

2013

CONTACT

Magazine



EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY
SERVICE

Estonian impressions

2013

Publisher

Continuous Action MTÜ
www.continuousaction.ee

Edition, DTP

Radek Jakubiak

Photos

Private collections

Cover

Artwork by Attila Jager



This project has been funded with the support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the authors' views only, 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) in a country outside of Europe in a field which interests him/her the most. 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 supports 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 euroopa.noored.ee/evs or European Commission's webpage ec.europa.eu/youth

Continuous Action

Continuous Action as a non-government, 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 action 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, training and events;
- Providing information and counselling services;
- Development, coordination 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 organizations 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 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



Radek Jakubiak Karolina Kwinta

From Wrocław, Poland

Project 'Together is better'

Continuous Action office

March 2013 - June 2013

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO DO EVS?

We decided to start EVS in Estonia, because we've never been in this part of Europe. We love travelling and after finishing studies we have visited a lot of places. One year ago before our moving to UK, we had the info meeting with our sending organization about EVS and possibility to visit such an amazing place like Estonia for 7 months. Our CVs were sent to Continuous Action and after one week we got the answer: YES, you can go! 8 months later we came back from England, packed our bags and arrived to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia.

After the 23 hours travel to Estonia, we arrived to Tallinn at 11:30 pm on 4th of March 2013. There was snow everywhere and it was terribly cold. But we weren't scared, because we had the same weather this time in Poland. After 11 hours of sleep we started exploring Tallinn. We definitely fell in love with this city. Medieval old town and the sea just a couple of minutes from it, it is absolutely amazing!

We weren't afraid of going to Estonia, for us it was big adventure. We met a lot of different, amazing people and we hope that we will keep in touch with some of them.

PROJECT EXPERIENCE

During our stay in Estonia, we worked in the Continuous Action office. We learned how an NGO is working and how to apply for EVS and Youth Exchanges project. It was very useful for us.

Amongst other things, our activities included: meeting with future volunteers in EU House in Tallinn or Polish Days in Youth Center in Põltsamaa. In our free time we worked as volunteers for the Polish Embassy, we made together Polish stand during European Day. It was a nice event.

The whole project and our stay in Estonia also made us think about what we want to do in our future. For example, Karolina decided it is time to go back into laboratory work. She really missed that, even though working with people was an interesting and inspiring challenge.



FREE TIME

We visited some places in Estonia. We were in Pärnu, there is a very cool beach there - and Tartu - the student capital of Eesti. And we will never forget the view of Tallinn from Pirita. We will also miss Estonian food and Leppoja - a settlement in the middle of the forest where we had our mid-term training.

We were also planning to go for a 3-day hike on the RMK trail, but unfortunately we ran out of time. We still want to do it though, even if we have to go all the way to Estonia again! It will make some nice holidays too :)

We absolutely are big fans of this country and we really want to come back here!!!



Constanze Fürst

From Munich, Germany

Project 'Children in Joy'

Kiikhobu Kindergarten

September 2012 - August 2013

THE GREAT DEMANDED QUESTIONS IN BREVITY:

Why EVS? – Why not?

Why Estonia? – Estonia is the Bermuda of Europe, not even everybody knows that it exists and if you go out in winter during the whole-day-darkness and the never ending snowfall, you can even get lost – challenge accepted.

Your fears before arrival? – No fears.

Weather in Estonia? – I am still alive, so no panic about the cold. Don't care about what Wikipedia tells you, come here and enjoy Estonian winter and summer, and yes, there is summer!

What I liked the most? – The winter, the beach, my Spanish volunteers, my teachers.

What I didn't like? – Dark November, the kindergarten food, too little food money, sometimes the support of the organization.

What I will miss the most? – My Latin Ladies :)

FOLLOW ME AROUND

Estonia, Tallinn, somewhere in Mustamäe, 8 o'clock in the morning. "Constaaaanz tuli!" (*Constanze arrived*). I enter the room of my kindergarten group, there are already 8 children in the age of 5 and 6 sitting at the table, drawing, making puzzle, dreaming... at the end of the day there will be up to 20 of them.

I talk to one of my teachers to hear about what's going on today, and join a group of girls who are drawing. It's not a challenge anymore to draw a princess in 3 minutes, if you do that for 8 months every day. Then it's time for breakfast, porridge, for those of you, who don't know what it is, come to Estonia and find out, you will eat it every day.

After breakfast, I take paper, glue and scissors and start to make handicrafts with the girls, they are very creative - I found out that's the easiest way to make them happy.

