Activities within EVS project

Volunteering can be added value to the organisation, if the project is reasonably maintained, with regard to cultural shock, volunteer's needs, the needs of the organisation and the local community.

Activities taking place during the project are connected to the working placement, as well as the team members and volunteer's spare time.

Coordinator, supervisor and mentor are crucial figures in volunteer's life, so the success of the activities depends largely on their motivation and commitment to the project.

Activities with users

What is the role of an EVS volunteer in your organisation? What are their daily tasks? How can he/she be involved in the organisation? How much freedom and initiative can he/she have? Every organisation is different and has different working model according to which volunteer's tasks should be assigned.

The first few weeks of a project are the hardest ones. Volunteer arrives not just to an unknown working place, but also to a completely new, unknown environment. For the first few weeks, he/she will live in information overload and confusion. I will share the way we do it in NGO Öökull first we let the volunteers observe for a few days how we work, try to get in touch with team members and with the users. After few days we sit down and talk about what they noticed, what they think about our working system and where they see their place in the organisation.

First few weeks are usually filled with simple, daily tasks and a lot of talks: about volunteer's thoughts, ideas, sense of initiative. After a while, we start to give tasks with more responsibility. Usually, there are some failures at this stage and tendency to lose self-confidence. We analyse the failures together and find motivation for the future. At this point, the idea of Footprint/Mini/project is introduced.

Before the volunteer starts to plan and deliver his/her own activities, he/she gets familiarised with the NAOMIE plan:

N — needs
A — aim
O — objectives
M — methods
I — implementation
E — evaluation

Let's focus on two aspects from above — needs and evaluation.

Determining needs has a significant meaning for the success of an activity. The activity should respond to the needs of the organisation/users, of the volunteer and the local community.

Example 1 — volunteer might be interested in cooking and wants to make a meal for children that he works with. But looking from the angle of children's needs (they don't know how to prepare a meal), would be more effective to cook together with them.

Example 2 — volunteer likes music and he/she wants to organise a local music festival. At the same time, there is a local organisation who are making one already and are searching for volunteers. Why not join forces with the locals?

Evaluation should be made regularly during the duration of the project with coordinator, supervisor or mentor (sometimes with all of them) depending on the character of the organisation and needs of a volunteer. Evaluation helps volunteers to take a look their actions and see what came of them. Well-led evaluation helps to

draw conclusions and motivates for the future. If you don't know how to undertake the evaluation, the internet is full of interesting tools.

There is usually space for evaluation of learning process of EVS volunteer during evaluation meetings. The combination with Youthpass is recommended as noticing learning outcomes during the evaluation meetings are later on useful for preparing the Youthpass.

Helpful tools
1. Needs model for planning activities

Needs
of the local
community

Common needs of the local community,
the organisation and the volunteer

Organisation's
needs

Volunteer's
needs

2. Activity report

In NGO Öökull we ask a volunteer to fill the activity report. At the beginning, it's a weekly report, later on, a monthly one. The report is followed by questions that are used during the evaluation session.

Example

Date	What did I do? My daily tasks, responsibilities and activities	Comments, observations, thoughts, questions

Sample questions: What happened during this time? What was the easiest and the hardest thing? How would you describe your role in the organisation during the previous month? What is my sense of initiative? How do I present my ideas and thoughts? Was I successful so far with delivering my own ideas and activities? What could I have done differently? What can I do differently in the future? What did I learn during this time? What would I like to learn in the future?

Activities with mentor and team members

Some coordinators work directly with volunteers, some don't. Some of us have a chance to spend time with volunteers outside of service environment and some don't. Whichever is your case, try to make sure that the volunteer gets a chance to meet his/her team members outside the working environment. Invite him/her to the Christmas party, tea on Sunday evening, weekend outside of town, organise a movie or cooking evening for

co-workers. The activity of this kind will not only bring your team together but lets people understand what is the purpose of EVS and that we all learn from each other (especially if your co-workers do not exactly know what is EVS and how does it work). If you don't work directly with a volunteer, suggest team's activities to a volunteer's supervisor.

Activities in free time

Volunteers also need to do something in free time. There are some volunteers, who come to their host country already signed to the nearby sports centre or the local choir. But there are much more who need help to find free time activities or find places where they can continue their hobbies. Ask a volunteer if there is anything they would like to do or learn and help them to find places where it's possible to develop their interests (gym, swimming pool, book club, cooking classes, youth centre, choir, animal shelter etc.). You, as a local, know better. How to find those places If you don't work directly with a volunteer, suggest it to a mentor or supervisor.

Resources

Graph „Needs model for planned activities", author Agnieszka Hanna Kunz

„Activity report", author: Agnieszka Hanna Kunz

Agnieszka Hanna Kunz,

NGO Öökull, long-term experience

with topic of EVS, Estonia/Poland