

How EVS has changed my life

How learning in EVS made impact on my life choices and employability

stories of EVS volunteers

The success stories of EVS volunteers in front of you were contributed by the participants of the symposium "EVS competences for Employability", which took place May 2014 in Ljubljana. Symposium was financed by the EU Youth in Action programme and organized by the National Agencies of the Erasmus+ Programme – Youth chapter from Slovenia, UK, Hungary, Poland, France and Belgium-Flanders, Slovak Republic and Malta in cooperation with SALTO Inclusion and SALTO SEE Resource Centres.

Joris Wagemakers, Belgium: Tintin in Moldova

Country of EVS: Moldova

My EVS journey started at the moment that I decided to apply for a project of one year in Moldova. Knowing almost nothing about the country, knowing little about the project and even not being sure if EVS would be right for me, it was a step into the unknown. This step was one of the many that I took during my EVS experience. Every step I took was a step towards a greater level of self consciousness and ability to self development.

When arriving to my flat in Chisinau, the capital of the poorest country of Europe, I experienced a first challenge. The room where I was supposed to live for one year had very basic living conditions (a desk without any chair to sit on, a mattress on the floor without any warm blankets and a closet without any shelves). After sleeping in my winter jacket for one week, I requested to have better living conditions which I also received. Many moments while living in Moldova requested me to be assertive, one of the attitudes I learned during my EVS.

A bigger challenge was that the project where I was working for was not challenging to me. More precisely, there were very little tasks available to me. Rather than only complaining or leaving the project early, I decided to apply for European funding and to organise a youth project related to human rights. As project manager of an international youth exchange, funded by the former Youth in Action Programme, I was responsible of all stages of the project: from application to implementation and financial accounting. This experience taught me to have a proactive attitude towards work and to find the best solution in a difficult situation.



Facing many unexpected situations during my EVS, I gained a flexible attitude. I started realising that it's impossible to plan every possible situation or outcome of my decisions beforehand. This way I gained another perspective on life. Rather than planning and expecting everything to go according to plan, I became more conscious of the environment where I'm in. This perspective values what exists and recognises the possibilities connected to this situation instead striving to achieve something else.

My EVS experience also taught me to be more tolerant. I gained a better understanding towards other people, mainly because of this new attitude that I described above. To me cultural differences are not some kind of obstacle, but an opportunity to learn from people with different backgrounds, different kinds of strengths and perspectives.

My EVS experience started with a difficult decision and becoming assertive to request better living conditions in my flat. In the beginning I was somehow chocked by the different mentality, culture and living habits of Moldovans. Towards the end I started appreciating this culture and how Moldovans go through life. Now my EVS story still hasn't come to an end. I'm still gaining understanding of all the things I learned and I'm applying the competences I gained to my life in Belgium. I'm even trying to convince others of the value of EVS and stimulate them to go through a similar experience. My EVS begun with a cultural shock but evolved into a process of self development.

Anna Romanczyk, Poland: The world is smaller than you think

Country of EVS: Belgium

Taking a decision to leave everything what you have and take a deep plunge into something unknown is never an easy one. I took such a decision, left my job and decided to take one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do my EVS in an international NGO in Brussels, ECAS (European Citizen Action Service). It took me some time to grow to this decision, but finally I made it. And after two years I can say that it was definitely worth it.

My EVS showed me that if you take risks, if you get out of your 'safe zone', it pays back. You only need to open yourself to new people, new experience and new opportunities.

As an EVS volunteer I understood that Europe or even the world, is very small. The adventure usually starts before you even leave your country – you meet other people like you on a meeting before the departure, or sometimes through mailing lists, facebook groups, etc. You get to know their stories and their motivations and then you understand that you are not alone, that there are other people who want to do something 'unusual' or even 'crazy'. When I was leaving Poland my friends kept telling me two things: one was that they were a bit envious that I got this opportunity – a project in the 'heart of Europe', which is not that easy to find. Second, that I had enough courage to give up what I had and what I did and leave, just like that.

The adventure continues when you come to a new organisation, meet new people and have to communicate in a language that you thought you had known quite well. Or learn a new one in

order to be able to work for your organisation in a more efficient way and be able to communicate with the society that has welcomed you. In my case it was quite easy, Brussels is a multicultural environment, a real 'melting pot', so finding a way to communicate was not difficult. However, it took me some time before I was able to speak with my colleague in the office in French and at the same time read an email in English. EVS is a great opportunity to learn languages and get more confidence in their everyday use.

And the most important part: while doing an EVS you get to know many people. Many different people, very often coming from different countries, different backgrounds and this is I think the most valuable part of EVS experience. Suddenly you can have friends everywhere, be able to stay at 'friend's place' in any town in Europe, because you are all members of a great community, the EVS family. To me this is a great thing and even though I was travelling quite a lot before my EVS, I only then understood how easy it can be, even when your budget is tight. EVS was a turning point for me in discovering Europe. And its inhabitants, because a town in a local's eyes is always more interesting than when you visit it with a guidebook in your hand. I am still in touch with some people from my EVS and it doesn't matter where we meet: whether it's Vienna, Belfast or Warsaw.

And finally the most 'serious' part – job. Having EVS experience in my CV, especially in an NGO based in Brussels, was a great chance to develop a career that I was dreaming of – a career in the EU institutions. It was also a turning point for me, because while I was working for my organisation I had a chance to get closer to the EU institutions, meet some people who work there and that was when I understood that this is definitely not my dream place to be. It was a very important experience that impacts your whole life. I think that mostly thanks to my EVS I had a chance to stay in Brussels longer and do a 10-month internship in a big international organisation. Following that path, it is also thanks to that experience that I have my current job in Warsaw in a big NGO and that I understood what I really enjoy doing.

