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European
Voluntary
Service:
Estonian impressions

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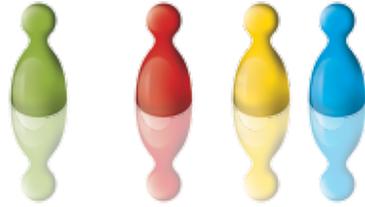
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What is European Voluntary Service?

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

Experience Very Special

Olivier Bernard
from France

volunteer in Continuous Action

The European Voluntary Service programme exists since about 12 years. It is European voluntary work as its name shows it, and several young people from all around Europe have already tried the adventure. Continuous Action, an organisation located in Tallinn, Estonia, sends, hosts, and coordinates young people from many nationalities.

In that issue, we propose you to share the accounts of some volunteers who made their EVS during the year 2008-2009, through the coordinated projects of Continuous Action. We have collected a dozen of volunteers' words, who all express their pleasure for having taken part of this unique experience.

Many of the volunteers were working in kindergartens. Thus, Continuous Action coordinates projects with three kindergartens in Tallinn: the Asunduse Kindergarten, the Tihase Kindergarten and the Kullatera Kindergarten. The accounts of the volunteers are very warm. It was a very rich and full of emotions experience for them. Nvard, an Armenian volunteer, told us besides: «It was like in a fairy tale – there were just smiles and happiness, but it is true that among my children everything was like in a nice fairy tale». She also adds how it was difficult for her to leave the children she mixed with for a whole year: «But this moment was really difficult. In my ears it always sounds my child's, my Ricky's words - "Ära mine, palun", which means "don't go, please". I will never-never forget them. It is too much for me.». Anna, a Swedish volunteer, who made a short-term EVS in last May says the same: «I remember they asked me why I would go home and I said that my time is finished there. They did not want me to go and said they will miss me very much but I have promised to keep in touch with them via email so that's good.»

Other projects are coordinated by Continuous Action, like the Saku Youth Centre one or the Pärnu "Youth Information" one, and the "To Breathe as One" project which took place this year; also, some volunteers were hosted by Continuous Action and worked at the office of the organization such as Mara from Armenia and Bence, from Hungary.

The fact of being through his contact with young people, learned them many things and enabled them to be fulfilled. Elisabet, a Spanish volunteer from Barcelona, who

made a six month EVS underlines it: «something inside me has changed, and [...] I will never be the same again. It is not that you become a different person, something that

you are not, but just the opposite, you are more yourself, and you feel more alive, more useful». Every experience was different, but some of their activities were similar, like for example teaching their mother tongue to young people. Harald, a 24 year old German volunteer tells us about it: «First of all, teaching in these courses was great fun – I believe for both parts, for the students and for me. Secondly, it was a great opportunity to get into contact with young Estonians, due to weekly meetings. It was a great pleasure to see their approach to learn to speak my mother language and their interest in Germany's culture and lifestyle.».

But what unites these volunteers the most, is the notion of sharing, of discovery, of exchange, of respect and of tolerance. To share a flat with young Europeans that they didn't know before was one of the most vivid things for them, and it will stay as one of their greatest memory. Therefore they all underline the fact that they have forged very great friendships throughout their voluntary service and «sometimes even more» as says Erika, a Hungarian volunteer.

When you read these full of enthusiasm articles, you realize that the EVS is a great opportunity for the youth to know Europe better and also to know the different manners of living of the people according to the countries. It enables to meet new people and to discover many different things because it is a good chance to travel and to see various cultures, which is so enriching. So I let the last word to Elisabeth, a German volunteer: «A stay abroad is a great opportunity to learn about yourself and the others, to be independent, to stand on our own feet and become more self-confident. This is the result of my EVS and I can recommend this exciting detour to everybody else who is interested in social voluntary work and other cultures.».

Minu Euroopa Teenistus

*Nvard Kocharyan
from Armenia
volunteer in the
Asunduse Kindergarten in Tallinn
from May 2008 to May 2009*

Yes, that was a piece of time of perfection, happiness and sadness, of joy, fun, motivation and disappointments... In a word normal life with everything... But it was different than normal life. It was another page of my life, a page that can only be written one time and can never be repeated, and all the sounds that are in it cannot be replayed...

I came to Tallinn without knowing what will be going to happen, what will be waiting for me... Then I was greeted by very cute children, and by very warm people that were working with them... I knew that I am a child lover person. I like children. They are so innocent and cute. But I could never imagine that I can get connected to them so much. After arriving to Estonia, I started to work the second day in the Russian group, where all the children except one were Russians. There was no language problem, I could easily contact to all the children, except the Estonian one, but a few days later I could somehow contact with him as well, as he understands Russian and English. Later on he moved to the same Estonian group in which I started to work in September, and when he entered to the new group he ran to me, hugged and kissed me, saying a lot of words which were not understandable for me. It was great; I was going to my new working place with great pleasure, without understanding how time was going. I must be frank and say that I was really getting tired. Well it was normal, because I have never been among so many children. Before coming to Estonia, I was working as a technical manager in a medicine-producer company, and also teaching in an educational computer program center for grown-ups.

After that, the change was really big; big, but great and unimaginable. The new country was interesting: new people, new faces, new food, and among all of that - just me, without knowing anyone around. There were a lot of volunteers, who were nice people, a majority of them became later great friends of mine. Time was running nicely with all those people. The volunteers that came to Estonia before me were showing me around, telling me about their experiences, also about working with children. So,

life out of work was also very nice. We had a lot of nice events, nice walks and trips, and fortunately it was light all the time, although surprisingly cold for summer time. Of course I will not deny the fact that after 1 month I felt the need to see my parents, to go home. I was always used to go home each month (these last years I was living in the capital, but my real home is in the north of Armenia). Then step by step everything became normal - I was concentrated on my job a lot, trying to improve my work. In summer time there are no any educational programs, children are playing all the time. It was so pleasant to be with children who are running and making fun. During all the summer time I was with Russian children. They were sitting on my knees and telling stories and also what they are doing. We also did little excursions, holding each other's hands.

