

# Learning process in EVS projects

There will always be some learning happening. The question is; would you like to take an active part in it and put your hands into that process?

European Voluntary Service is not just another voluntary service. It has a long history; it has been one of the first funding programmes within “Youth programme” supported by The European Commission. It has its own strong philosophy and it is part of the non-formal education programme.

The last one is the guiding point in the process of setting your own understanding of EVS project within your organisational culture and while keeping in mind the workload you face.

Work with European volunteers has its specific pace that might not be always fitting to all the needs of the organisation.

## Such as

- It is a non-formal and informal education process.
- There is a self-evaluation and learning documentation tool involved – The Youthpass.
- There is a set of training involved for EVS volunteers – Pre-departure training, on-arrival training, mid-term an evaluation, annual meeting of EVS (meeting after EVS is finished), as well as for coordinators of EVS projects in the organisations, like for example International SOHO training for sending and receiving organisations and others.
- There is several quality assurance systems implemented – accreditation process of organisations, mentor support system, sending and receiving organisation, in some cases the role of coordinating organisation as the one being more experienced and giving support for other receiving organisations.
- The learning is happening not only on the side of the volunteer, but very often having an EVS volunteer in the organisation means a pile of learning for the whole organisation and its staff – such as dealing with the language barrier, cultural differences, feeling of ambiguity, or simply working with volunteers and their sometimes fragile motivation.
- One of the Key competencies tackled in Youthpass and the one that is often evaluated as important one among EVS volunteers is *Learning to Learn competence*. For those youngsters who for different reasons drop out from educational system, or are in some way with fewer opportunities, EVS can be very first working experience and more importantly first moment when they become mindful, conscious about their own learning process happening, needs they have in order to learn, motivation and goals they would like to reach. That is a lot to digest!

This all reminds us that EVS is an educational programme including learning, rather planned, structured and reflected one in the ideal case, plus with international recognition of that kind of learning experience gained.

## What can help to set up and maintain a learning process in EVS?

**Create open learning environment** – if it is needed, dump your language to a level where everybody can understand, set regular meetings, implement work Youthpass and key competencies from beginning. Get enthusiastic (but not over-enthusiastic!:) about the process itself, it is very empowering, enriching and energetic process to support somebody else’s learning process, it is often the motivation boost to start your own one too.

“We are a learning organisation”<sup>1</sup>, “stupidly is good” and “How fascinating”<sup>2</sup> should become **part of your core principles**; go into the veins of the organisation.

**Back and forth** – it always goes both ways, to stay with the learning process, includes all stakeholders in it, listens to the other side, makes time and space for evaluation, feedback, coaching, mentoring, peer support. Make sure you ask volunteers, often they might have the right answer or, sometimes, unrealistic expectations – this all can be cleared out once it is spoken out. And if you are for any reason, not the right one, delegate it, get mentor involved etc.

**Heritage or treasure** – A lot of knowledge and learning by doing can be nicely transferred from one generation of EVS to another. There are many things where failure is the first step, so avoid the same for next generations, the nice task can be to make some collections and hand them over to next one(s) coming. For the current or soon leaving volunteer, this can be a nice way to collect his or her own learnings and findings and make a wrap up of own experience. Such process gives time to slow down, reflect, and feel important and useful.

For the newbie volunteer, such collection (whatever it is, a chronicle passed on, online blog, an old map of the city with all important spots and hints....) can be a nice welcome present, warm item to not feel completely lost or simply really useful thing to use.

**In the nick of time** – Time and time management is often a topic to work on with EVS volunteers, it is part of the experience for many of them, to be alone, plan your own time at work but as well all the spare time. To keep certain work-life balance, make sure your hobbies, sports and a healthy lifestyle still are included. To do stuff before it is too later. EVS is going to finish one day. So time management, prioritisation, structured planning and realistic estimation of how long things takes, critical review of own planning, all of these can be nice development topics to tackle and work on with volunteers and they will be essential for making space for learning to come.

**What would I do if I were not afraid? What is the worst thing to happen? What would you do if you would have a magic stick?** Sometimes the best tool is to ask a right (magic, open...) question at a right time. The important part is to be completely natural, truly yours and authentic with putting such questions. Otherwise, they will not make their way, though.

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### *Resources or actually a little exercise*

*I suggest you visit the official website of Youthpass and read through the description of Learning to Learn competence and especially the critical guiding questions to ask a volunteer.*

*And put these questions not only in front of volunteers but as well in front of you as coordinator and your colleagues, other involved staff in the organisation receiving or sending volunteers. It might first helpful step to proceed to a status of "learning organisation".*

*Here is the promised link: <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/documentation/action-2/key-competence-learning-to-learn/>*

<sup>1</sup> *What does it mean to be a learning organisation for your organisation? Some inspiration can be seen on websites of two international youth organisations (there has been a long path to be walked in organisational development in both cases that led to these living and lived principles/values):*

*IYNF core principles (scroll down the page) – <http://www.iynf.org/about/structure/>*

*YEE values – [http://yeenet.eu/images/stories/YEE\\_PROJECTS/Annual\\_Meetings/Annual\\_Meeting\\_2015/YEE\\_VALUES.pdf](http://yeenet.eu/images/stories/YEE_PROJECTS/Annual_Meetings/Annual_Meeting_2015/YEE_VALUES.pdf)*

<sup>2</sup> *Just watch this video till the end. Benjamin Zander, conductor of Boston Philharmonic orchestra talking to teachers: <http://archive.teachfind.com/ttv/www.teachers.tv/videos/benjamin-zander.html>*

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