Around 9:30 we have our morning circle for around 15 minutes. Today is Tuesday the 7th of May, the sun is shining. So the kids have to answer some questions. Aside from that, they get some easy mathematic tasks, learn something about environment or family.

Two times a week they have music lessons, so we go upstairs in a big sunny room, where the music teacher is already waiting for us. "Laulame" (*Let's sing!*)

10:30 time for dressing up. We stay outside till 12:15. Running, playing with the ball, building castles in the sand (I think that in the winter months I was running with the sleighs for up to 45 minutes)... I like staying outside, so for me that was the perfect work.

We eat at 12:30, if you don't like potatoes you should think twice about choosing Estonia. At 1 o'clock the children go to sleep, I sit next to their bed, stroke their heads.

Half past one: my day in kindergarten ends, I go home.

FREE TIME!!!

Olé olé, I arrive home, if the weather is nice I take my running shoes, jump in the trolley bus, go to the beach, which is 45 minutes away from my home, but it's worth it. In Munich there is no sea so I enjoy every minute running, watching the waves and the seagulls.

Arriving home in the late afternoon again, checking Facebook, to know where the Party is taking place tonight. During the week it's most of the time more gathering, every Tuesday volunteers meet to watch a movie from different countries, on the other days I just enjoy the company of Spanish, Italian, Romanian, ..., people or go watching soccer. At the weekend traveling or PIDU PIDU!

Most of the time Ana, my Spanish roommate, is with me. It's so important to have a good relationship with the people you live together with and especially if you share a room. I am very thankful that Ana was an important part of my EVS, and now I am feeling very Spanish :) See you in Granada for my Erasmus Guapa!



WHAT DID I LEARN DURING THESE 12 MONTHS?

For sure I learned Estonian language, I don't speak fluently, but I can understand you Estonian people, so be aware of what you

talk about in front of me (this is also the explains how I communicated with the children in the kindergarten... eesti keeles, you can do it)!

For sure I learned how to live "alone", keeping a household etc. I have also learned how different children react and how to handle that.

But the most important point that I learned is that I am European. The European Voluntary Service is the best opportunity to keep in mind that we all have something in common and to recognize that it is important to stay together as European Union, you will understand what I am talking about when you decide to get this experience.

We are the generation that has to keep the system working, especially in times of crises and political discourses. I was able to see at the example of my Armenian and Georgian friends what it means when you don't have the freedom to travel where you want, I don't wanna miss this freedom!

Marco Mazzara

From Palermo, Italy

Project 'Children and Joy'

Vikerkaar Kindergarten

September 2012 - July 2013

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO DO EVS?

I decided to do EVS when I still was a student of computer science.

It wasn't a very good period of my life, also I couldn't say that I loved what I studied, so my mind was not quiet enough for complete that academic road.

I was still at home with my parents, and although I love them very much, it wasn't enough to live together with them, when you are already a 25 years old young man. Furthermore, I always have had a little conflict with some sides of the culture and the morality of my land, and for this reason I always dreamed of my transfer to another country.



EVS has been for me like a springboard for my dreams and the will of improve and change my life.

WHAT WERE YOUR FEARS?

This is the most easy concept that I can actually express (but also before the project): NO fears.

The fears of what? Living alone managing every details of your life don't have to be a fear but a pleasure. While it could be hard, personally I think that is the main aim of a human being.

The EVS gave me right this: the possibility of live at 360° without any restrictions apart my will and judgement.



It had been really hard sometimes for sure. When the world around you is not the same as the one you were born in, some discouraging situations may happen.

I still remember the first months in the supermarket with paper and pen in my hands: read and write all that you can; then go home to translate and understand. It wasn't just a question of translation: often it was discovering new local habits and behavior. For example I spent one week to understand what hapukoor (sourcream) really is. Something almost unknown in Italy!

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT THE EVS WILL GIVE YOU?

My EVS life left me with a big amount of experience: I met many people, foreign and local. I learned languages and cultures. I had fun, I was happy and sad, energetic and tired, full of tasks or bored. I loved and I hated. I helped someone and someone helped me.

I lived and I still live like I wished.

Right now I have a bit more than two months to the end of my project. I have to think where to live in the future so I don't lose all that I gained until now.

This land has still a lot to tell me. And maybe I'll spend more time here after my EVS project. Yes, EVS means also this - start to feel something strong towards the land that hosted you.

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

In Estonia I have discovered the real old side of Christmas - the pagan one!

Without too much Christian influence, in all the lands of north Europe these old traditions remained during the centuries: real Christmas trees (not the plastic ones!), huge amount of ginger biscuits and performance of the helpers of Santa Claus everywhere, all the time! Also in my workplace, the kindergarten.