In the beginning of September I moved to an Estonian group. From this time real experience started. All around was in Estonian, only 2 kids were speaking Russian. I just started my Estonian lessons, I didn't know any word. What could I do? Children knew that I didn't understand, they were showing a lot what they wanted with their hands or taking me to a certain place and showing what they wanted there. The Russian kids and teachers were translating for me many times. But this big problem was not a barrier between children and me. We had contacts, I can't even say how now. I was very happy to see the Estonian child who was in the Russian group before. In fact, I was with this child during all my EVS, and also he was the only Estonian child I could talk a lot with, because he understands English and Russian, although he is only 3 years old...

Well, the language issue was bothering me, but I easily participated in all of their activities, art works, everything. After a while, all the children got used to me. Maybe it

Vabatahtlik



sounds unbelievable but it is true. When I arrived my children were running to me. I love to hug them so-so much. I never sat alone in the group - one of my wonders is surely with me. The whole world is mine when they sit and put their small heads on me - "requiring" me to fondle them. It was amazing. There were so many great moments, that I could never end writing about them. I was naming some of my children by my own names,

- "minu angel", "minu karu", "minu nukk" and other names. It was not a surprise for them, when I was calling them like that. There was a girl, very small, she was just smiling all the time. She never cried, or speaks a lot, she just smiled, and that's why I call her "my doll- minu nukk". When I said that name, she just smiled and came to me. With elder children it was another way. When I was saying "minu karu", the boy that was referred to, started to say other names, and then we chose names for us for that day. When we were doing art things with colors, my hands were all in color, we were joking a lot on each other, making hands colorful. And after all, who can tell a reason not to enjoy my time with them - with my sweet darlings.

It was like in a fairy tale - there were just smiles and happiness, but it is true that among my children everything was like in a nice fairy tale.

After all, came the moment when I had to say goodbye. I knew from the beginning that this day would come, everything in our life has a beginning and an ending. From one side I am happy to be so sorry to finish my project- it can only mean that I really enjoyed my EVS time, with my little princes and princesses. I know I will miss and need

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them a lot. I hope to come to Estonia next year and visit them. I promised my children that I will come. But this moment was really difficult. In my ears it always sounds my child's, my Ricky's words - "Ära mine, palun", which means "don't go, please". I will never-never forget them. It is too much for me.

But this is a fact. So, let's be proud of them, proud of my little friends, or as I am used to call them "minu vaike armas-

tused". I hope to see them, hug and kiss them again. Probably they will say "kalli-kalli, ja musi" and then I will feel as happy as no one else....

And at the end, I just want to say goodbye. Thank you for everything, dear parents, dear colleagues, dear all.



Everything for the first time and unforgettable...

*Mara Arakelian
from Armenia*

Volunteer in Continuous Action March 2009

Life is an everlasting process with victories and losses, which gives us chances to wish, to start something with interest, to make new discoveries, to know ourselves. I love life, and I'm trying to use all the given chances. Today, a lot of young people have all chances to realize their ambitions - some of them manage to reach them partly, some of them completely, but you must wish it very, very hard! As a result of my enormous wishes, I am here in Estonia, in Tallinn, doing European voluntary project.

Since my childhood I have heard about Estonians as a nation with very typical culture and traditions, but they are different than Armenians, and I heard about one of the most beautiful cities in the country - Tallinn. My grandfather visited Tallinn during the Soviet times, and he was telling about it with great admiration. About a year my friend Nvard was also living in Tallinn. She was taking part of the EVS program. She told me very interesting things about Estonia, and about Tallinn - Toompea, Pirita, Kadriorg and all the other places. She spoke about the life of volunteers, about different activities they usually do, which encouraged me to be in this society. Finally I'm here for already 2 weeks.

From the first day I shared the admiration that my friend Nvard and my new friends had. I had a chance to get acquainted with some Estonians, who are just brilliant people.

When I just came out from the airport, I and my friend went to my new house, where I had a nice cozy lunch, full of Estonian national food - famous kama, something with mushrooms and potatoes.

After a while I went to my working place which is located just in the Old Town, where my future work was ex-

plained to me. When I was walking to the working place the first impression of Tallinn I had was that it looked like Armenia's capital Yerevan: everybody was in a hurry. Only the weather was different: here it is so cold, unlike Armenia, where it is already complete spring for a long time now. It makes some little difficulties for me, because it seems to me that it is another winter after spring. But the coldness of the weather doesn't seem so bad, because of the warm attitude of my friends. When I go to the friendly atmosphere of my working place, which is just in the heart of Tallinn, in the medieval Old Town, it seems that time has stopped: we are back to the past, and plunged in the medieval times...

There is also something, which we can't take notice of it, it's that everywhere in Tallinn, in the streets, on the roof of the houses, well everywhere, there are thousands of doves which are the symbol of peace for people all over the world, it's impossible to do not admire this beauty. Though it is a civilized city, it still remains some pieces of medieval times in the centre of the city, a city where everywhere you can meet grey, brown, black and white doves, a city which the neighbor is Baltic Sea!



Estonia - an opposite place compared with Italy, but so interesting and stimulating!



My name's Gian Pietro, I'm from Italy and I am 28 Years old. I got a degree in philosophy 3 years ago and then I worked as a librarian for a couple of years and as a public clerk as well.

