenty activities, such as sports and handicrafts.

Problems are different varying from people to people. There are always problems with creating the connection between youngsters and volunteers, some are more eager to talk and some are not. In this occasion the best solution is so called ice breaking games. One of the

problems is also choosing the right volunteers. My solution is letting the youngsters read the applications and to help me choose.

Process of hosting EVS volunteers

In the beginning of the project, at application stage, selection procedure, etc, I am helped by Continuous Action in the role of coordinating organization. Later on, during the project activity itself, the work is done all by me. It includes finding a place for the volunteer to live, meeting them at airport and finding them a local person to teach language.

Some secrets of a good EVS project:

There are two big, main secrets for a successful EVS project:

- to share the process of selecting the EVS volunteer together with my co-worker and with active youngsters visiting our centre;
- another good idea is to have a Skype interview prior to making a decision about which volunteer to select.

Sometimes it also helps that the supervisor would be also the mentor for the volunteer, but it doesn't necessarily make it easier.

Future plans and recommendations

"It is the best way to get to know yourself"

We are planning to continue hosting more EVS volunteers. First of all because we like this kind of projects. But also we consider that our community and organization are the best places for hosting volunteers. Moreover that Saku is near to the capital city, Tallinn and especially that there is a nice countryside area.

In the end I would like to say that of course I recommend hosting volunteers. It is a good way to get to know yourself. And it is also a good way to widen the horizons of young people.

Experience Valuable for Sure, Extremely Very Shaking, Exchange Very Surprising or simply European Voluntary Service

Pierre Demeulenaere

From Eyvirat, France

Volunteer in Tallinn Kullatera Kindergarten

EVS Project "Sebra"

September 2010 - May 2011

EVS, European Voluntary Service. 9 months of a unique experience, I think I will need a lot of time to see what it brought to me, how it changed me.



The The journey to the destination country of my EVS project began with a car-trip, I chosen to do so and which I will keep forever in my mind as a great memory and challenge: 10 days, 6 countries, 5 capitals, more than 3000 km. This was a first good challenge, but I wasn't aware yet what a bigger one was waiting for me ahead. I arrived the 1st of September 2010, beginning of fall with wonderful colours in a new country - Estonia. To be honest, I wasn't even able to locate it on the map, I heard it was one of the three Baltic States and that's it, this is all I knew about it.

upon prior to starting it. For example my project took place in a kindergarten, but I was used to work with children already before doing my EVS. When I changed the country, I discovered new ways of working, and of course a new language, which will happen to you as well. This last point - the new language - has been the toughest moment for me, because Estonian language is so completely different from my own language, French. But you have to remember one thing: the body language is the same all over the world ;-)

"Volunteer doesn't mean only to "work for free", but it is much more than that"

"Only things you need are to be motivated and open minded"

Actually this is also one of the strengths of this kind of projects: you can be inexperienced, you may not know what is waiting for you, but, after reading only 200 words on a webpage about a project in a kindergarten, you will find yourself much quicker than the speed of your thought is, at the other side of Europe!!!

Only things you need are to be motivated and open minded, these being the only main requirements to become and work as a volunteer. And of course, a big smile!

Your project is not limited to the activity you agreed





I was doing in a Estonian kindergarten, as my hosting organization since September 2010 till end of May 2011, continuing with cooking pancakes with Russians teenagers in a child-at-risk centre in December 2010 and teaching French lessons to a Lithuanian boy, Russian and English speaking in April. And that is EVS! Now that my project is ending, looking back at it I can see that I was not a

As I was used to say, you really build the biggest part of your project by yourself, having so many opportunities at your disposal or that you personally can create alone or together with other volunteers. To show you the variety of activities you really can do during an EVS project I can list here for example starting with the work

simple volunteer. Actually in my opinion, based on my experience to be volunteer doesn't mean only to "work for free", but it is much more than that, it is much more than just to discover a new culture, a new country and new peoples; it is to find yourself. And this is EVS!