My final thought is: don't be afraid of your dreams and take any opportunity that comes to you. The next one will follow 😊

Taja Metličar, Slovenia: Kardemumma is COOL;)

Country of EVS: Finland

Because I did not even imagine that EVS could bring me such an experience, it has even bigger meaning. New vision, perception and acceptance of life. It gave me a bounced step, for the continuation of my life. I got a great idea for my career and at the same time realize yourself in a whole new light. Now I know better diversity of the world and I'm more ready for it.

I afford a similar experience for everyone because it brings you a bigger smile on your face. ;)

Amina Purivatra, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Country of EVS: Netherlands

I was in Rotterdam for six months for my EVS project, I was 22 years old when I participated in it. I was volunteering for foundation Lava Legato which was working with other organizations in Rotterdam and everyday in a week I was working on something else.

I was learning by doing and I think that is the best way to learn. I was totally open-minded to differences and that's way I learned more than I expected. My project demanded from me to work in several different organizations and that means I got a chance to learn more things.

Mostly I was working with children but also I was working on lots of events where I needed to present or talk about EVS, I always done it successfully. Variety of my project were so useful that I even learned to work with animals - birds, hedgehogs, you name it. But the best thing of all is that I learned how to manage in totally unknown situations and still do my job successfully. Now I know that I can do anything.

This EVS experience has taught me that different language is not barrier and if you are open for new people, cultures, traditions you can learn a lot and after that you can appreciate more your own culture. I embraced diversity of culture of my host country and of course I try to represent mine as good as I could (everyone was interested in history of Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the war and everything).

To be honest I always loved to travel and to meet new people, cultures and traditions, but this was totally different. Feeling when you are sitting on the beach with ten people from different countries in Europe, watching wind kites flying around and chatting about differences between yours countries is just incredible. This makes me think about my country and it motivates me to find a way and chance everything that I can change (in good way of course). These experience have exposed me to great responsibilities and given me the opportunity to challenge myself in ways which have vastly developed my character and maturity.

I really can say that this experience taught me many things but more important of all I think it changed me in nice and positive way. Not because of the country or city, because of the people. I meet beautiful people (from inside) who shown me a bigger picture. I learned many things about different cultures and that helped me respect more my culture, country and people in it.

Bozidar Dimic, Serbia: Nothing happens by chance

Country of EVS: Greece

Since I found out about EVS in my third grade of gymnasium, I knew that I want to do it immediately after I finish gymnasium. And I did it. After many struggles, and a year and a half of project applications it came to me, I didn't chose it. But, although I personally didn't apply for my

project, but my friend that couldn't go, Youth center of Kalamata accepted that change, and I started my EVS adventure in august 2010.

I already had some experience with EVS volunteers - I was EVS mentor and language teacher for about a year, and I already knew the possible problems of volunteering during my EVS, and I, more or less, knew what would I do if I had any problems.

But, I think that the most important is the attitude that I had – that I didn't expect anything. Generally I know that I can expect something just from myself, and that attitude of mine was very useful.

I was working on a project that included work on website, blogs, and design on materials for the organization. But, when I didn't have anything to do, I was doing something else: like teaching Serbian, or working on therapeutic horse riding with disabled children, different creative workshops and small theatre plays also. Working on that many activities helped me to more develop my proactive attitude, and to show me the opportunities in the society.

My EVS changed my life: it open my horizons, helped me to rethink my way of thinking, helped me developing my language and interpersonal skills, helped me to develop tolerance and I think that developing my personal skills through interpersonal relations in the organization were the most important.

But the mooost important from my EVS for me in the moment was that I managed to see what I want to be in my professional life. It helped me to realize that I want to be in the area of education, and now I am studding pedagogy.

Tomas Savkanic, Slovakia: Bug The Pilgrim

Country of EVS: Lithuania

Firstly, I have to note that I am never going to forget what I have lived during my time of Voluntary Service.

Secondly, the EVS has really made me mature in a short period.

I arrived to the country of different cultural background and different language. I had to adapt as quickly as possible to make my stay smooth. To overcome the initiative problems it was my companion, the EVS partner, with whom we supported each other. Having had the EVS companion made the things easier. The situation at the beginning was a bit difficult because the winter was still present and our main tasks were designed for outdoor terrain. So we spent the first moments just exploring our possibilities and getting to know each other. We cooked together, we exchanged our culinary 'talents', we explored our national cuisines.

I had a sufficient time to prepare my own little projects, to involve myself in things that I would not have thought I would be capable of at my home place. I was forced to be independent out of

sudden, big cultural shock without preparation. I just had to seize for the things. I had to impersonate myself into multidisciplinary worker, learn new language, improve my English, teach English, teach Biology in English, learn about the natural heritage of our hosting organization, but mostly think about my own insertion to the project. The place we occupied did not have the scale of free time possibilities we would immerse ourselves in. Either we had to educate ourselves on our own or stabilize. We could develop our inner skills and brush them up.

The environment where I spent time consisted mostly of people from different countries. As our project involved 16 individuals from all over the Europe there was a lot to learn about different cultural habits and historical background. I realized that my capacity for learning is even bigger that I could have ever thought before. I liked being in international environment. I looked for the possibilities in what collaborate after the end of the service. I came to know about the existence of other internship projects. I was really happy that my EVS experience helped me to do it and make me sort of relevant for it. I subscribed for AIESEC and I was selected for the work in Colombia. I had the opportunity to travel in Latin America and learn Spanish.

I consider EVS as a very good start for travel keen people who endlessly want to improve their abilities and discover new dimensions.