Gian Pietro Lolli
from Italy

*Volunteer in Saku Municipality
from May 2009*

Now in Italy such as in the other countries there are some problems for young people who are looking for a job because of the recession and for me in particular, because I'd like to teach in high school and there are no free places at the moment in the Italian schools. So in the meantime I decided to look for some different jobs and experiences and I discovered the EVS.

Saku, there are no churches, quite weird for a person like me who lives in the pope's nation, isn't it? There are no ancient buildings, but you can find a lot of green and flat spaces with trees. Basically it is the exact opposite of my nation and it's going to be very interesting because I can be enriched by this experience.

I found a very nice project in a youth centre in Saku, near Tallinn, and I applied for it. And now I'm here, in Estonia an opposite place compared with Italy, but so interesting and stimulating. The first emotion I have felt was a sensation to be in a country with a long history but not written by the monuments as in mine. I think here the history is in the forest as well, especially when you go a little out from Tallinn. I like it very much, because it's the opposite of the place where I live. For example in

I think that in Estonia I can know the real meaning of EVS: tolerance, discovery of new cultures, facing with situations which are different than they are in your normal life in order to enrich your European awareness. And what about the people at the moment? I don't know any Estonian people except my supervisor and people who work with her... but they are very nice and I hope most of all the Estonian people will be like them!



My EVS in Tallinn

So far, so good...

*Anna Slätt
from Sweden
Volunteer in Tallinn Tihase
Kindergarten 3 weeks in May 2009*

My name is Anna Slätt, I am 22 years old and come from Mölndal on the west coast of Sweden. My voluntary service lasted three weeks (11-29 May) and I worked at a preschool called Kindergarten Tihase. I really liked it and the children were incredibly nice. European Voluntary Service (EVS) is for young people who are between 18-30 years. Voluntary service is part of the Youth in Action programme and is an alternative educational experience that gives you the chance to develop your skills while you make a concrete effort in another country. My sending organisation was KEKS/Mölndal and the coordinating organisation was Continuous Action in Estonia.

we went on a tour with the children in the group I worked with. We went to the forest and the sea and it was incredibly cozy and funny. During the first few days, I was in different groups and then I had the choice said the headmaster named Ruth. And so I chose to work with the big kids, the ones who are 5-6 years old. Another day we went off to a place called VABAÕHUMUUSEUM, which is a historical museum where you can see how Estonia was like in the past. The children had their traditional costumes on, but there was no feast. It was to celebrate their singing and folk festival that is 140 years old and teachers wanted to show children how it was like in the past.

The first days at the preschool I didn't do so much, I was just checking the practices, etc. I remember I got a shock already on the first day because the children are much more quiet and calm when they eat than the Swedish children are at the kindergarten I worked in, at home in Sweden. And every day it was something sweet either during or after lunch.

My experiences with this EVS were both good and bad. The good was that you may see a different culture than you're used to. Also you can see who your real friends are, when you go off on something like this.

These weeks have gone quickly and I actually wished that my EVS time would have been a little bit longer. I have gotten many new friends such as a girl from Germany who also worked at the same kindergarten as me, and I will have contact with her after that. One day

The first week, me and seven other volunteers went on a bike ride for two days in a small town in Estonia and I thought that it will be obvious that my knee would be OK, but after about 20 km, the knee hurt so much I had to stop and go back home to Tallinn the next morning. I thought it was a pity that I would go home to Tallinn, but I was forced to think about my knee. The purpose of the bike tour was to give out information about EVS and youth exchanges for young people and different kindergartens. I thought it went well at the nursery I visited and I remember that it was one teacher that asked if they could choose one of us.

Something I regret now is that I did not take any language course before I went to Tallinn because what has been the most difficult was the language and I think it was sad to not be able to talk to people. So I have a very good tip for those who read this. Take a language course especially if you are going away on short EVS which is

less than 1 ½ months, because it is good to know the language and it becomes easier to talk to people who live in the country. Those who go away for a longer period, the EVS always include language lessons.

There were not so many people which could speak English in the Kindergarten Tihase. It was extra difficult to communicate with each other but there was one person in my department who could speak good English, so that was good. Moreover, I had of course also my roommate who learned to speak Estonian in two months so she could act as an interpreter for me.

Last day of kindergarten there were many tears and hugs both from me and those who worked there and the children, but it was mostly hugs from the children. I remember they asked me why I would go home and I said that my time is finished there. They did not want me to go and said they will miss me very much but I have promised to keep in touch with them via email so that's good.

Last day in the apartment we all sat in the kitchen and laughed at everything and everyone. When I got up there was a note outside my door: Why must you go home? I will miss them so much but I will keep in touch with them via Facebook.

I forgot to tell you that in the beginning I lived with six other people who came from different countries: Armenia, Germany, Hungary and Italy. It was both girls and boys. I got to sleep in the living room the first few days because there were seven people in the apartment and there were only six beds. But after two days

*I really think you should
go away on EVS!
This is a great chance
to see another country.*



the girl from Armenia went home and I could move into one of the rooms.

Last but not least I can come up with some good advice for those who read this. I really think you should go away on EVS! This is a great chance to see another country. It is amazing how good you will know the country. I will also like to say that you will have a great experience by making an EVS! I would also like to thank our international coordinator and youth leader Sara, which has given me this chance and that she believed in me.

Walking in the winter wonderland

*Szabolcs Bence Pal
from Hungary
volunteer in Continuous Action from
February to May 2009*

What did I know about Estonia before I came here? Singing revolution, singing festival, Kalevipoeg... One of my professors said that Estonian people are nice and polite, and – for some reason – they are like Hungarians. Sounds great, because sometimes even Hungarian people don't like each other, not just for politics, but in the (let's say) everyday life.

