

A CYA GUIDING EXPERIENCE

The Creative Youth Accademy Guide to volunteer

Created by the CYA's volunteers, a Project of
IIC-International Initiatives of Cooperation, fun-
ded by the Bulgarian National Agency under
the frame of Erasmus + programme



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

BE A VOLUNTEER

This guide is created with the aim of reflect on voluntary experiences. It needs to start trying to provide a definition for voluntary experience as more general and complete as possible. There is, indeed, a blurred line between the meaning of volunteering and the concept of being a volunteer, if the first can be described with a simple dictionary definition and is common and clear for all the volunteers around the world, the second is strictly personal and has a different meaning along with everyone's experience and needs. Therefore, a necessary mediation has to be made in order to give the most accurate definition.



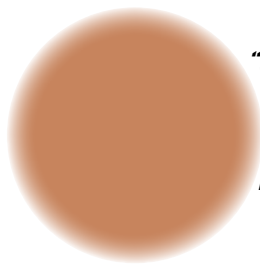
"A general definition of volunteering starts from the idea of creating and providing altruistic activities, alone or in a group, for no financial gain to benefit other people, organizations or groups. Nevertheless, it cannot be enough. To understand voluntary actions a big focus has to point out the reasons that bring someone to join a voluntary program. Personal needs, inner feelings, gap years, need to do good for others are the real reasons why people choose to undertake this kind of experience"

"As i was teaching, i learnt a lot" Ana, Spain

But what does joining a voluntary service means? Being a volunteer has not a dedicated job's field, but belongs to a social working area. Different voluntary projects bring people to test and improve their skills in different areas, such as agriculture, animals and people with disabilities and in needs support, kids education, youngsters empowerments, private activities supports. Joining a project rather than others is all about knowing personal needs and being able to find what can really fits with them.



The time spent doing voluntary experiences, no matter what kind of jobs people are in charge of, is a long term investments in term of gaining life experience (often abroad) and soft skills and, for these reasons, is always worth to be spent. It gives the possibility to develop social skills, to meet new people from all around the world and to learn stuff from them, to open the mind and to benefit, through the work, not just the others but themselves understanding the importance of what has been done as well.



*"Choose to volunteer in a place you have never been before".
Ruben, Spain*

If you had to make a list of all the things that being a volunteer means, the proper execution of the job you are in charge of would be in the last position. Not because it's not important, but because this experience is a lot more than just doing a job, doesn't matter what is the social cause. First of all, volunteering gives the opportunity to change people's life, gives the satisfaction of playing a role in someone else's life, giving back to different communities and gaining key skills to use in life. Self-confidence and self-esteem are part of the personal assets that a voluntary experience gifts, the awareness of having enhanced someone else's life gives back emotional fulfillments that cannot be reached with money.

The special feelings given by the connection with other people helps you in many different ways. People that have volunteered in their life are more responsible and self confident. Despite volunteering doesn't need specific job skills, it helps to gain many skills that will be very useful at the time you will seek for a job, such as team working, problem solving with limited resources, fast adaptation in different and disadvantageous environments and many others.

WHAT DOES BEING A VOLUNTEER MEANS ?

VOLUNTEER'S ROLES

To understand the role of a volunteer is mandatory to start knowing which are their rights and their duties. Depending on the voluntary project you have applied for, there will be different rights and duties. Pocket money, accommodation, food allowances, free time will depend from the agreement you have signed with the organization where you will be volunteering, along with weekly work hours, job tasks, duties toward the organization. However, there are common rights for every volunteer in the world. Voluntary comes from you, this doesn't mean that you have to feel yourself in right of give up your job whenever you want, but you have the right to understand your limit and what you want to do and what you don't.

In other words, you have the right to say no (we will talk about this later). You have the right to quit your voluntary experience when you feel that for you must end, but, in the same time, you should be sure to have completed your purpose, because although you are volunteering for yourself, you are also working for an organization that has exceptions from you.

How many times have you stood up and wanted to change your life and turn it 360 degrees? We are used to following the pre-established, studying, going to college and working until you find the work of your life

Because "if you don't go to college right after finishing high school you won't be anyone" and because "if you don't start working right after finishing college you won't be either" so when someone considers volunteering in Europe the main question is: why volunteer if you can do other things like continue studying or looking for a job?.

Well, basically because European volunteering makes you live a new experience, in a different country that is within the European Union, with the opportunity to know a new

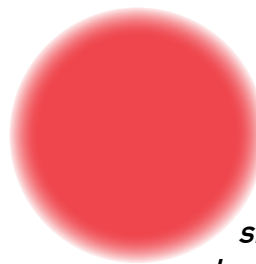
WHY SHOULD YOU DO A VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE

"Diversity is an asset if mixed with mutual respect and dignity! An open mind needs an open heart to set up a familiar environment".
Luis, Portugal



WHAT REWARDS DOES VOLUNTEER WORK HAVE?

culture, make friends from all over Europe and grow personally, if the project you decide to do is related to what you would like to dedicate yourself to or what you have studied, it can be useful to practice everything you have learned and if the project has nothing to do with what you have studied or what you want to dedicate yourself to in a different country. What you have to be 100% sure of is that volunteering in Europe can completely change your mentality and, above all, your life.



Learn by learning: listen to yourself in challenging situation, be always active and meet the community
Antonio, Portugal

Volunteer work is not only rewarding for other people. The work can also be beneficial to you. When taking a wider look at the topic of volunteer work you will see, that it is offering a lot of chances to improve. Doing something new and different requires you to be confident in yourself and your skills. If you are not a confident person you will have a chance to improve. Volunteer work requires you to step out of your comfort zone. Try something new and you will feel the achievement. Trying to change the world and change history are high expectations for volunteer work. No the less volunteer work can have a beneficial impact on the people around you. Improve the life of others and your own. You will see a difference



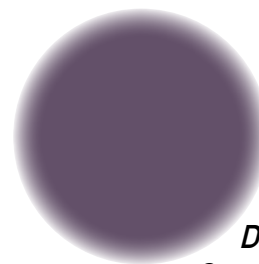
DIFFICULTIES FACED DURING VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCES

The world is a small place. While doing volunteer work you get the chance to meet like minded people, who share with the same motivation. There have been worse situations to meet new people. Volunteering is a great way to get in contact with people. Did you ever wanted to learn a new skill? How to handle a stressful situation or how to work on your own. You have the option to learn new skills for free. Other people may pay a lot of money to acquire such skills. How fortunate are you to have such a great opportunity to learn?