Supervisor says

Kullatera Kindergarten is one of the few institutions of this kind in Tallinn with big experience in hosting EVS volunteers already several years. In order to find out more about the reasons to host volunteers, about the new things the volunteers are bringing into the everyday life of the kindergarten and to have a general overview of working with young people from abroad, we talked with Jevgenia Polkovnikova – one of the teachers who is also a supervisor of the volunteer.

Continuous Action: Jevgenia, please tell us shortly about the Kullatera kindergarten.

Jevgenia Polkovnikova: Our kindergarten works in 9 groups for children aged between one and seven years old. For every group there are two teachers and we have also one special teacher for music and second one for sport activities. In total we are 22 teachers and 17 other employees. Today the kindergarten consists of two

buildings: Kullatera kindergarten which was opened in 1950 and Aasalill – opened in 1949. Both houses were united together in 2007 under the name of Kullatera kindergarten.

CA: When was it for the first time that Kullatera had the first EVS hosting project and how many volunteers since then did their EVS in the kindergarten?

JP: It was in 2006 that the administration of the Kin-

dergarten Kullatera decided to host EVS volunteers and since then each year we have a new young person helping our teachers. We had a very positive first hosting experience for our organization which motivated and gave us courage to continue on the same way. As a result we hosted already 5 volunteers coming from different European countries such as France, Finland, Spain, Germany and Lithuania.

CA: Jevgenia, why did the kindergarten decide to take volunteers from abroad through European Voluntary Service projects?

JP: Actually the main reason was and still is that we always wanted to bring something new in our everyday work and we thought that international volunteer will be the right thing to achieve this aim. Then, after the first experience, which ended-up successfully we were sure we didn't make a mistake.

"Now our teachers and children know much more about other European countries and people, traditions, habits, etc"

CA: Could you describe, please, the impact of hosting volunteers on the activities of the organization and in general on the internal life of the kindergarten?

JP: Our cooperation has been very good learning experience for both - for the organization and for volunteers. Now our teachers and children know much more about other European countries and people, traditions, habits, etc. On the other hand children are always very open for new friendships and they are happy to have the volunteers around them.

CA: Could you list some changes that volunteers bring in the everyday work with children?

JP: The main change is felt in the general atmosphere. The everyday routine is not a routine anymore since every volunteer brings a new and positive energy in the kindergarten. They, the volunteers are involved in everyday activities and are also welcomed or encouraged to show and make use of their skills in order to teach kids something new. Some of the young people were more creative, while others less, but nonetheless the new they bring stays and this is the most important for our children.

"Communication and patience is the key to every problem"

CA: EVS projects, besides positive things, are also involving some challenges. Would you describe some of them and the ways you finally cope with them?

JP: EVS projects can be very tricky because every volunteer is different and has different requests and expectations. It's a big challenge to live up everyone's expectations but so far

we managed to pass every obstacle we came across and I can say that communication and patience are the key to every problem.

CA: Do you have help in your EVS project? Who is helping and how?

JP: Since we work as an organization, every teacher and every employee in the kindergarten help in their own way to make life and work easier for the volunteer.

CA: Would you share some of the tips/secrets of a successful EVS project which you discovered based on own experience?

JP: In my opinion, motivation and expectations are the keys for a successful EVS project. If there is enough motivation and initiative from volunteer's side and enough understanding from organization, there will be finally a project from which both sides will get satisfaction and happiness.

CA: Would your org/institution take more EVS volunteers? Why?

JP: Our organization always applies for at least 2 volunteers since we have two houses. The help and innovation brought along with the presence of the volunteers in both kindergarten houses is always welcomed.

CA: Would you recommend to other organizations to host volunteer? Why?

JP: EVS is a great idea and I would highly recommend to any organization that has the space and possibilities to start participating. The reason is simple: so far our impressions are more than positive.



“If you want to sing out, sing out!
And if you want to be free, be free!
Cause there is a million ways to be
And you know that there are...”

Vera Surall
From Paderborn, Germany
Volunteer in Tallinn Kiikhobu Kindergaten
EVS Project “Sebra”
September 2010 – May 2010



Whenever I met people before and also during my EVS, the first question I had to answer was: “And why did you choose Estonia?” After a while, I was very bored of this question – because I really had no idea what to answer. Might one of the reasons be the big amounts of snow? Or it might have been that I wanted to eat potatoes every day? No, maybe I just wanted to feel -30°C? Or even more: it could be that I wanted to learn a language with 14 cases?

