



VOLUNTARY MESSENGER

@ INEX SLOVAKIA @ 2011



GR pre vzdelávanie a kultúru

Program Mládež v akcii



ABOUT INEX Slovakia

INEX Slovakia is a youth organization, its aim is to associate young people no matter what their nationality, political or religious orientation is. Activities that INEX organizes are focused on youth mobility and (non)formal education. Moreover, INEX offers volunteering possibilities to Slovak youngsters abroad and to young people from abroad in Slovakia. Main aim of volunteering activities is to provide help to the local community or to any project necessary (social, environmental, renovation, cultural etc.). Young volunteers can spend their free time valuably, can meet other people coming from different cultures, learn from each other and enjoy their lives differently.

INEX Slovakia is a non-profit organization founded in 1993. Its main aim is to play an active role within the international youth exchange which promotes international understanding, intercultural learning and tolerance. They provide an opportunity for young people of different national and cultural backgrounds to live and work together; facilitate personal growth and a personal responsibility. We organize different voluntary activities including “International summer workcamps”.

During the summer we organize workcamps in Slovakia where we host big amount of international volunteers from all around the world on various community projects. As we consider workcamps as a method of nonformal education, we prepare study part for the volunteers on various actual topics. This year the topic is promoting volunteering, which fits perfectly to the aim of our activities. By this, we followed the European Year of Volunteering. For the summer season, we decided to host two EVS volunteers to become “inex messengers” on the workcamps around Slovakia. Unfortunately, one of the messengers (Federica from Italy) decided to finish her EVS project very early, after one month, so Virginia (from Spain) remained as the only INEX Messenger for the entire summer. Moreover, she decided to prolong her project and to stay not only till September, but till the end of year.

ABOUT ME

My name is Virginia and I am 25 year old. I was born in Zamora, a little town in Spain. When I was in high school I did not know what I wanted to do with my life, but I really enjoyed volleyball so I decided to study Physical Activity and Sport in León, Spain. During my studies I had the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus Mundus program, so I spent one year in Florianopolis, Brazil. It was a really good experience, and I started to appreciate travelling and living in foreign countries. The summer after my Erasmus I went to a workcamp in Poland, and it was there when I got to know about EVS-volunteers. My sending organization, Servicio Civil Internacional, kept me updated with some projects, which I could apply for. Eventually, I was accepted to a Messenger project in INEX Slovakia. I really liked the idea of going to Slovakia, where I have never been before, and I didn't have any previous contact with the Slavic culture at all.

ABOUT PROJECT: INEX Messenger

From the first time I read the brochure of INEX Messenger I felt that it was perfect for me. The project was about promoting volunteering to all the workcamps that INEX organized in summer and I should make it through a workshop. With the first look, it meant to me travelling around Slovakia and meeting a lot of people from the entire world, and it was exactly this.

2011 is the European Year of Volunteering and INEX wanted to make people more conscious about this topic. Because of this, they decided to host two EVS-volunteers who will promote charity among volunteers that come for a workcamp to Slovakia. These EVS-volunteers were Federica from Italy and me, Virginia. Unfortunately Federica did not finish the project, because during the first month of our EVS, she was called to work in an NGO in Italy.

EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING

In the European Union, millions of citizens are volunteering. People of all ages make a positive contribution to their community by investing some of their free time in civil society organizations, in youth clubs, in hospitals, in schools, in sport clubs, etc. For the Commission, volunteering is an active expression of civic participation and strengthens common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion. Volunteering also provides important learning opportunities, because involvement in voluntary activities can provide people with new skills and competences and can even improve their employability. This is particularly important in this time of economic crisis. Volunteering plays an important role in sectors as varied and diverse as education, youth, culture, sport, environment, health, social care, consumer protection, humanitarian aid, development policy, research, equal opportunities and external relations. Volunteering has a great potential, but so far under-exploited for the social and economic development of Europe.