In kindergarten I discovered how important it is to live in a comfortable and well ruled environment to make the kids good future citizens of a country.

Starting from the lessons of music and traditions, to the celebration of special days, I always observed with interest how much energy the staff put in the attempt of hand down the good sides of a culture.

Ana Martínez

Toledo

From Murcia, Spain

Project 'Children and Joy'

Männikäbi Kindergarten

October 2012 - August 2013

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO COME TO ESTONIA?

A lot of people asked me this question during my first months in Tallinn. I have always been an adventurous and outgoing person who enjoys travelling, meeting new cultures and new people too. I studied to be a teacher for elementary and primary school and I did not have a job in Spain because of the deep recession. Once, someone told me about the European Voluntary Service and about the wonderful experience that it would be for me, so I did not think twice. I was interested in improving my skills in the Education field, that is why I chose this interesting project and, fortunately, I was chosen as well.

THE WEATHER

I know that the chilly weather is a usual and really commented topic among the volunteers but I have to say that it shocked me considerably. I came from the south of Spain therefore nobody can imagine how difficult was for me to survive the long, dark and cold Estonian winter.

A handful of data - my city, Murcia, has around 300 sunny days per year. On the other hand, I had never worked with handi-



capped people so it was also a big challenge. From my point of view, I consider that working with disabled children is not an easy task (all my respects for those people who do this work).

THE LEARNING

From October until now I have seen things which have surprised me (the Northern Lights), I have felt emotions I had never felt before (the loneliness), I have met people with another way of thinking, I have lived bad moments...but, undoubtedly, I have to say that this is one of the best experiences of my life. I am discovering myself, I am becoming a more mature, patient and



independent person. I have realised that happiness is from the small things and more specially, not from the material things.

I feel like at home in the kindergarten now. The headmaster, my supervisor and the other workmates have always supported me and treated me as one of them. During three months, I was teaching some of them how to dance “sevillanas” (a traditional Spanish dancing). When my Spanish friends came to Tallinn in April we did a “pidu” with typical Spanish food. I wanted my kindergarten teachers to get a better knowledge of my country and I also wanted my friends to be involved into the Estonian culture spending a lovely evening together. I will always remember that moment where all of us, Estonian and Spanish, were in a circle, holding hands, dancing, singing and sharing our traditions.

At this moment, I am looking forward to feel the summer as well as travelling to other unknown places and living great and memorable moments with my second family: the rest of the volunteers.

Cosimo Amato

From Palermo, Italy

Project ‘Children and Joy’

Jarveotsa Kindergarten

September 2012 - August 2013

THE DECISION

I decided to do the EVS because it was an opportunity to join two of my main hobbies: volunteering and travelling. In fact, EVS is not my first experience of volunteering, I already cooperated with some organizations when I lived in Italy. Staying abroad for a long time is a rousing opportunity. I began to apply for many projects about disability and I got some positive responses from Germany, Finland, Denmark and France, but those were mid-term of 5-6 months. I looked for a long-term project of 9 months, at least. Afterwards, I finally got a positive response from Estonia: I had to spend a long year in Tallinn and work in a Russian kindergarten.

THE CHALLENGES

When I have chosen the project, I knew I will have to face many challenges and the weather was the main of those. I live in Sicily, where the weather is almost African and we spend our days outside even in the winter. In Estonia the temperature can reach minus 25 and the sun goes down on November and comes back in March. Actually, in the beginning, it has been a little difficult to manage, during the winter the people are forced to spend their days in indoor spaces: pubs, clubs, café, libraries, home or elsewhere, but they can't stay outside more than twenty minutes, otherwise they begin to freeze like an ice lolly. But it can become an opportunity to have a long chat or a dinner with friends somewhere and get to know them better.

THE PROJECT

About my project, I work in a kindergarten as a teacher assistant, in a classroom of children with speech and orthopedic problems. My job is to play with children, to help them to dress or eat and to assist the teachers to carry out their activities. Besides work, I have chosen to do volunteering in a foodbank and in a library. In the spare time, I like to go in the national library to read a book or listen to music. On the weekend, we take some trips in other estonian cities or in the neighboring countries.

THE CHANGE

The Evs will give me, not one, but a lot of things. For first: a second homeland; after this long year here, Estonia became a familiar place, I really started to love it, despite the weather. I don't know yet if I will spend here some other year of my life after the Evs, but I will come back often hereafter, anyway. And if I will go back to Italy, my life in my city will be different than before, Evs has been an opportunity to change and improve myself, a chance to understand and to make clear for me what actually I want from my life, what I want to achieve. EVS gave me also some new good friends around the world. I will take with me what I learned from the children's smiles and joy, they taught me things that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. But above all, I learned how dangerous is playing football and snowball war with russian children, they have a very relative concept of fair play. After a long year with them, nothing scares me anymore.