“In this multicultural community, I’ve learned that being different is not a disadvantage for a friendship”

The answer is “No” to all of the above “possible” reasons, because at the beginning, I didn’t choose Estonia, but as I found out later: Estonia chose me. Actually, I cannot say that I came here with a lot of expectations. I just wanted to see something new: a new environment, a new culture and new people. And I wanted to gain experiences – the good, but also the bad ones. What truly happened to me here, in Estonia, was incredible. Firstly, I had the luck to share a flat with three crazy people (in a good meaning of this word) who made my day every day. In this multicultural community, I’ve learned that being different is not a disadvantage for a friendship. We shared experiences, travelled together, had a lot to laugh, went through crises and learned a lot from each other! Thanks to all of you! I will never forget you!

The first day, when I arrived in my kindergarten, everyone was very nice to me, welcoming with a big smile. Afterwards all nine months my work continued the same way. For example was enough just to mention that I would have liked to make a theatre play and all my colleagues started to think about how to realize my project. During my EVS, I got a lot of support from my hosting organization not only in formal, but also in private issues. But the main reason why I loved to go to work, were, of course, the children! Every day, I got so many hugs,

smiles and love, that, even if it happened to have had a bad day, there was no chance to worry anymore!
Nii, tänan teid, minu kallid sõbrad! Ma mõtlen tihti teile!
Besides the activities and responsibilities as a volunteer in Kinderagarten, an important moment for me was learning more about Estonian culture. I have tried to learn and use the language; I had nearly every day Estonian food in my kindergarten and celebrated Estonian festivals and traditions. Moreover, I was very interested in the Estonian handicrafts and also went every second week to a Dance Club to learn Estonian dances.

“Who thinks that there is nothing to do during a long and cold winter, is totally wrong”

What concerns the cold season in Estonia than who thinks that there is nothing to do during a long and cold winter, is totally wrong: firstly, there are a lot of good and cosy places in Tallinn. You can do what you want – go to meet your friends in a nice *kohvikum* and drink a hot chocolate or glöggi; see a great sunset on *Pirita beach*; enjoy swinging in the *Open Air Museum*; have a great party in *Von Krahl*; play a laser game; eat the best

pancakes in *Kompressor*; go to concerts; make good business in the second-hand shops; walk in the beautiful *Kadriorg park*; go ice-skating, skiing and sledging in *Lauluväljak*; see how it is to be blind in the *AHHAA Science Centre*; walk on the frozen sea; watch free movies from different countries in the *European Commission house* and most important: wherever you go, you meet new and interesting people!

Besides my life in Tallinn, there was a passion which I really liked to share with other people: my travels. I have travelled a lot to Estonian cities and villages in order to visit volunteers, to learn more about the Estonian culture and to work in other places such as it was when I worked one week in different youth centres in Põltsamaa and Jõgeva, went to an orphanage in Viljandi, to a Russian school and two other youth centres in Rakvere and Tallinn to support other volunteers. Besides, I also organized activities in a Child at Risk Centre and went to Maarjaküla to work there for one week. In February, I got the great opportunity to participate in a

IF YOU START
YOUR JOURNEY
OF VOLUNTEERING,
DON'T FORGET
TO PUT YOUR
♥ IN THE
SUITCASE!

youth exchange as a group leader in Poland. There, I organized workshops and an Estonian evening with disabled people from five different countries. Besides my trip to Poland, I have also travelled to Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. All the above mentioned activities taken together made my EVS year an unforgettable time!

“With some people I have only spent a few hours, but they were unforgettable ones...”

But it would not have been as good as it was without all the wonderful people I have met during these nine months: ones with whom I shared the everyday life in Tallinn and the others who were there for me any time, even though they lived far away. With some people I have only spent a few hours, but they were unforgettable ones...

So thanks to all of you – for your support, for your smiles and for this FUNtastic time!