After that conversation, I attend the so-called `Researchers Night` in Budapest, which was organized by the university in Budapest (ELTE). There I saw one hour long film about Estonia, Tallinn, Pärnu, the landscape, the people, the habits, the art, etc., and I thought `why not?` - maybe It will be worth to try to apply for an EVS to Estonia. By the way, I spoke with many people about that, and the most of them said as well, that Estonia and Tallinn would be a good choice, and it could be a good opportunity. And mostly, the people, who already were here, said that Tallinn is a beautiful city, and somebody said, it is its favorite city. On the photo there is the Old town in the night.

Before I came here we had this so called pre-departure training. It was a challenge, to introduce our destination countries. We were in groups. I was in a group with two girls, one of them went to Siberia, and the other one went to Sweden. It was challenging, what we could make for introducing, what is common in those countries. The

answer was simple. Cold. (Definitely for the two other group members).

This EVS-project is for me, I would say, like in advertisements, a "4 in 1-package": learn a new language, Estonian (I am wondering about Estonian), practice Russian, sometimes visit Finland, and get acquainted with the European Union programs and objectives like the Grundtvig project, the Youth in Action Program, the intercultural dialog, which I think, is important, as I experienced it during my work camps here and there. And I hope I can share with more and more people the experience to try those programs, and use them for their own and for common good. Without any arguing, European Union has a very important and significant rule in our life. O. K. It means maybe more bureaucracy, but also some great opportunities, if you are ready to fight for. Like the EVS. So even there are many people in Europe, who are so-called "euro skeptics", European Union gives and means many advantages as well. I hope, I can use them wisely, learn as much as possible, know local people and cul-



ture, help other people - and feel good- tararararara. My tasks are really challenging as well: environmental projects, integration, organizing intercultural happenings, promote the European Union`s possibilities, they are just some of my possible activities.

And how was Tallinn for me in the real life? Here are some of my impressions. Tallinn is like a town in fairytales. There are many towers, shortcuts, walls, gates, like in the Middle Earth, in the *Lord of the Rings*; I wouldn` t be surprised to see Frodo Bag-gins, or Grey Gandalf once.

On my second day here I got lost as well, but finally, I got home. So, it was sometimes like a labyrinth, for me, I was thinking about, maybe there is some cheese at the exits... Or, do you

know those little kitschy glass balls, which you can buy in souvenir shops, and you should turn them upside down, and there is snow inside? Tallinn was in some days like these glass balls, but in real.



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In Tallinn you have to be sometimes like an equilibrist. Because the sidewalks are icy, even when they put stones on them, because they are melting, and they will freeze again. On the other hand, the traffic is well. (In Budapest unfortunately, people are not so patient in the traffic, in the countryside they take care more for walkers.)

So, keep walking, Tallinn!



Real fairytale

*Friederike Rohl
from Germany
Volunteer in Tallinn
Tihase Kindergarten from September
2008 to May 2009*

"The streets, I'm walking seem to me uncertain and ambiguous. In less than nine month each of them will tell different stories, show versatile adventures and experiences and will let me remind various people from all over the world."
(L'auberge Espagnole)



teachers for their following lesson preparations, giving them my own creative ideas and helping them to carry out the ideas for handicraft and other. It also meant being there for the children, playing with them and showing them different things about my culture. For that I often used playing some musical instruments, listening to our national music and making handicraft with them. Week by week and day by day I got in closer contact with the children, with my colleagues and assistances as well as with the parents of the children, therefore I could find people to talk to and create my own small home in my working place, far away from my real home in Germany.

But mostly, it was outside of the kindergarten that the EVS enriched me every day. Getting to know new people from all over the world and being in contact with their unknown cultures, travelling around the "in the beginning unknown-new" countries, developing deep friendships with people, who experienced the same thing as you do and were a part of your adventure, and above all getting along by yourself as well as with the first experience of sharing a flat. EVS coined me not only regarding to my social and voluntary work, it also made me stronger to find solutions on my own, to spend time on my own and to fend for myself without the help of others. This is an important part of the person's development while living abroad. And finally, after one year there, you feel like at home in a country that was so strange and alarming to me in the beginning and whose streets seemed to me without any logic and made me feel insecure. Now those streets are also a part of my EVS experiences as well as for many other volunteers who were here in Estonia in year 2008/2009.

I can remember many film-quotations which can describe my year abroad, here in Estonia. They are all telling stories about different experiences and adventures, like getting to know a new culture and a new lifestyle, learning a new language and tackling extensive facts about international history as well as getting in contact with several nationalities and developing deep friendships. Most of the people are right while saying, that this is the best experience one can reach.

I spent nine months working in Tallinna Tihase Lasteaed and experienced most of what living abroad can bring to me as an experience. Kindergarten-work means to have your eyes, ears and arms opened all the time, it means to be there for the children – even not knowing the local language at all – and to discover the world together with them. It means to be both a teacher and a child, to understand and to teach, to learn and to practice. Every morning, on the way to the kindergarten, not only the working-day started, but furthermore the reality stopped and I was welcomed in a world without sorrow and trouble. The only reasons for tears were when we were not getting along with the zipper, forgetting about soft animals or games and not remembering to say goodbye to mummies and daddies. It was so useful and satisfying for me to see how easy life could be as well, being a part of their lives and learning from them a lot.

My working days consisted of helping the kindergarten

Found in translation

Tere!

My name is Harald. I am a 24-year old student from the north of Germany. After having finished my Bachelor degree in "European Studies" I decided to work as a European volunteer abroad before continuing with my master's programme. I chose Estonia to be my new home country and applied for a five-month project called „Youth Information". After my application it did not really take a long time and in January of 2009 I arrived in Pärnu, the Estonian's summer capital where my Host Organisation is situated.