Challenge yourself with the work. It is like jumping in the cold water. At first it is a big shock and you want to leave. After a while you get a bit better and in the end you can not imagine to leave the water. It is the same with volunteer work. You will do things you never could imagine to do.

To do a European volunteer work, like everything else has its difficulties, because it is necessary to take into account several things like that the volunteer is in a country other than his or her own, he or she lives in the same house with a group of people with different cultures, during the first weeks it is normal that one does not feel adapted, but at the most a month has already taken the routine of living and working as a volunteer. Depending on the country where you are volunteering, you will find it more difficult to get in touch with the inhabitants of the town or city, since it is not the same for a Portuguese in Italy as it is for a Portuguese in Germany.

But all this does not mean that volunteering is going to be hard, on the contrary, it will fill us with experience and make us discover ourselves and our qualities



*"Don't be afraid
of being your-
self".*

*Dorothea,
Germany*



You are a volunteer and you enjoy your work. It is really a fulfilling work and you spent a lot of time there. You simply enjoy the work. Your colleges are nice, the environment is great and the cause of your work is the best. Managing the work is no problem for you and are doing a great job. Everybody is amazed by your work. Sometimes you even think to yourself: I would pay money to work here. It is the best decision you made to start volunteer work. What can stop you in the volunteer work? You feel incredible good doing the work. You are constantly thinking on how to do more. How to improve the work and what is missing. Your life seems to center about the volunteer work. You enjoy the work in any possible way.

but then...

*"Learn to work in team
and on your own!"
Maria, Italy*

Out of nowhere comes a request to you. You ask again to not misunderstand it. You have to do this? You think to yourself: I can not do this. It is just impossible. You feel how everything in your body is moving against this simple task. How is it possible? You loved the work and now this? You are not enjoying it anymore.

Big part of volunteer work is to step outside your comfort zone. Nonetheless this aspect can ruin your volunteer experience in total. You should never do something you do not feel comfortable doing. Take the courage and point out your problem and try to be honest. What bothers you about the task? Find a solution for your problem. It can take a lot of courage to take these steps, but you will not regret doing so. Being open about a problem can be a big advantage.

WHEN TO SAY NO

POSSIBILITIES NOWADAYS

Being a volunteer is easier than you think, nowadays the possibilities are a lot, it just depends on the necessity you have. You can decide to spend just few hours per week in volunteering or dedicate all your energy to the cause. Volunteering is time you dedicate for you personal inner growth, you will decide how to spend it. Above all, to volunteer is not necessary to go abroad, a lot of people think in their hometown there're no possibilities to have these kind of experiences but most of the time they're wrong. A volunteer can operate in any field of social working, you will easily be helped by the parish church of your hometown to find a voluntary experience nearby home, but homeless and animal shelters too are places where possibility can be found. Good places to find voluntary possibilities are the public buildings, such as libraries, town halls, cultural centers, museums, parks and so on.

During the summer often many festivals are organized all around the world, you should take the chance and ask for volunteering, many times organizers are looking for people available to help during the event. However, if you are looking for a different type of experience where also your ability to adapt in another country and really will be challenged, you should open your pc and start checking the thousands and more possibilities all around the web. An EVS experience, but also moving abroad to teach english in order to obtain TEFL certification, or (if your studies are in that direction) supporting medical centers as a doctor or a nurse, are chances worth to take in order to change completely your life.

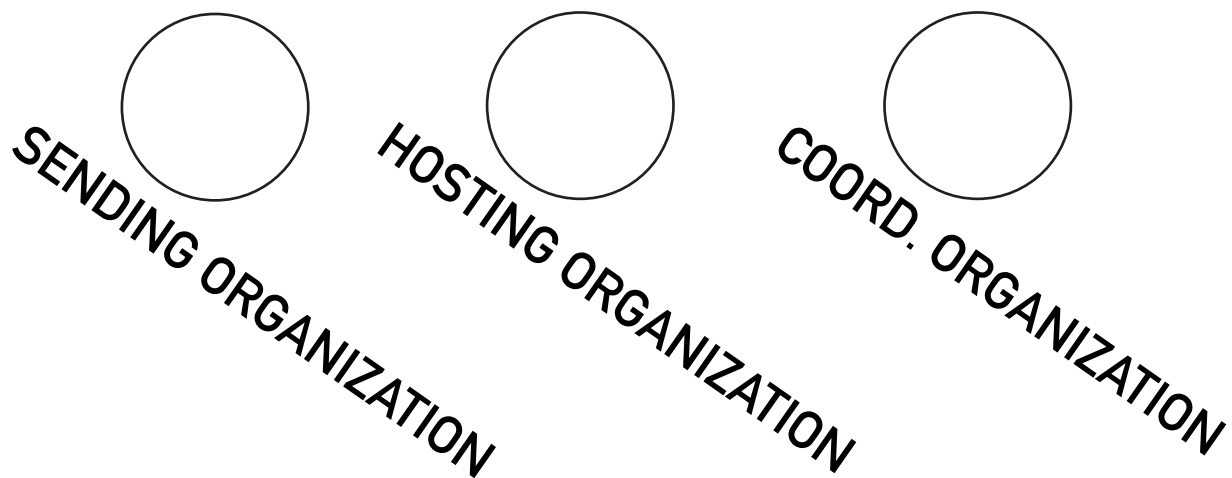


*Different
backgrounds
and nationalities
are
resources!*
Ruben, Spain

Facing the reality of the world opens your mind, your eyes and helps you to discover how you really want to spend your lifetime. Many people completely changed their purpose in life after an experience like that. To apply, whatever your voluntary experience will be, is always very easy. If you are looking for something in your hometown the only thing to do is to take heart and ask, it will be worth for sure!! If you are looking for volunteering abroad, the website of EVS is easy to surf and full of thousands of possibilities all around Europe where you will have the opportunity to train yourself and your experiences.