Supervisor says

Maive Edovald
Teacher
Tallinn Kiikhobu Kindergarten
Mummid group
Experience: 15 years

Supervisor of Vera
“Sebra” EVS project

Tallinn Kiikhobu Kindergarten
Opened 45 years ago
12 groups of children, nurseries
18-24 children in group
Two teachers per group working in shifts



How the story started:

“It is a funny story. One of our teachers told us once that her daughter is dating a young man and the young man was Dorus [project manager at Continuous Action – n.r.]. He told us about the opportunity to host volunteers because we didn’t know anything about it. This happened in the autumn of 2009 and in the same autumn

we hosted the first EVS volunteer. It was a fantastic time because this was so new for us. Everybody in the kindergarten, teachers, children, knew the volunteer and everybody enjoyed it.”

Why the EVS was needed:

“First of all we have a lot of children and not enough employees. Any help coming from outside is needed



and useful for us. Usually volunteers are young and they are bring in the kindergarten a positive energy. They are playing around with children. We teachers usually don't have enough time to play but the volunteers can look after children and play with them.

"Once realizing that they can propose and do own projects it became more interesting to host EVS volunteers."

Later I also understood that volunteers can implement own ideas, own projects in the kindergarten, fact that I didn't know from the beginning. In my opinion the volunteer was there only to play with kids. But once realizing that they can propose and do own projects it became more interesting to host EVS volunteers."

What did the volunteer bring new/change:

"Own ideas is first change that EVS volunteers brought along. Then I noticed in other groups that the volunteer was doing art workshops with children. We have magazines from Germany where there are showed many ideas, but we didn't use them before. The volunteers started to use them and this is fantastic.

All of the hosted volunteers until now brought something new, starting with Laura from Germany, the first volunteer who stayed for 10 months. Then in winter 2010 we had Mohammed from Somalia, who actually came from Italy for 5 months in my group. It was a funny experience because of big cultural differences. And last volunteer was Vera from Germany again who was here for 9 months."

How did children's parents receive the information about hosting EVS volunteer in the kindergarten:

"Usually parents ask how the volunteer will communicate with children. In the case of first volunteer I didn't know what to answer and now I know. But actually children don't need to know any language; they simply come to you, grab your hand and start to play with you. Almost all the children started to speak some English. We watch cartoons with them which was interesting to notice."

"I encouraged to tell me how she can in Estonian and not to worry about mistakes"

About the volunteer and Estonian language:

"Vera started to understand Estonian already before

Christmas, after she came in September. But she was afraid to speak it because she was afraid to make mistakes and was trying to be perfect. But I encouraged to tell me how she can in Estonian and not to worry about mistakes. By the end of the project her written Estonian improved a lot, compared to speaking. This is because she had more time to think while writing how to form sentences than when speaking. But as I was busy most of the times I used mostly English instead of Estonian, which somehow was not the best way to do but it was needed."

Supervisor's challenging experiences and ways to find solutions:

"One small misunderstanding that we encountered and had to solve was related to the volunteer accommodation. At the beginning of the project there were four volunteers sharing a three room flat in Kadriorg Park and they said that it was suitable for them. They were happy together. The attitude changed though completely after the few months when they decided that they couldn't share the same flat anymore, having some different issues to solve among them. On the other hand in our culture for example is normal to share a room, while in their cultures they said it is not so common. So, they started to look for a new place for one of the four volunteers and the problem was solved. Actually this was the only problem we met. I can't recall any other moment when we had any problem.

Maybe the winter time can be the challenging period for the volunteers when they have a period of feeling at low ebb, becoming stressed after being already five months in the project and thinking about the following four-five ones, left to be in the same country, with that cold winter, far away from family. In that case I suggested to Vera, taking a day off which I usually don't count as a holiday. But it is recommendable to stay at home, to enjoy a free day, to go out with some friends.

Otherwise we don't have any problems. Vera was fantastic to work with. She was always so organized and prepared me in advance for new things she had in mind to do. For example in the beginning of the month she listed me the activities she was planning. This was useful for our further work together as I knew what she has planned and could support, telling her when to start to prepare and knew how to help her. Besides we could plan in such a way that she could have days off for some extra activities outside kindergarten. If one person is as organized as Vera is then there are no problems at all to plan the work.