PLAN OF THE WORKSHOP

During June, before the workcamps started, our task was to create an interesting workshop about volunteering. The very first days when we arrived, our coordinator explained us the aim of the the project and our task in it. Then we started to make a research about promoting volunteering and we were trying to make the study part as interesting as possible. Federica and I had some brainstorming and discussion about what the focus of the workshop would be. We wanted volunteers thinking through some dynamics. We made a list of points that we considered important and divided the work. The first draft included:

1. Ice breaking and introduction to the session
2. Brainstorming: the volunteer experience
3. Interactive activity: “the more you do, the more they get”
4. Game: “Lifelong volunteers”
5. Smile makers (puppets)
6. The domino effect: “ Think global, act local”
7. Hand out leaflet

Brainstorming: the volunteer experience

To warm up, we did a round of the “word association” game. Asking people to say the first word that comes into their mind when they think about the word “Volunteering”. That was supposed to lead them to self reflection: “Why are you here?”, “What does it mean to be a volunteer today?”, or “What are volunteers’ expectations?”. _There will be a large group discussion in which people shall exchange opinions, experiences and points of view._Afterwards, we divided participants into 2 or more groups and we will give them some key words such as “friendship”, “commitment”, “to learn”, “to be”, “to do” and they have to create sentences, like some quotes which can reflect the motivations which led them to volunteer in a workcamp.

The more you do, the more they get

Who are you?

Aim: we make them think about what volunteering involves

How: we will hand out different roles for each participant, which are attached here. They will create their own character for few minutes and then they will introduce themselves to the community. We will help them to think about their characters with some questions:

- Imagine a normal day, what do you do? How is your everyday life now?
- What sort of lifestyle do you have?
- Where do you live?
- What do you do in your free time?
- Are you happy? Is there anything that could make you happier?
- Do you have a dream?
- What are your worries? Are you afraid of anything?

The more you do, they more they get

Aim: find solutions to improve the life of disadvantaged

How: the participants will be divided in two groups, one of volunteers and another of disadvantaged. (In the workcamps where the number of participants will be reduced, we and the leader could join them as disadvantaged). The two groups will be located opposite each other, leaving space between both groups. Volunteers need to find a way to help the disadvantaged. According to the ideas of volunteers, the disadvantaged will make a step forward to the volunteers.

For example: Volunteer: "spending one hour per week teaching how to draw to disable children"

Disadvantaged: „Yeah, I think that will make me happier". So that disadvantaged make a step forward.

The game is over when all the disadvantaged reach the volunteers. Everything is possible in this game, but it would be nice of all of them, volunteers and disadvantaged to make decisions together (for example, volunteer should ask the disadvantaged what they need...).

Reflection, evaluation: At the end, make an evaluation as a group, here are some driving questions: what did you feel being your character? Was it very far from your reality? Was receiving help difficult? Was helping other people hard? How did you feel? What did you feel stepping forward? How did you feel making the disadvantaged step forward?

Roles

You are a 19 years-old woman who volunteer with children.

You are a 23 years-old man who volunteer with disabled people.

You are a 25 years-old woman who travelled to Costa Rica to take care of turtle's eggs.

You are a 54 years-old man who volunteer with ill people in the hospital.

You are a 27 years-old woman who is in Kenya volunteering to build wells in some villages.

You are a 31 years-old man who volunteer in a reconstruction of a castle in your city.

You are a 45 years-old woman who volunteer with refugees.

You are a 65 years-old man who volunteer in a food's house to beggars.

You are a 22 years-old woman who volunteer with alcoholic and drug addicts.

You are a 45 years-old man with physical disabilities.

You are a single-mother of 2 years-old boy, and you have some economic problems.

You are a 28 years-old woman, who does not have home.

You are a 72 years-old man from Syria, who is asking for political asylum.

You are a 8 years-old boy with cancer living in a hospital.

You are a 21 years-old African woman in charge of a family of 13 members.

You come from Costa Rica, and you work in a Turtles Reservation.

You come from a little village and you are the owner of a little shop with souvenirs.

Smile makers, puppets

Aim: to create puppets for children and meanwhile to look at the differences between a professional work and a volunteering one

How: we will separate them in two different groups.

1st group gets the info, that they get rewarded for each created puppet. Without any explanation who are the puppets for.

2nd group receives the full description about the project and the purpose of the created puppets as well as description of the receivers.

As soon as they finish we will mix again and make the discussion

Reflection: group discussion: What did you feel before making the puppets? Were you motivated? Did you feel involved with the activity? Did you enjoy making the puppets? How do you feel when you think in the purpose in doing this activity? Were you happy about the price for each puppet? Were you happy to know that you wouldn't get any reward for the puppets? What is the different between a professional work and volunteering?

Game: Lifelong volunteers

The aim of this activity is to reveal some interesting personalities that sacrificed their life to volunteering. The short story of their lives is cut into several pieces and the goal of participants is to make the whole story correct. They need to match the names and the stories of personalities.