EVS'S PLAYERS





The sending organization is dedicated to managing the EVS project in the volunteer's country of residence. These sending organisations may be non-governmental organisations, foundations and administrations.

The sending organisation is responsible for advising the person seeking to make an EVS, ensuring their pre-departure training and submitting the application form.

The host organisation is the one that manages the EVS project in the country where it is going to be carried out. *They can be host organisations: non-governmental organisations, foundations and administrations such as town councils.*

It's the one in which the volunteer carries out the tasks, as well as the one in charge of providing decent accommodation, food, pocket money and adequate socio-cultural and linguistic training. Usually submits final reports to the national agency. There is one person in the host organisation who acts as a reference for the volunteer and acts as a tutor

The coordinating organisation is an entity that coordinates together with the host organisation to submit application forms and final report to the national agency. In other words, it assumes a part of the responsibility of the host organisation, which, depending on the agreement between the two organisations, may assume more responsibilities.

*It's not always
about you, it's
about the pe-
ople, organi-
zation and all
the actors who
surrounds you*
Ana, Spain

Did you ever think about participating in a mobility project of the European Union. Seeing the world and meeting people can be pretty interesting experience to anybody. There are even a reward for doing such an adventure. You will receive a Youthpass at the end of such a project.

YOUTHPASS

The first question you may have is: What is a Youthpass? The Youthpass is a certification. For recognising the acquired skills during your mobility project.

One of our volunteers applied for a trainee job in Belgium. For that application the Youthpass was really valuable, because it clearly states the necessity of non-formal learning and the skills the volunteer gained throughout his voluntary service. The volunteer got the job and now applies for another one in Slovenia. As a matter of fact, he actually did become a European citizen.

YOUTH WORKER

The Youtpass is a tool to reflect your work and to recognise the achievements of your project. With the Youthpass you have highly recognized certification. This document is reflection of your skills and highly regarded among Universities and future employees. It is also cool to brag with among your friends and family.

*Planning to start a project?
Be sure to know
situation,
structure,
target! You
need to un-
derstand the
needs of people
you will work with!*

Luis Caimlo, Portugal

Nonetheless the Youthpass should not be your motivation to participate in a mobility program. It is a great and useful reward for your work. Let us spin a bit the time machine and imagine we have finished the mobility project. How are we going to fill out the Youthpass? The Youthpass will contain your personal information, a introduction of the project, key information of the project and your responsibilities and a description of the learning experience.

*"Never wait! When
you want to create
something, go for
it! Don't wait for
someone to start
it for you (not even
your organization).*

Be the Seed!"

Antonio, Portugal

WHY IS THE YOUTHPASS SO IMPORTANT?

EIGHT COMPETENCES

An evaluation form prepared by the EU, which you can use to reflect your learning.

Communication in mother tongue

- Here you could write about teaching your language
- Translating your own language
- Presenting your language

Communication in foreign languages

- The language you learned
- How did you interact with people

Mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology

- Skills in IT
- Calculating your budget
- Environmental issues

Digital competences

- Usage of the Internet for your project
- Coordinating activities online
- Putting up contacts

Learning to learn

- How did you acquire new skills
- How did you teach somebody new skills

Social and civic competences

- Seeing problems in the communities
- Working with people in need
- Participating in demos

Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

- Seeing new opportunities for the project
- Reaching out to other organisations
- Creating own activities

Cultural awareness and expression

- How did you live together
- Understanding of other cultures
- Respecting others behavior
- Other specific skills (Optional)
- Things that did not fit into the other categories

*"If you expect to profit from this work, you are in the wrong place!".
Janiki, Italy*

INTEL

STORIES

inspiring stories
from CYA
volunteers





DOROTHEA NEUBAUER CYA VOLUNTEER

If I would describe my EVS with only one word it would be “unexpected”. After I came back from my first failed experience in foreign countries for longer than just holidays I was totally lost and didn’t know what to do with me and my free time.

After around one month of doing nothing I received an e-mail that a volunteer in Bulgaria is needed. So I thought: “I have nothing to do and really need something to do and they really need someone.” After I wrote one

mail everything went incredible fast. It was around two weeks and everything was fixed and on the 1th of January 2017 I started my adventure. It began with forgetting my phone, breaking the internet on my laptop

and the (successful) try to come to Razlog without a possibility to get in contact with David or Kostadinka, and ended up with 5 months full of experiences and more little adventures.

So let's start my journey: On my first day in Razlog the weather was really good. I took the first bus in the morning and after I asked a few people in the bus if I could use their phone and called David like five times I could finally reach him and say to him when I will be in Razlog. He picked me up at the bus station and we brought my stuff to Ellie's house. We had to wait a bit on the door until Antoncho finally opened the door. Everybody had a big hangover from the New-Years-Day and was sleeping. So I met practically no one. The first thing I saw was the kitchen in a BIG mess and I thought: "My Goodness?!" We just could put my stuff in the corridor and I would introduce to Ellie. My first impression of her was really good and I thought she's a nice woman but this should change really quick. David brought me to his apartment and I met Kostadinka. Actually I was really surprised that they are a couple and have

children. We had breakfast together and after I went to the toilet I was more relaxed because I was on my period these days. Their oldest son, Alexander, wanted to sit the whole time on my laps and the younger one, Konstantin, wanted to play with me the whole time. It was really funny because Alexander was eating and enjoying and I couldn't eat properly. After the breakfast we met Reny, Valo and Pepi and together we went to take a coffee. There were also some friends of Reny if I remember right. Everyone was talking in Bulgarian and so I was playing with Alexander most of the time. After a while I went home, could finally take a shower and relax a bit. I thought the other volunteers would come in maybe one hour or so and so I didn't sleep even though I was really tired. I spend the whole time in the kitchen (which was clean now) and read a book. When I finally decided to take a little rest the others came and it was a big hello. All of them gave