*Harald Werner
from Germany
Volunteer in Pärnu Youth
Counselling Centre
from January to June 2009*



My project was hosted in a Youth Counselling Centre in Pärnu. My project was coordinated by the Estonian Coordinating Organisation Continuous Action and together with my Sending Organisation, Continuous Action cared about all the needed official paperwork. The Youth Counselling centre's main task is to counsel and inform young people inside and outside schools about job and career opportunities. My colleagues visit school lessons to speak about education and working possibilities or provide assistance to youngsters in personal conversations. As easily guessed from the project's title my main task was also to provide pupils with all kinds of information as well as to develop awareness about the European Voluntary Service and the Youth in Action Programme among the local youth.

Many interested pupils visited me in the centre or contacted me via email to talk about the possibilities to study and work abroad or to participate in EVS. Together, we discussed about their opportunities and I assisted them in practical issues such as the application proceed-

ings, CVs or German language tests. Besides, I went to schools to talk about the working and volunteering possibilities in the European Union and Germany and organised a workshop about European Union issues.

One of my most favorite tasks in my project was to give German lessons. During my stay I led three different weekly courses, two for beginners and one for advanced students. First of all, teaching in these courses was great fun – I believe for both parts, for the students and for me. Secondly, it was a great opportunity to get into contact with young Estonians, due to weekly meetings. It was a great pleasure to see their approach to learn to speak my mother language and their interest in Germany's culture and lifestyle. Observing their progress in the ability to speak and understand let me feel quite satisfied and, of course, a bit proud of them.

However, the students were not the only ones who got taught – during my time I learned a lot. When you are teaching your own language to others you automatically have to think about it yourself in order to explain the language's phenomenon. You start to observe your language from a new point of view – a very interesting experience. Besides, the language courses were a great help to my own efforts to learn Estonian – by comparing vocabulary and grammar between the languages we found many similarities and some obstacles to learn the Estonian language started to disappear.

Learning to understand bits of the host country's language is a very important step to feel comfortable in another country - one of my most important experiences was to arrive and live in a country where at first I did not have a single idea about the language - this means that to manage even the most simple things such as daily shopping or going to a barber you need someone to assist you. In my first weeks I started to feel like a small child again - at the beginning you can only fulfill simple tasks where language is not needed at all and you can only understand other people if they want you to understand. Therefore I was very happy when I started to understand the main contents of the conversations around me...

When you are living in a foreign country there are situations in which you will feel alone in the beginning - the only way to solve it is to find new contacts. As an European Volunteer you can be sure that there are other volunteers in your host country who are interested to meet you - you just need to contact them. This is another great thing I have learned - just to contact unknown people without being afraid of refusals. During my stay I wrote emails to a lot of people I did not know before and asked to meet them - surprisingly it worked and after a short time there are other people who contact you first. During my stay I learned to know a lot of interesting people who helped me to get comfortable with the new situation. On the one hand there are the working colleagues who help to integrate into the work place and the host town and culture and on the other hand there are the fellow volunteers from different countries who are all facing the similar situation.

After some time I also learned to know a lot of Estonian young people and we became friends - it is amazing when you start to realize that you manage to integrate and suddenly start to know the people on the streets - this was the first time I really started to regret that my programme only last for five months...

One of the more tricky challenges was definitely to live in Pärnu in wintertime only. As all of you know, Pärnu is claimed to be the summer capital of Estonia - so, maybe you can imagine the stereotype reaction of the surprised people after I told them about my departure before the real start of the summer season. However, after a time

you know how to manage with that - as a consequence, every time I visited a new class I begged them insistently not to speak about this sore spot - I promised myself to return to Pärnu during the main season one day.



When we arrived in our new host country, everybody of us felt insecure, small and a bit helpless because everything is new and unknown - at the end of our projects, on the departure days, there was the same feeling - this time it was because we had to leave a now known place and our new friends



When we arrived in our new host country, everybody of us felt insecure, small and a bit helpless because everything is new and unknown - at the end of our projects, on the departure days, there was the same feeling - this time it was because we had to leave a now known place and our new friends...

I am very glad about my decision to take part in the EVS. When I'm reflecting on my work I am satisfied with my project - it was a very unique experience to teach and to talk with pupils in schools and to assist young people to seize their chance within the European Voluntary Service. I experienced a very great time in Estonia and met a lot of new friends from many different nations (including Estonia!) and I am sure that we will meet again. In the end my fellow volunteers and me made a surprising discovery: When we arrived in our new host country, everybody of us felt in-



Magic feelings

When I think about it now, in the beginning, for some moments I doubted before deciding: EVS or not EVS? Leaving or staying? I just feel so happy that afterwards I chose what my mind was telling me... The risks are always there, you can do nothing against them, you just have to accept them and try to make them everyday smaller, till the day they disappear, or you do not worry about them anymore.

.....

When you arrive in the hosting country, everything looks a little bit strange, sometimes disappointing, because being in a different country always brings you new feelings. On the other side, you have your previous expectations, the wish that everything will be all right...

After the first impressions, you realize that all your wishes cannot be accomplished in two days, that big things need time, and if we are talking about a Northern country like Estonia, maybe a little bit more. Of course, it depends also on which country you come from; in my case, the fact that I come from Spain, I ended to find some differences in the way people communicate with the others. Differences that sometimes made me feel confused or misunderstood, but nothing you cannot solve without being constant, keeping on doing the things you believe in and having a bit of patience. After a while, you realize what all this brings to you, and then you see that maybe some people need more time to get used to new things, and also you can understand other ways to socialize with them, and to express yourself. The results of your actions will come, sooner or later, but to get them you cannot leave your spirit down, the volunteer must be strong in front of adversities, never let them turn you down... Even though that will be from these ones that you will learn the biggest part.