"I started to use other expressions like: "Fantastic", "Cool", which I don't really use in Estonian"

Another challenge for Vera was the way we gave feedback. If she was doing something, I was used to say that

it was "o.k.!" and for her meant that I don't appreciate her efforts. She was disappointed at the beginning, thinking that she could do better. Only in spring time we started to laugh about this and I started to use other expressions like: "Fantastic", "Cool", which I don't really use in Estonian. Vera was used to say that I have the emotions always in the middle, nothing being good or bad. But this is just as we are.

A change that the EVS brought new is that I started to hug persons."

About the relevance of previous education in the field of working with children in kindergarten:

"Actually it is better if the volunteer doesn't have an educational background in the field of the kindergarten work. For example Vera had a practice in one kindergarten in Germany prior to the project start. This created her a certain image, idea about this kind of work which explains her fear from the beginning when she saw that we have 18 children in the group and only one teacher. She was wondering where the others are. When I told her that there will be only me and her working with them, going outside with them, she was surprised comparing always with the German way. She had different expectations towards the system and it was not easy for her at the beginning. That is why it is better if the person comes without knowledge in the field or certain expectations."

The kind of support a supervisor receives:

"The support system provided by Continuous Action was extremely useful. For example it was enough to write an e-mail to Dorus or to somebody else from the office and we always received the practical answer.

"If there was a problem, we could also solve it together communicating to each other, the supervisors and the coordinating organization"

The supervision meetings were of special value, both together with the volunteers or only supervisors. During the meetings with the supervisors only, we could discuss issues important for the work with the volunteer and we received advice how to improve the cooperation with the volunteers. Also we could communicate with each other via the e-mail list, to give and receive feedback. If there was a problem, we could also solve it together communicating to each other, the supervisors and the coordinating organization."

Learning moment for supervisor:

"Before I was thinking that everyone else should do the things the same way I do, considering that only that way was normal. But working with volunteers I learned that there are different ways of doing things. For example with Mohammed: he was ready to do the work but not immediately, maybe the next day or next week, while we in Estonia are used to do it immediately, latest the next day. It was disturbing at the beginning, but then we dis-

cussed and found out that in Italy they do it differently, it changed my understanding at certain extent."

... and for volunteer in a EVS project:

"Vera told me for example that she used to be mostly studying and thinking about herself, about what is good for her and for her future. She was focused on getting good grades in order to go to University later. During her EVS she was involved in a lot of extra projects and activities besides kindergarten work. She also went to a YE in Poland. Also she was in different organizations in Estonia. All these activities taken together made her think that she now knows how to help people, fact which makes her happy. She understood that she can improve the life of somebody, of people with disabilities for example. These people are alone sitting all of their life in one room only. But if somebody comes to them, play with them and do things for them, or just have a walk with them, changes something in their life. So, Vera started to think about other people also besides herself."

Sharing secrets of success in an EVS project:

"A very positive moment would be to learn more about the volunteer's background and not to select the volunteer based only on CV and motivation letter. A discussion about mutual expectations and an understating of own expectations are very important moments. It is also essential to discuss the activities that the kindergarten proposes and the ones that the volunteer would like to do. We have to communicate with each other in order to achieve the most out of the EVS project.

"It is good to agree on a common free time when things can be discussed"

The work is always busy but it is not good to say that one doesn't have time to talk with the volunteer. It is good to agree on a common free time when things can be discussed and to find this moment, without blaming all the time the work. Also it is possible to have a coffee together and talk. The volunteer has to feel that he/she is also important.

Personal advice to give to volunteers sometimes, when the one needs, is also a secret contributing to the improvement of the common work. For example Vera decided during her EVS project to which University she wants to go afterwards and I wrote her the recommendation letter."

Maive's message for actual and future EVS hosting organizations:

If one organization wants to take a volunteer should be prepared for everything, because other persons are special also. The hosting organization, the supervisors have to be open minded and do not under appreciate the volunteer. Also do not consider that everyone is the same and to have wrong expectations but to accept the things as they are.