me a hug and kisses on the cheeks and I was so totally NOT used to this kind of saying hello - in Germany we shake hands and that's it - that it was a bit wired for me to have so much physical contact with people I don't know at all. Also Elli came down and everything got louder. After everybody calmed down a bit and Ellie went back upstairs Filly started to paint every one's hair. I thought that it would be good if she also makes my hair to make the first step in to the group. After the whole hair painting we went to the restaurant behind Ellie's house and had a dinner there. I shared a salad with Filly and everyone was looking at me like I'm totally crazy that I just order a salad. On the dinner I met for the first time Janiki and I was a bit intimidated by him. Maybe because I never saw him before and he looked and acted so grown up. I think the words I used the most that day were "Ah" and "Okay". Nothing else. The following week we were just sitting



in the office because the children were in winter holidays so we couldn't go to the school. During this week I bought my first smart phone and finally I could do something in the office. I also went to "Home for Kids" and the "Rehabilitation Centre". My first experience in the school was really nice. I went with Luis and he told me everything what I needed to know and how we will do this activity. The activity itself was really good and I enjoyed it a lot. To work with Luis and Janiki was always nice. It was clear what we will do and how we will do it. Unfortunately I didn't work with them a lot. At my second weekend we went to Greece. Actually we could write a book about this trip with funny stories but I will give you only a few impressions: Our first problem in Athens was how we can get to and in our apartment and then how to follow Rubencho in his crazy vacation-speed to make pictures from everything without people and see EVERYTHING. I think I saw whole Athens during one day. On the first night we wanted to have dinner in an alternative part of Athens but

at the end we found more warehouses than something like restaurants or bars. Rubencho thought one of the warehouses is a restaurant and went inside. After 30 seconds he came out again, totally shocked, and said with big eyes and a quiet voice: "Oh my god! I saw a naked woman!". Actually I was sure from the beginning, that it's not a restaurant and I regretted it a bit that I didn't go inside as well. For me it was really good that I went right at the beginning with them to vacations to integrate myself better in the group. The next big thing or event was the cooking competition in MAZA. I think this was the hardest week for me in my whole EVS. We had to cook in our national teams and because I was the only one from Germany I had to cook alone. Filly supported me during the whole preparation and was a big help for me. We also had to go to the other activities like school, "Moga", "Reha Centre" and "Home for Kids". Actually the

whole week was a big mess because the schedule for this week was not really clear. I was enormous stressed because we had to manage everything in the last minute and improvise a lot. Also the thing with the restaurant was not clear and I had to go almost every day there to discuss something with the owner. In this week I really felt uncomfortable and that I didn't have privacy. The day of the event was at the beginning a shit and then at the end when Janiki was supporting me and tried to make me feel better it was really good. The party after we cooked and had the presentations of our countries was great and then I was just happy that I could go home and sleep. It was a bit difficult to bring Antoncho home because he was drunk and aggressive and threw me in every snow hill on the street but somehow we could make it. Then we went to the big trip... ...never again in my life. I mean it was nice and all this but I remember more the

thing they didn't work so well during this trip than the good ones. The first thing was the car. We were seven people and the car was for five people with two seats in the car trunk. I was sitting on the car trunk places all the time except once when I was sitting on the co-driver seat. Okay, to be honest. The back was not too bad but you needed like 10 minutes to go in and then again 10 minutes to go out of the car. The second and bigger thing was that we had too little communication between each other and too many misunderstandings. Always there was a vague hunch where we will go next but most of the time I didn't have a clue where we wanted to go. Now to the good sides of the trip. I saw nice things in and around Bulgaria. The best of all was Transylvania and the mountains full of snow. I also began my first relationship and laugh a lot and had fun during this time. At least as much as I was desperate to didn't know to which place we were walking since two hours with -10°C. All in all: Nice but not again. In the beginning of March it was already time

to say tschau tschau to Janiki. I needed to say good bye earlier because I was at this time in Sofia on the on-arrival-training. The training was really nice and I had a lot of fun. I wanted the whole time to go to a strip-tease bar but at the end I didn't go because at the last evening I fell asleep in the bar we have been and I just went back to the hotel. Rubén and Anabel were in Istanbul and they came back for a few days until they had to go back to Spain. I think in the two weeks between Anabel and Rubén left and until Antoncho and Luis (the two Portuguese volunteers) had to go back to Portugal I laugh the most during my EVS. Antoncho and I made a lot of stupid things and we always teased Filly. It was really, really funny (at least for us). On the day when they had to leave and we brought them to the bus station Filly was crying like there was no tomorrow. For that you have to know that Filly and I are like fire and water. I'm organized and straight and she is the

total opposite. At the beginning I was really scared and thought we would kill each other after two days but we fit perfectly together. Of course we had some times where we fought a bit and also wanted to kill each other but most of the time it was amazing. We were only two weeks alone and then Rubencho came back to work in the office and to be our "boss". For this month I can say it was my best one without doubt. I enjoyed the work and also the free time more than before. The work, maybe because there was a lot of work for only two volunteers and so we always had to do something. The free time I think because Filly and I wanted to do the same... stay in the bed. Filly was always watching or reading Asian gay stuff and I was listening to audio books. Even if it sounds like we were doing nothing else than lying in our beds we did a lot of things. For example we made an "Easter-event" in the central park of Razlog which was amazing.