You discover a lot more about yourself, and at the same time about the world around you, while being more aware about the reality, and then, more able to act and to change what you do not like or what you think is not fair in this world.

In my case, working with small children gave me a lot;

*Elisabet Trilla Bestregui
from Spain
volunteer in Tallinn Kullatera
Kindergarten from August 2008 to February
2009 and teaching Spanish in the Saku
Cultural Centre.*

not only because they are so sweet, spontaneous and natural, but also because these "small people", as I called them, are totally surprised about every tiny thing that they found on their way: how nice are the colors! And how funny is a simple piece of "plastiliin" ("plasticine")! How many things can you create and imagine with it?! Sometimes in the adult world this feeling is lost, we need to observe a child in his or her normal life, to see that the everyday routine can be amazing! This is the reason why I think I will not forget anything I learned from them. When you are in the position of teaching, you always get something back; in the case of children, it is difficult to say who is learning more... There are thousands of things that we can learn from a three year old child, even if adults believe that we are just teaching them.

On the other side, during this time I shared my place with 5 other people who I did not know before, and we had to get to know each other at the same time that living together. I discovered lots of new information - about their countries, their ways of thinking, and the reasons that made them decide to go abroad, etc. You discover that you can have lots of things in common with somebody who is coming from thousands of kilometers away from your country. Also you enter in a world of differences, and that is a good chance to prove your skills to solve conflicts, and also your capacity to adapt into new situations.

After these six months I had moments of fear, happiness, loneliness, confusion... but the strongest feeling was always an enormous feeling of freedom: freedom to decide, freedom to do, freedom to change. That is what made me feel more alive.

Now this is the moment to leave, somehow to go back, but with a big bag full of experiences, stories, new friends, and a lot of other wonderful memories... and with the feeling that something inside me has changed, and that I will never be the same again. It is not that you

become a different person, something that you are not, but just the opposite, you are more yourself, and you feel more alive, more useful.

I feel that I had the opportunity to take another path, the one that is not always supposed to be like this, which is a little bit different, but finally the one that gives you so many beautiful things. This "extra-life" is not just up to the EVS, even if this one is a brilliant option, but I believe is more up to everyone of us, because we are the ones who decide if we want to live our life being as "normal" as possible, or if we want to have a little bit of "extra-life".

My proposal? Try to put a little bit of the voluntary spirit in your life. You cannot imagine what all this can bring to you!



An exciting detour – European Voluntary- Service

„So, what are you going to do after you finish school“? – One question, which many young people are asked, it was the same with me. And what I did? I decided to make a detour to the university and then I went abroad to do an European Voluntary Service. This service is sponsored by the European Commission and is a great opportunity for young people to go abroad and do some voluntary work.

To make the adventure more exciting I chose Estonia as the country which I wanted to live and work as a volunteer for nine months. Estonia is not so popular in Western Europe, it is a small country with many things to discover, I found out very fast! I was amazed by the two sides of the country. On the first hand the technical progress, and on the second hand the simple conditions of living. I started my work in a public kindergarten in Tallinn in September 2008. From day to day I felt more home in this new and for me unknown country, although it took some time to get used to the Estonian culture, the people and the weather.

European Voluntary Service means not only to do social work, but also to get to know many youngsters from all over Europe. Being part of this big colourful volunteer community offers the possibility to find new friends, to travel with them, to make party and have fun together and so on. Many different characters are meeting, but

Elisabeth Bangert
*from Germany
volunteer in Tallinn
Kindergarten Kullatera
from September 2008 – May 2009*

one thing connects them all: being abroad, without family and friends from the home country and thereby having the same worries and problems. But the mutual support helps to solve problems and makes one feel well.

I learned Estonian language on a language course while I was working in the kindergarten. My language knowledge then was eligible to communicate with the children and to manage in everyday life. In my opinion, the effortless relationship with children is the easiest way to learn and to use foreign language. Children don't care about wrong pronunciation or grammatical inaccuracy, they are simply happy to have one new big friend. The lack of linguistic knowledge can also evoke funny moments – to answer just with „yes“ or „no“ without knowing what the question was about and then see what happens can lead to some surprises...

A stay abroad is a great opportunity to learn about yourself and the others, to be independent, to stand on our own feet and become more self-confident. This is the result of my EVS and I can recommend this exciting detour to everybody else who is interested in social voluntary work and other cultures.

My European Voluntary Service in Estonia

Almudena Zazo Segundo

from Spain

*volunteer in the Saku Youth Centre
from June to August 2008*

Three months is nothing when you are about to live an unique experience in your whole life. The first thing that scared me when I chose this project was to start to feel useful when time will already be over.

Every person with whom I talked about this told me that the first months are mostly hard, because you are trying to adapt to a new country (and for this experience also to a new culture because Estonia and Spain seemed like opposites to me). It will take maybe two or three months. The rest of it was perfect: three months working as a volunteer in the Saku Youth Centre, a quiet and small city in Estonia which is famous for its beer and which is full of cultural activities during summertime. There are also very good people that helped me since the moment I applied.

So I had two options: sitting and waiting for the good things to happen or taking the opportunities as soon as I arrive. To get used to Saku was easy. The sympathy of their people, the warmness of my bosses and this kind of life which is so relaxing and peaceful made everything very natural.

But my big surprise was that the best part of the project came from unexpected things, that weren't in the plan at first. To work with children with special needs, to give Spanish lessons for adults and the possibility to live in an intercultural environment were three of the most gratifying experiences I've ever had in my EVS.