Attila Jáger

From Veszprém, Hungary

Project 'Children and Joy'

Asunduse Kindergarten

September 2012 - July 2013

WHY DID I DECIDE TO COME?

I decided to spend almost 1 year in Estonia after finishing my studies in Hungary. I didn't think about it as a horrible journey but I expected some really struggling periods. Not because of the foreign environment but the changes in my life. I left Hungary in a disappointed mood. I needed some fresh air and loneliness to understand myself, my fears, my intentions. This is not a smooth trip but extremely necessary if I want to be satisfied with my life. No pain, no gain!

I participated in a short-term evs in Tallinn 2 years ago. Nice old town, thrash areas, galleries, skateparks and spots. By and large, it was a good time so I returned when I heard about the opportunity.

MY WORKING EXPERIENCE

I got a great accommodation in Kadriorg. I was hosted as a volunteer in Asunduse Kindergarten 10 minutes walk to my flat. I worked with 3 years old children. I enjoyed the time with them. I learnt a lot from them. The way how they think and act. They just do what they feel. They are able to say „sorry“ or „thank you“ very easily. They live in the present and have a very creative talent to express themselves without any fears or expectations. They just build, draw, create, play, learn but in a very serious way. This time helped me a lot to review my childhood and reminded me why is really important to protect the child inside us.

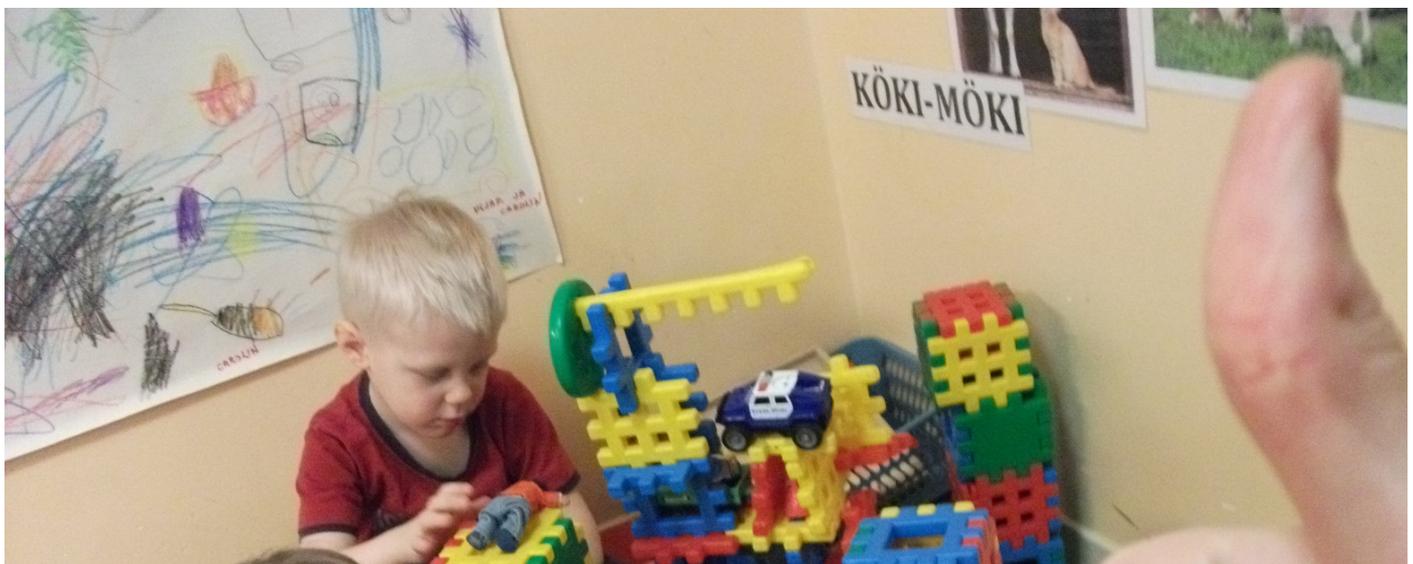


MY FREE TIME

I had a lot of happy moments here. There are some remarkable outcomes and some tiny magical moment as well. I participated in a performance festival called Dimance Rouge from Paris in Culture Factory Polymer; I had several exhibitions for example in the Hungarian Institute, in the skatepark of Pääsküla Youth Centre; I took a part in a demonstration where the objective of the event was to draw attention to the financial problems of Gruuvi Keskus Skatepark; I joined to the Democracy Project for the extreme sports with a short movie.