A few days before we had to work with some Grand-mas and help them with school classes from Sofia. They were around 100-120 kids and we invited all of them to come to our event. After they said yes and all of them wanted to come we realized what we did and got a bit in panic because we NEVER worked with so many children before. At the end it was a lot of fun and I will keep it as a very good memory. My best friend Leonard visited me over eastern and so we went to see a few things around Razlog. The weekend after he went back to Germany we were in Plovdiv. We travelled by train which was slowly but also funny because we didn't know where we had to change the train and so we run every five minutes to the timetable in the train. Next to timetable there was sitting a man and I think he was really annoyed by us. At least when I couldn't hold back a fart (it was a quiet one) near to his face. On the train station in Plovdiv our couch-surfing-host picked us up and brought us to his home. There we ate a lot and then fall asleep. Our host was talking a lot and I think he would have talked two hours more

when we didn't said to him like 15 times that we are really tired and wanted to sleep. He is really goodhearted but he also was bit wired. Our only day in Plovdiv was amazing. We walked around a bit, saw a lot of things and in the evening we went out for a beer. On the next day at seven we had to get a bus to Sofia to pick up some of the participants for the music youth exchange from the airport. This day was horrible. Basically we spent to whole day in the airport. The only good thing during the whole day was that I had cards with me and Filly and I could play the whole time "MauMau". At some point I started to make a list to see which one of us is the "MauMau"-Queen. In the end it was Filly So, now to the music youth exchange. During this one and a half weeks Filly went back to Italy and I had the Wings for Life Run which should be my personal project. At the beginning it was more stress and work for me than enjoyable and fun. I helped during the project with all

the things they needed help with, I needed to make the Byebye present for Filly and then I had to make the rest of organization for the run so I couldn't spend too much time with the participants. For Filly it's really easy to integrate her in a new group and I thought for me it's the same but it was not like that. After a few days it got slowly into the group but then I could enjoy the whole youth exchange. At the end I had a lot of fun and dandruff because I went everyday to the pool in the hotel and never dried my hairs properly. This time showed me sides on myself I didn't know they exist and during I made my "personal project" I realized how difficult it is for me to ask for help or something I need. I'm really grateful that I could be in the youth exchange and that also the others gave me the feeling to be part of the group and more than just a worker from the organization. During the exchange I moved from Elies house to my new house. The new house was AMAZING. I had a

balcony and a big bathroom only for me. At the beginning it was sometimes creepy to live alone in a big house but I could handle it better than I thought. Okay, the kitchen was really small and not at the same high standard like Ellie's kitchen but it was okay and manageable.

Ellie is the landlord of the house we were living at the beginning. That apartment was maximum for four to five people but she wanted to host all the volunteers from this project so all seven of us were living there. In my first weeks we tried to move to another house but we couldn't and so we had to arrange with the situation. We girls were living in the room you have to pass if you want to go to the miniature kitchen. During the winter they were smoking in the kitchen and so my whole things stank the whole time like smoke and onions. I hated it. Ellie was entering in our rooms whenever she wanted and also her son came to our kitchen when he needed something without letting us know. She always had some problems with us and said we are not clean enough and we have to clean the kitchen more. I

was the main person who was every second day two hours in the kitchen to clean this hell just that five minutes after I finished it someone came and make it dirty without cleaning anything. After Luis and Antonio went back to Portugal Filly and I had a contention (one of thousands) with her. She was shouting at us for five minutes and we were trying to make her understand that we will clean everything and move than to the other room. But no. We had to go to the room where she wanted to have us. At this point I already didn't like her but then, on the day I moved to the new house, she threw away my hiking shoes and since that I disrespect her with all of my heart. After this really stressful and intensive week of the youth exchange I thought that everything will go a bit slower. I thought I will have some time to get used to the fact that I have to go home in a few weeks, prepare myself for this and organized the time after the EVS. Actually

I should have learned that nothing is like I expect it to be and the best thing is to have no expectations. So the two weeks before I left Razlog where unnerving. I was already with my head in Germany or at least not in the work anymore and I just wanted to relax, travel with my family, watch "InuYasha" and DO NOTHING. But fate hates me and I had to work a lot and also in a way I couldn't enjoy it too much. Of course there were some good days and lessons and it was nice to see most of the children and people I work with again and to say goodbye. But from the beginning. On the weekend after the youth exchange Leo, the new volunteer from another project, arrived. We wanted to show him the things directly in his first week but he had to work on his own things so we couldn't. On the weekend Kostadinka and David married and the wedding was pretty funny. Three days later my sister and her boyfriend came and we travelled around for the weekend. That



was a really nice time. We went to the Rila monastery (the third time for me) and then to Plovdiv. We wanted to see a special whole near to the Rila monastery but we couldn't find it and so we went back to the parking area. I asked a man if he can take us down to Rila and it turned out that they wanted to drive to Bansko. Kindly they took us with them and paid a soup for us. It was really nice because they were six Israelis and some of them could speak German so we had a few good talks. From Plovdiv we made a day trip to the valley of roses and to Buzludzha. We paid 15 Leva to go to a rose festival just to stay 10 to 15 minutes in the rain and pick some rose and that was it. Buzludzha was even more impressive then. We needed to climb through a whole in side of this abandoned building and through the same whole we could get out again. Inside were a lot of mosaics from the communism time and everything was a bit creepy because also the weather was not the best. My mum and my other sister visited me one week after the other two went back and on Wednesday, the 31th of May, I left Razlog

and went to Sofia. We visited a cave and saw the "Eyes of God". The cave was really, really big and there were also some guys climbing in it. After this we went to a small nice village in the mountains to have a coffee. We saw the Rila monastery and we wanted to go to the seven Rila lakes but we took the wrong road. At the end we decided to go back to Sofia without seeing the lakes. On the airport I had to put some of my stuff in my mums language and at the end we were both pretty near to the weight border but we had nothing to pay. This was my journey and until now the biggest adventure in my life ☐ Of course I can't remember everything and something don't fit in this diary but I tried to give you a more or less short view about my EVS.