Sometimes three months can be everything when you take good advantage of the situation. 90 days full of travels, of different children from different countries and cultures, status or needs, regional parties, cooking days or intercultural evenings can be enough to change you.

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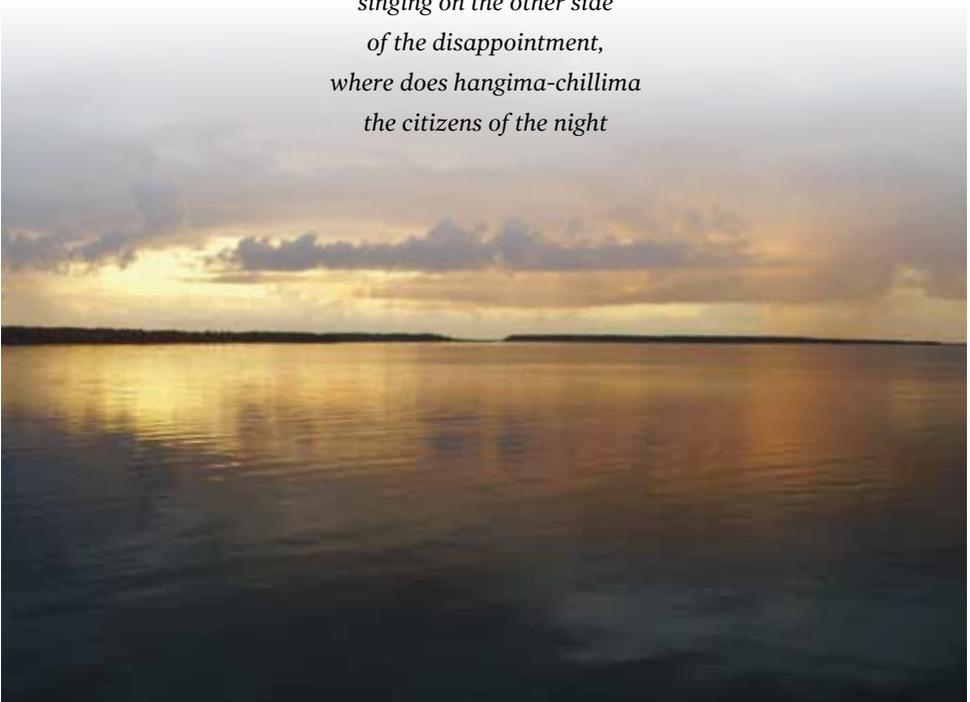
Manuel Rodriguez Lozano
from Spain
volunteer in the Saku Youth Centre
from June to August 2008

*Rusalka,
you that requited me
Twilightless Sea;
all in a sorrow.*

*Winged Beloved
Whom I left salt and ciphers
like a forfeit.*

*Lover
chained to a silence full of edges,
bearing a brain
electrical colour.*

*Dilettant clepsydra
singing on the other side
of the disappointment,
where does hangima-chillima
the citizens of the night*



Miracle: To Breathe as One

Lelde Upite

from Latvia

volunteer in the Estonian

Song and Dance Celebration Foundation

June-July 2009

In the North of Europe there is a small country that some people from Southern Europe still recognize as a part of Soviet Union. But this country has strong cultural roots. Their traditions and customs have survived through different times. There were Germans and Russians, Swedish and Danish people coming with their cultural experience, but still the ancient spirit of the land's true inhabitants didn't disappear. The country is Estonia and the people are Estonians, who kept their best traditions and didn't allow them vanish through the times.

In the beginning of summer 2009, fifteen young people from all around European Union came to Tallinn to learn a little bit more about Estonian culture. They were lucky, because they were invited to be a part of one of the biggest world miracle that all three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – are proud of. The miracle is Song and Dance Festival. You could wonder why it's a miracle. If you have ever been a part of one of these festivals, there are no questions anymore. That atmosphere, these feelings, that unity which brings thousands of people together! Even UNESCO has admitted the Song and Dance Festival of the Baltic States as something unique and important to protect. In the year 2009 Estonia had the XXV Song and the XVIII Dance Festival named To Breathe as One. That was the reason which brought one Greek, one Bulgarian, two Hungarians, one Italian, two Spanish, two French, one British, one Swedish, two Latvians, one Lithuanian and one Austrian to Estonia to spend two of the hottest months of the year in one of the most Northern country in Europe – Estonia.

Everyone came with his or her theoretical knowledge about Estonia, about music and dance, about history, but the true Estonia surprised them. Who could imagine how strong can one nation be when it sings and dances? How can a song and a dance connect almost everyone in a country with a population of approximately 1.3 million people? That's a real miracle! And that's the real spirit of Estonians that these fifteen young people will bring

back to their countries with unforgettable memories of Eesti Laulu- ja Tantsupidu.

This year of festival involved lots of foreigners. They came as volunteers, as guests and even as participants. There were even choirs and people coming from the United States and Canada. The biggest amazement was for the people who were in Song and Dance Festival for the first time in their lives. The good emotions coming from foreign participants were indescribable. Their surprising faces, the feeling of happiness and unity. They sang with feeling as true Estonians. The crowd of patriotic people in the Song Festival stage took everyone's soul and fulfilled it with unbelievable good emotions and sensations. That's the secret how Estonian culture has survived during the Centuries. They don't keep everything for themselves - they share the best of their culture with others. That is how to make people aware of your nation. As a result there will be at least one who "knows" in every part of the World. And that's how a small country can become big. You don't need to have huge territories with billions of people speaking the same language. The only thing you need is to have one good short word going out of your country into the big World. Every good word said to the others spreads quickly. After this year's Song and Dance Festival there are so many people who will be the sparks in all around the World and will share their best memories all over the Earth.