Instructions: ask people to get into small groups (3 or 4 in each group but it could depend on the total number of volunteers in the workcamp) and hand out one set of cards to each group. Ask them to spread the cards out, face down the floor. Explain that the cards describe events in the life of 5 people which have dedicated their lives to the others and to volunteering. The aim of each group is to match the events with the correct character and thereby to build up a brief description of each person. Allow each group to devise their own strategies for building up the personalities. They will need about 15 minutes for this stage. After they finished, gather everyone together and ask a representative from each group to introduce, in their own words, one of the personalities.

Debriefing and evaluation: Which of the characters had people already heard of and which of them were new? Were people surprised by any of the information? What did they find most impressive?

Follow up: We should try to follow up this activity by encouraging people to find out other people like the characters we have chosen. Our characters are just a starting point.

The domino effect: “Think global, act local”

Now, we arrived to the last step of this workshop. We did an initial brainstorming in order to better understand the motivations which led you to come here volunteering, secondly we did a game, then we matched and read the stories of 5 extraordinary people which dedicated a big part of their lives to volunteering; we used the puppet workshop to make you aware of the difference between voluntary and professional work.

Now, we would like you to think more about the importance of volunteering in everyone’s life. You came here to volunteer for 2 weeks and this is already very praiseworthy, but I would like you to think about doing voluntary work also when you return home. We would like to create so called “domino effect”. I mean, after you come back with your experiences acquired during the workcamp and you can try to involve more people, your friends in activities that could bring benefit to someone else or to the whole community. So, now, what we would like you to do is to think about your reality, the city or town you come from, and try to imagine how you could volunteer in your own reality and community. Try to write your idea, your project of activity and write on the white paper come of the things you envisage to do during your winter. A small compromise what is real that you do back at home.

Here you can find some inputs and advises: Do you come from a city or town on the sea? Think about organizing a group and go cleaning the beach! Don’t think that things are not going to change! We are convinced that your simple act will be followed by others! Act as a friendly visitor to a patient in their rooms, visit weekly and build a lasting friendship with someone who really needs you. Are you a musician? Volunteer to sing, play an instrument or in a group to help others! If you love to cook, lead a cooking class. The possibilities are really endless!! The most rewarding thing you can do is to brighten the day of another.

MY VOLUNTARY WORKSHOP

However, as every draft, this had some changes. After we wrote it, we tried in the office and we realized some errors. For example, the length of the workshop was almost 3 hours, although we had skipped some parts.

In reality, the more I traveled, the more I improved the workshop. By the end, it consisted of an introduction to the session, “the brainstorming” with a long debate, “the more you do, the more they get”, “the domino effect” and creating the puppets. According to the time I had in each workcamp, I had to leave out the sentence game and “all life volunteers”. I used a different idea in the puppets workshop, as some of the volunteers had previous information about what the puppets were for. It was impossible to convince them that we would sell them to pay our expenses and therefore to carry out with the activity. Then, all of them just had this workshop as a creative activity in order to make some children happy.

Introduction to the session

Firstly I introduced myself, my EVS and INEX. I also explained why I was there and what we were going to do. I did it briefly just to put them in the right position to start the workshop.

Brainstorming

I wrote on a flipchart the word “Volunteering”, using different colors for “Volunteer” and “ing”. Then I said that they were volunteers, and I wanted to know what this meant for them. They wrote in the same paper the words that came to their minds. For example: help, unpaid work, fun, languages... and when everyone had participated, I asked them to explain to the rest why they had written these concrete words. After everybody had spoken, I intervened and asked them some questions, for example, why they were in a workcamp, what reason brought them there, if that time was their first one. As well, some questions about what it was written in the flipchart, as if volunteering was only about giving, or if it was also about getting things, linking solidarity and other selfish motions. The discussion were really interesting, the topics were different according to their own experiences. In several workshops, volunteering was just about workcamps, having fun and languages, however in others, people were more involved with nonprofit associations, with more experiences and the topic was wider. You should create a good atmosphere, where order is respected and everyone listens. When the groups are not very participatory, you can ask the members to say a name of a mate when they finish talking, so everybody knows he will be named he will speak.

“The more you do, the more they get”

I hung out the different roles of volunteers or disadvantaged people. Don't forget to distribute the characters in couples and pay attention not to put a character who does not have her duo between them. I gave them some time to think about the life of their role. For some of them was not easy to put in their role's feelings, give some advises or examples. A flipchart with guiding questions is very useful, helps them to go into their roles. After some minutes they introduced their roles to the rest of the group, ask them to be creative but be careful with the time, sometimes they invent the whole life. This part was very interesting for me, because the characters were completely different from on each workcamp. In my opinion it depended on the country where the volunteer came from and also optimism of the person. For example, the vision of the disabled differed radically. A disabled who lived supposedly in Iceland was working and playing basketball with a lot of friends, on the other hand other man with disabilities who was from East Europe could not work and did not have anything to do at home. These diffeferences were nice, but be sure that the disadvantaged group understands that they need some kind of help.