There are more good things I will keep in mind from the EVS. For example the amazing "painting with music"-lesson in Dobarsko where we were dancing all together at the end. Or when we

met some of the Moga-people (the centre we were working with people with disabilities) and one of them run to me and gave me a kiss on the hand. And of course all the small moments when one of the small orphan kids tried to help me to close my shoes and my jacket, when he gave me a small kisses and when he called me "kaka" which means "big sister" in Bulgarian. I collected a lot of nicknames e.g. Little Hitler, Dorogamba or Dorogambinia, German tank, Potorothea and a few more. After I found out that you get 30% off on fruits and vegetables when the plastic bag has a red "not good anymore" sticker I collected those bags and reused them for fresh fruits and vegetables and got the 30% off. Actually I cheated where I could (during the training I didn't want to pay the ticket for the metro and I slipped through this control thing behind a friend) and stole some forks and knives and also a blanket. But I stole the things for or house so I became a functional kleptomane.

Some of the Bulgarian things I will never understand. For example why do the swings have bars instead of chains and why nobody is on the street on Sunday afternoon and evening? Now after five months I feel like the same person even if I now that I changed a lot and learned so much from the moment I arrived in Bulgaria. I learned to relax and just go with the flow in some situations, e.g. when an activity not worked like I plan it, but also to be organized and more strict in other situations. I had a lot of experiences and now I know better what I want and what I don't want for my life and my near future. I don't want to say that everything was perfect and sometimes I really felt that I was the only Not-Latino under the volunteers. Some of the people said because I'm from Germany I have to be and act and behave like this, this and this. Sometimes I could take it like a joke but at other times it was more an insult and also a pressure for me than just a joke you make with stereotypes. I'm really thankful for those five months and the people I met during this time. We are more

like a family than just friends or colleagues and I never had this before in my life. I just can give you the advice to do something like this if you have the opportunity. For me it was the best decision in my life





ANTONIO FERNANDO FELHINHO

CYA VOLUNTEER

This is my diary. I am in Bulgaria since 26 of October of 2016. I arrived in Sofia around 1 am and the airport was strange, looked a bit out of date. I had to wait to pass through passport control and I was the last one. I was not in a hurry

as strange as it may sound. After I pick my baggage, I was walking to the exit of the airport and a middle-aged man approached me and asked me if I wanted a taxi. I said yes but then I started to see that the car was parked in a dark place.

parked in a dark place. I got a bit scared because I felt something was not right. All the other taxis were in front of the airport except this one. And then I remembered that a few days before my host organisation told me to be careful

with the fake taxis. The man started to put my baggage inside of the car but I decided to say "no, I don't want to go with you, sorry, I changed my mind". The man was a bit angry with my decision and said some words in Bulgarian. Bad words I think. Finally I found a taxi and I was on the way to Hostel Mostel. I got out of the taxi but couldn't find any sign of the hostel in the street. The taxi driver was pointing to some door but I couldn't see it. Then finally I saw a very small sign near one door and rang the bell. I spent a bad night, I couldn't sleep well because I was anxious. The next day I got in Razlog, meet with everyone and felt better. Everyone seemed good people. However the first 2 weeks were difficult for me. I arrived when things already started and I felt a bit confused and lost about what I had to do. Over time I felt better. I really enjoy the time we spend with the kids, It's very rewarding to feel the love of the children and older people. We gave them attention and love too. I like to think that I am improving their lives in a better way. The on-arrival training was an amazing experience! We got together with a lot of other volunteers from different cities in Bulgaria, and they were all really lo

vely people including the teachers! We made a lot of games to feel more comfortable between everyone. Before I get to the hotel, in the morning I met a Bulgarian guy who told me he had a band with meditation mantras and he gave his band CD. I was surprised because I do meditation and it looked like a big coincidence for me. Though I know there are no coincidences in life. Everything and everyone is connected. The trips we made to Sofia and Plovdiv we're fantastic. We participated in free guided tours to know the most important monuments and places. We meet a lot of great people there, in the street and bars, Portuguese people including. It was funny to make new friends so fast. We went to a bar in Sofia named Rock n Rolla, with great rock and heavy music. We had so much fun, also because there was a karaoke room session there and we spent a great night there. I did football trainings with the Razlog football team in November. I was very happy because I love football.

The stadium was located in a beautiful high place near the mountains and you can see the town in the bottom. At first the trainings were hard for me, because I didn't train for a long time, but it was completely gratifying. My parents came to visit me in Bulgaria. It was the first time for them in this part of Europe, and especially my mom was not prepared for this kind of cold. But they loved the city of Sofia. I showed them the city and went with them to a free tour. It was snowing a lot in that morning but still was a very funny and interesting free tour. My family also loved to visit Razlog. They call Bulgaria the wonderland. The landscape was beautiful at the time, covered with the snow. The food and the people are fantastic and the cost of living, so that makes it very appealing country to visit. There are a lot of special people here, starting with the organisation. All of them are very kind and support us a lot. I've met a lot of great people in Razlog from Moga, from the school of Jane Sandanski, Bachevo



and Dobarsko, from rehabilitation centre, from grandma's institution and from other places outside of work like the gym, restaurants, bars etc. All of these people know what we are doing here and understand that we can be helpful for the development of the town. We understand they can teach us new things, and show us their very interesting culture. The story of David and Kostadinka is also very inspiring to me. How they met and got together to work is this amazing organisation. I really think I would like to be involved in some organisation like this after this volunteer time. We made a balcan trip by car around Bulgaria and other countries. We rented a car for 7 people and start from Razlog. It was one of the greatest travels and experiences of my life. Adventure, companionship, and a lot of fun between all of us during the car travels and every time we got together in a different city. The first city we visited was Veliko Tarnovo, a very pretty town with very historical places to visit and beautiful views. It was full of snow. There was a big river that crossed the town. It had a lot of fortresses and during the night we visited one of them.

There was a beautiful view from the fortress. Then, next place was Varna, a beautiful city near to the black sea. We have a few friends there from the on arrival training and they hosted us for 2 nights. We went to a bar near to the beach during the night and spend really good time all together. Next stop was Bucharest, a really huge city with large buildings. In fact it has one of the biggest buildings in Europe, the Parliament building. Next place was Belgrade. We spend 2 nights there. The group went to the hostel but I was trying to save money so I slept in the car. It was a hard experience because once in a while there was some drunk people passing in the street and making a lot of noise so I couldn't sleep. Next place was Skopje in Macedonia. A city full of great and imposing buildings. It was a bit strange because the city was very empty all the time. It looked like a Hollywood fake city, where they make the movies. A beautiful place with no people loses some beauty.