For us EVS is..

*Volunteers in the Estonian
Song and Dance Celebration
Foundation
project "To Breathe as One"
June-July 2009*

EVS is the best opportunity. There are not so many things that can take place only once in your life, but if you have some, you should use all of them.

Lelde
from Latvia

EVS is a second chance because basically you quit your life at home, you just simply leave everything behind and you get a second chance to make your life different and better than it is at home. You meet people who judge you, who you are, NOT who you were in the past.

Andrea
from Hungary

EVS is sunrise. Sunrise stands for the beginning of a new day. I compare this with EVS because the EVS is for me the beginning of a new year.

Manu
from Austria

EVS is intercultural because people from different countries and cultures are gathering for a common purpose: to help in an event-festival or activity. It's nice to have friends from abroad.

This relationship is based on the respect of other person's individuality and it's fascinating, how so different people can be combined for the best result.

Stratos
from Greece

Peace, love and EVS. EVS is a good way to understand different cultures around Europe.

Kim
from Sweden

EVS is the extension of outlook on life. You can meet new people, visit new places, do things that you've never done before... That's great.

Ani
from Bulgaria





EVS is open horizons. Discovering new people, new cultures, languages, are big players in making new experiences and emotions.

Juanjo
from Spain

EVS is companionship. Fifteen people from eleven different countries come together on a neutral place (Estonia) to live and work together and have to manage differences in language and culture so they open themselves in the group and add their horizons in order to learn more about tolerance, humanity and human relationships.

Manu
from Austria

EVS is forever a memory because you can always look back. Because the people you help out will always remember what you have done.

Beth
from UK

EVS is connection between nations because

- you can live in another country and not just go there as a tourist, between young people
- they have to live and work together

- they may become friends or sometimes even more than friends, between country and country
- sending and hosting organizations have to be in touch during the whole project.

Erika
from Hungary

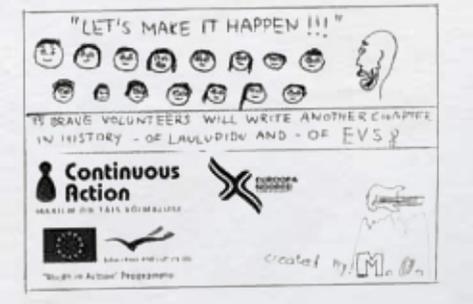
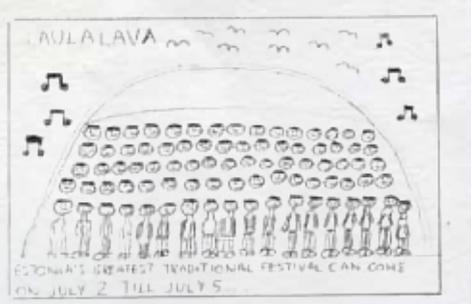
EVS is colors. Life is colors but sometimes you use to draw always with the same kind. EVS is a way to know that they are many colors to discover.

Almudena
from Spain

EVS is personal development and good atmosphere. EVS offers the possibility to share this rich thought, which is the culture of everyone, with each one. It gives us also time devoted to a common goal and to entertainment, which allows, associated with enthusiasm and motivation, to share a lot of time together and to develop friendship. The good feeling between the volunteers create a good atmosphere, a nice time to enjoy together, joking, creating and developing ideas and himself: it's the informal education which is nicer than the formal one.

Leo
from France

EVS What will be for you?



Intercultural friendship

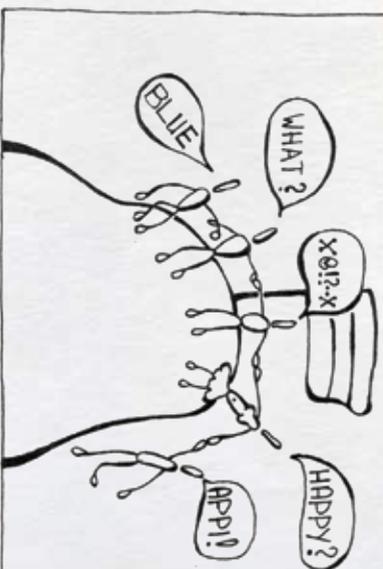


EVS STRANGERS

2009.06.01.
45 strangers FROM 41
DIFFERENT COUNTRIES
ARRIVE IN ESTONIA

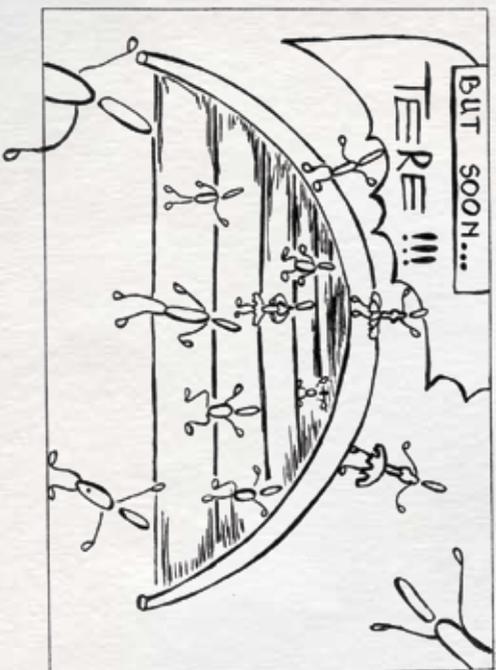


[AT FIRST...]



BUT SOON...

TERE !!!



2009.01.15
45 FRIENDS DEPART
FOR THEIR HOME COUNTRIES.

**Continuous
Action**



liberation.net/eur/evs

MAAILM.ORG TAIS VOIMALUSI "Youth in Action" Programme