Less is More 2011

The short-term EVS project "Less is More 2011" took place in Estonia during the period April – May 2011 and was designed to host three young people from Lithuania as volunteers in the office of Continuous Action sent by organization Youth Exchange Agency from Lithuania. Together with them were hosted two other young people from Sweden in the frame of the "ITER" project of Administration of Allocation of Social Welfare (City of Gothenburg).

The project aim was to involve young people who face difficulties with employability in their own country due to different reasons. The three young people from Lithuania – Dovydas Milius, Mindaugas Prabulis and Artur Vertinskij together with the two young volunteers from Sweden – Alexander Liljeklev and Matilda Paulsen – spent in Estonia almost two months. During this time they worked in different places like kindergartens, food bank, youth centres, and children at risk centre located both in Tallinn and other towns – Põltsamaa, Saku. On the other hand they were engaged in such activities as giving presentations about their culture and following workshops about employability. These volunteering experiences along with living and working in a multicultural group of people in a different country gave them the possibility to get to know more about different jobs, about each other, to discover themselves.



The five volunteers decided to transmit their messages to other youth about what they think about EVS and want others to understand as well:

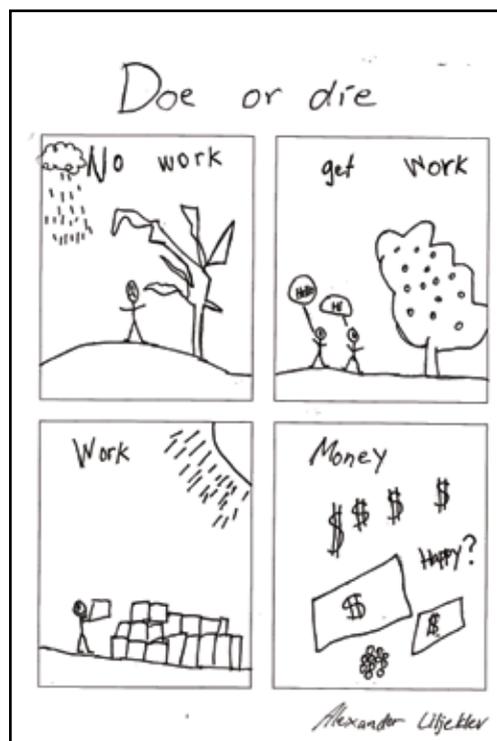
Alexander: "The project is a perfect opportunity to get to know you a little better thanks to the different trials you get."

Matilda: "The project as a volunteer is an excellent opportunity to get to know yourself and other people in other cultures"

Dovydas: "Hello. My name is Dovydas. I am from Lithuania. I am 19 years old. I like to work in the kindergarten. I like to be with the children and play. And also I like Estonian capital city Tallinn."

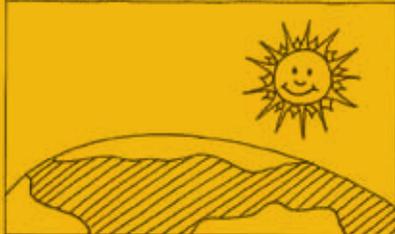
Mindaugas: "Hello. My name is Mindaugas. I am from Lithuania. I am 19 years old. I work as a volunteer. On Europe day we will go the youth centre to represent our country and do games with the young people."

Artur: "Hello. My name is Artur, I am from Lithuania, but have Polish nationality. I like the work in the Kindergarten, because it is a good therapy for me. I like to play with kids and just immerse myself in a carefree childhood. Food bank volunteering was not a new experience for me since I was a volunteer in the food bank in Lithuania, but I liked it and it was fun. For the total project, I get a lot of very good and meaningful experiences; it will be helpful in finding my place under the sun."



Sun is shining over the rainbow...

One day the sun decided to bring warmth to a cold place ...



... and she chose Estonia!



At the beginning, the people were very irritated, but then they found out that...



... together they can create something beautiful!



Vera Surall

The adventurer dreamer



Matilda 17/5-2011