During this trip, a lot of good things happened. I made new friends and started a new relationship with a very lovely girl from Germany. A few weeks later we said goodbye to 3 of our brothers: Janiki, Anabel and Ruben. It was a hard felling to see them leaving. It was like a part of me was leaving too and I felt very sad. There was a day I decided to go with Dorothea (the German volunteer), to the hat of the Pirin mountains near to Razlog. It was a very nice walk. We reached the Pirin Golf Resort and there was still a lot of kilometres to walk but we were very exhausted and we decided to go back. On the way back we tried to hitchhiking but no cars stopped. Then we saw a man on a horse cart and we stretched our thumbs. We got really surprised because the man stopped. It was a very nice man around 50 years old and the cart was full of cut pine trees. We just lied on the pine trees and enjoyed a lot the ride back to Razlog. I am very grateful for doing this volunteer work. I had



this idea in my mind before: to go abroad and make this kind of work that involves people and help them in their lives, but I never face it so seriously before. I just had one week to decide. I was a little scared for the adventure, but after all I followed my heart. I realize that all of this experience is going to make me grow as a person, as a human being. The saddest moment was the goodbye. I could see sadness in Filly's and Dorothea's face. Filly cried like a baby, like in every goodbye. A part of me stayed in that small cosy town. But that's life and sometimes we get to move on to the next adventure. Razlog mi Pueblo, I miss you a lot!!!





FILLY FODARO CYA VOLUNTEER

Have you ever lived abroad? Have you shared your life for five whole months or more with people from totally different countries? I did and it was one of the best experience of my life 9.11.2016

Here begins my journey. I arrived in Bulgaria around 10 in the morning It was snowing.

It was snowing. You know Narnia? When Lucy goes through the closet and like magic all around her becomes white? So that was my welcome in Bulgaria. Enchanting Well, now let's go back to reality. I took my luggage and

I went through passport control. Once outside, the first person that I saw was one friend of mine that made my first day in Sofia really nice. She took me to a Mall to take lunch together and then directly to the bus station. Razlog was waiting for me.

Razlog.

The first familiar faces that I saw were those of David and Kostadinka. The boss of my Host Organization. Well, my impression of Razlog? A country almost of another era. You know, the bus station is old style, the streets are almost all made of stone except where cars can circulate. You can find old ladies gossiping from the window which I like that a lot and reminds me of my South Italy my country. You can walk in such amazing piece of green land and staring at with snow-capped mountains as scenery. You will talk with the grandma even if you can not understand each other. The people here are really friendly and looks like they accepted us very well. They like our work and everytime that someone ask me "Where are you from" or "What are you doing here?" and I said that I'm Italian and I am in Razlog because I am a volunteer they smile at me. In the village center there is a large lake surrounded by a large green park. When has snowed the lake was frozen and I remember very well that on January 6, we have witnessed this traditional dip in the ice, in practice, to celebrate the Epiphany. I was almost dying just looking at them.

It's a really weird tradition. They jump into the water, a really cold water to grab a cross that the priest throws in the lake. Another tradition is the Kukeri Festival. It's the celebration of New Year. They wear this huge costume and start to dance in the street. Every neighborhood has his own Kukeri.

F*****g Volunteers.

What do you think will come out to put together two Italian, two Portuguese and two Spanish in a house that looks like a square for five months? The total chaos, very good. And if you are not entirely satisfied and want a little healthy organization why do not you add a German? Well, this was my family. The best I could expect Well, they were my strength, my home. The volunteers who will live with you and share your experience will be those with whom you can be yourself 100% and if the stars or superheroes or God it depends what you like and what you believe in will be on your side, maybe you will find even love. (The love part was not my case).

The on arrival Training.

We were in Sofia four days. The trip was usually normal. I slept almost the whole way. Instead the journey from the central station, at the hotel was very funny. We took the metro and we are committed to not lose. Then we changed and we took a bus that left us apparently in the street. We walked for about 15 minutes and at the end we arrived at this magnificent Hotel Premier and we were at the wrong door. However, when everything started to go as it should, we had fun. Huge rooms, soft beds, free food three times a day including wine. If you give all this to a group of guys who have to strike up, well bro, you're doing it the right way. During these days, in addition to the party and the fun we worked hard. We talked a lot. Why are we here, what we expect from this project, why we chose this one and not another. We did a lot of games to get more in tune between us and the teachers were fantastic. In the end, I found myself



having another family, even bigger and more international.

Living, weather and travel in Bulgaria.

DO IT.

If you are in Bulgaria for more than a month, traveling. Visit the Balkans. Travel as much as you can in this wonderful land and among his boundaries. Traveling from Bulgaria to other place in Bulgaria and is almost to everyone. This is entirely up to you. If you are person who likes to travel economically, then "Have a good trip". The landscapes are magnificent and when it will snow you seem to be in a Wonderland. Go to Sofia, the capital. Make a jump to the Rock and Roll bar if you like this genre and if you like karaoke and if you do not want to have an overdose of vitality you can make a jump to "The Muse." If you are looking for a bar where you can eat something chatting and smoking a few cigarettes without someone tell you "you have to go because we are closing," Well, go to Ruffy. It is definitely the right place and you can stay there all night. If you live in Razlog you have two choises to get out and create a social life on Friday evening. Staying in Razlog to drink a beer and maybe go to

a Chalga Pub or go to Bansko. Many times won the second option Bansko: OXYGEN, AMIGO AND DANCE CLUB. (Be carefull, the season is only until 1 of April.) OXYGEN: If you like Commercial Music and you want to go to the Oxygen but you don't know where is, nema problem. A guy in the street, for sure, will take you in this place and will offer you free entrance and one free drink but, BE CAREFULL usually this type of treatment is only for the girl. The boys have to work on simphaty. AMIGO: If you like rock and roll and live concert. It's really good. Nice people, nice music. DANCE CLUB: If you like techno music or house music or just if you are drunk at the right point. Now maybe you want to know what is best. Drink before going out or consume directly in pubs? Well there is a perfect blend that will allow you to not spend anything if you get drunk very easy like me. Rakia and beer. Prepare a bottle of good homemade rakia and one of beer. Drink a little bit of one and a

bit of another and in a moment you'll find yourself on the road to hitchhike to Bansko. (The most funny moment about this was the "Ciao ciao Party" for the Portuguese Pueblo. We were doing hitchhike for Bansko and in a moment of ordinary boredom we just put down our pants in the middle of the street and guess what?! We get a Taxi.)