I enjoyed the Ilon Wikland Museum in Haapsalu, the sauna and big-foot hiking in Pillapalu, the Night of the Museums and Tantsupidu in Tartu, the skatepark at Lauluväljak, the bike road to Piritu, the beach, the Japanese Garden, the long days, the long nights, the darkness, the brightness, the flea markets, the harbour, the trash districts, to meet with strangers especially the mongolian artist in the library, the half-drunken skate-motivated estonian, the smiley russian in veru keskus named Vladislav.

I liked the movie nights in Euphoria, the intercultural football games in Lasnamäe, the estonian language course at Suur-



Ameerika, the giant pancakes in Komposter, the Simple Session contest in Saku Suurhall, the Russian-Estonian subtitled movies in Solaris, the tricolor landscape on the way to Tartu, the puppet theatre in the kindergarten

EMOTIONS

I experienced the joy, the sorrow, the loneliness and the helplessness. It was interesting how it made me stronger and developed my self-confidence. I got constructive feedbacks about my activities which helped me to take the next steps.

The best and the worst thing in evs is the freedom. I knew what I wanted to reach with my EVS so I didn't lose myself during the long term. I didn't expect others to solve and figure out my life. EVS provided me the opportunity that I could work on myself and gain upper levels successfully. Thanks for that.

Rocky Balboa says: „Until you start believing in yourself, you ain't gonna have a life!“ Maybe EVS can help.

Marie Cerwenka

From Gallneukirchen, Austria

Project 'Children and Joy'

Kullatera Kindergarten

October 2012 - August 2013

„WE ARE FROM PLANET EARTH. WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?“

I was watching a book about the Cosmos with a 3 year old, and the question above was what he asked me. Where do I come from? From Austria. Just from the Highschool-summervacations. From an environment that didn't give me a lot of chances to discover what I want to do in my life, what to study and where I see myself in the future.

„KAS SA OLED MINU SÕBER?“ - „ARE YOU MY FRIEND?“

My first week in the Kindergarten. Would the children like the strange new „teacher“ that also plays in the sandbox? Will I be able to communicate with them? Smaller children can be surprisingly moody... to conclude everything - I was being kissed and kicked ;)

„HOW OLD ARE YOU? 18?! SO YOUNG!!“

Yes, 18. To be honest, the idea of organising my own life in a completely unknown country was frightening me a bit. It took a while to adjust to the unfamiliar way of living in independence, but time by time I started to like being responsible for myself. I was curious which impact it had on me, to be so long away from my family - maybe I would even quit my project earlier because of homesickness? But I discovered that if you keep yourself a bit busy all the time, you don't think about home at all. And I really enjoyed being so independent!

„KAS SA RÄÄGID EESTI KEELT?“ - „AINULT NATUKENE.“

I knew it would be pretty challenging to learn Estonian, and my presumption turned out to be right... in the beginning I just said „...Jah..?“ or „...Ei..?“ and watched the peoples' reaction. I was really motivated to learn, but then I realized that one year is definitely not enough to learn a bit more profound Estonian. Which is a pity, because I like the language itself - the pronunciation is so soft and sounds so cute. Grammar, however, is not so cute anymore.



„ESTONIA? PEOPLE UP THERE ARE LIKE THE WEATHER THERE. COLDER.“

I was slightly worried in case this prejudice about the Estonians would be true. In the majority of cases I had the opposite impression, though. After half an hour in a huge huge supermarket, looking for breadcrumbs (of what I did not know the Estonian term) I asked a random person next to me. She spoke only a little English and did not really understand what I am talking about, and I said „thanks anyway“ and was about to go away. But she ran after me, calling an English speaking friend on the phone to whom I explained my problem. This guy then told her what I was searching for, and together we marched through half the supermarket to finally find breadcrumbs. And the weather? I have never appreciated the arrival of spring more than in this year - but it was amazing to see how fast everything suddenly awoke.

„THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, THAT EVS WILL GIVE YOU?“

I give a try to sum up such an amazing time in short: I had the chance to get to know myself better, my strenghts, but also my weaknesses. I had the chance to meet a lot of inspiring people. I had the chance to learn to appreciate the spring after a long time of winter. I had the chance to think about what interests me, how to continue in my life, to sort my thoughts. I had the chance to experience harder times and see, how things go up again. I had the chance to be a bit proud about myself.



Connie, Ana and other volunteers



Cosimo's kindergarten