Weather

Well, if you like the snow, I mean, a lot, but really a lot of snow, Bulgaria is perfect for you. For me this was the first time in my entire life with a lot of snow like we had between December and February. In February we arrived at -20 degree and for me was crazy. After a bit of time you start to get used with type of weather and the situation will be better. A funny thing was that when we was in Greece, with 10 degree , we were walking in the street only with our t-shirt and the people around us were really surprised, but come on, for us was almost summer, or spring When you think that winter and snow are things you



will only see next winter, well, just a tip: do not put aside your winter clothes although you are in April, they can always come back to you. Because in Bulgaria it is not uncommon to live a spring with some snowflake and I must say that it is really strange to see the snow fall on the blooming cherry trees.

Volunteering

Volunteer means many things, means helping, means enjoying, means learning and above all understanding. For me it was this. I learned a lot from the children in schools who looking for a dialogue with you even if they can't speak the same language and surprisingly in the end you will build together an own language. The guys from the rehabilitation center just want to be able to spend time with you and often without saying anything. They give you hugs that fill your heart. The children from the shelter house only need to become familiar with you then it's all about playing, being held in your arms and help you tie your shoes when you have to go away. We worked in some schools. Personally the one that I loved the most was the one in Dobarsko.

The kids are lovely and they really enjoy the time that they spend with you. The teachers are really nice. Everytime we went there they gave to us something for the lunch. Jane Sandaski is a good school and the kids are lovely except for someone, but you know they are kids, sometimes is normal be hyperactive. The director and some teachers speak English so for us it's quite good.

Grandpas and grandmas.

One of my favorite days ever was when we went to visit the grandpas and grandmas of Razlog. They made us wear the traditional Bulgarian clothes and taught me how to knit. It was a day full of hugs and love. It reminded me how it feels when you have grandparents where you can go to.

ROOMMATE

Now imagine you had to go to Bulgaria to find your twin sister and the more organized and better version of yourself. And it would be all right if it was not for your twin to be Spanish and the most organized one is German. I think these

two girls played a key role in making my experience unique and amazing. With Anabel there were no doubts about the first time we met. Maybe because she is really my Spanish twin. With Dorothea we both thought we would go awry when we found out that although we work differently together, we work great. The thing that I loved the most with Doro was one Sunday morning. We just wake up and start to watch film and reading manga as always during our weekend. She was in the kitchen, I was in the bed. When I finish my manga I went in the kitchen and when I hopen the Doro her face was amazing. She was really happy like me when something in the manga that I'm reading go exactly how I want. We start to dance together and in that moment I understood that I made a really great job. I was no more the only stupid in that house!

Our adventures together.

The thing that I loved most was that actually we traveled a lot. I mean maybe not



really a lot. Not me at least. We went in Greece two times. And it was amazing. The first time was in December and we went to Thessalonica with the bus. From Razlog to Blagoevgrad and then to Thessalonica. After we changed the bus station three or four times to try to find the right bus it started to rain. But maybe you know this phrase: "viaggio bagnato viaggio fortunato". Which more or less means "Wet trip lucky journey". Just three hours with the bus and it was like we were going to Sofia. On the bus was amazing. The woman on the bus gave to us a croissant and a glass of fanta. Greek people are really kind! We took a shuttle to go to the centre and try to find the hostel. We had only leva and some randomly person on the bus give us the money to make the ticket.

WARNING:

In Greece "NE" is "YES" and "OCHI" is "NO" In Bulgaria "NE" is "NO" and "DA" is "YES" And be careful the way that you move your head. Anyway Thessalonica was really nice and the hostel was really good. We met some guys from Australia, Poland and ecc. We had a lot of fun with the UZO(it's the Greek Rakia, Really good.)

Thessalonica is not expensive. At all After Thessalonica, in January we went in Athens, the capital. We took the plane really early in the morning and, without sleeping in the night was really bad. I remember that in Sofia Airport we just started to dance in the middle of the room "Shape of you". You need to know that we have a really serious dance, we practiced a lot! All the people start to looking at us and three Spanish guy enjoy a lot this moment. We met them again one night in Athens and we spent with them a good time. Athens is really good. A lot of archeological sites and historical place, it's a bit expensive if you want to stay in the center, but if you go in the University part of the city it's easier to find some cheap pub. The only thing that I can remember perfectly is that in Thessalonica and in Athens we walked a lot and that I feel asleep almost everywhere. The good thing is that I lost a bit of weight

OFFICE FAMILY.

Well the Office

Family is my host Organisation. IIC which means INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES FOR COOPERATION. Kostadinka and David are the leader. I admire their job and the way that they work. With Valio Pepi and Reni all of us have a good relationship. They help us if we need something like also Didi and David do. ALWAYS. I like my Office family and I feel really lucky to had them by my side during this experience

Razlog mi Pueblo.

Here I am. This was one of the best experience in my life. I really need to say thanks to everybody. To my parents to allowed me to come here in Bulgaria. To Bulgaria for hosted me so kindly and well and most importantly to all my new family to made this experience Special and Amazing. I love Voluntarism, I love the way you feel after and during it. I will miss you a lot! I tried once and I liked it and you? Do you want to try?