After the first part everybody stood up and were divided in two groups, regarding their roles, volunteers or disadvantaged. You may need to help some of them to understand who their couple is and which group they belong to. Then I explained that volunteers should help their couple between the disadvantaged and it was up to them how to do it. That was a bit hard for them to understand that there are no rules. Explain that they have turns to talk and their objective is to help disadvantaged by suggestions to improve their lives. Ask disadvantaged to be demanding the proposal, otherwise they will not

make a step forward and it will split up the game. In general, I have seen similar conducts, for example, they normally don't ask the favoured what they need, or how they could be helped. Also some groups fell into unreal proposals (buying a house or getting married).

This game may take a lot of time, but I did not let the activity last so much. As soon as I saw that the group got the idea and everyone had participated three or four times, I asked them to take a sit and I started the reflection. During the discussion I tried to be a moderator and not to take part too much, but of course sometimes you need to lead the conversation. I threw some questions and topics, for example: if we listen to each other, why we don't ask people how we can help, what people need in general, etc. I really enjoyed these debates; there was always something that surprised me and points of view that I have not thought of before.

"The domino effect"

I did not want that all our reflections stayed in these thoughts, I wanted to make something with what all we had spoken about. Because of this I asked the volunteers to think about something related with volunteering that they could do when they return to their cities. In some of the workcamps volunteers were a bit tired after the activities and asked me for doing it later. That was a mistake from my side. I did not consider they could forget it or they could not find the time to do it and I let them, so I did not get all the compromises. In my opinion to make this activity you need to give them time, otherwise some of them may not focus enough to write this promise. Also it would be useful if you show them some examples, that they can get the idea of the workshop.

"Smile maker - puppets"

I had to change the perspective of the game, owing to the fact that the volunteers knew the purpose of the puppets. It would be really important that they did not have any information about the activity, and then they could be divided in groups and given different aims to make the puppets. In this way at the end you could make a nice conclusion. Eventually this summer volunteers made the puppets knowing that their destinations were some children in need. The materials you need are socks, needles (enough for everyone), threads, buttons, some ornaments, scissors, glue, cotton and a bit of imagination. It would be great if you have some finished puppets to show them.

MY SUMMER PLAN

My summer was pretty busy, owing to the fact that I tried to visit all the workcamps at least for a couple of days. Unfortunately I could not go to two of them for personal reasons (illness). My summer started on the 6th of July when I went to Black castle, which is located in the west part of the country. It is in a little village called Zlatno, which is surrounded with small mountains. The journey was quite adventurous, because I did not know where the group and the castle were placed. So when I got to Zlatno, I tried to communicate with the bus driver but the language was a problem. I could not speak Slovak and he could not speak English either. However he was very nice and looked for someone who understood a bit of English and could take me to the workcamp. There I waited for the volunteers and the leaders, while I had lunch, and finally I met them after a long day of work or journey in my case. After a little rest we began the workshop, it was the first one. I would not say that was successful, but neither unsuccessful. I could not go deeper in our conversation as I wanted and the night caught us making puppets. Some of the reason could be that I did not have the previous experience and also the average age of the group was the lowest during all the summer, what could mean less self-confidence and experience in sharing their own thoughts. Nevertheless, we had a really nice evening around the fire, talking and getting to know each other.

After a chilly night, we woke up early in the morning, washed our faces and had a good breakfast. We were ready to work. We were divided in two teams, one worked on the river and the other one climbed up the mountain up to reconstruct the castle. I was in the first one, and we worked cleaning the sand from the river to use it later in the castle. After a couple of hours we had a break to eat a snack and then I returned to come back to Bratislava. The way back was easier as I already knew where I was going.

After two days I left the city again to Nezabudka, where an English summer camp was taking place. The volunteers were teaching English to Slovak children. I arrived for lunch; I remembered a nice soup with pancakes. After lunch leaders and volunteers were preparing the feast of cultures. I helped to cook some exotic dishes, and to peel some potatoes too. The time came, and the presentations of their countries for the visitors and parents were first. When everyone spoke about culture, habits, food, finally we were allowed to try these national dishes. I will remark the Slovenian food, it was amazing. But food was finished soon, and cups and dishes were waiting for us.

I returned the next day and I took part with some games for the children. When they went home, the volunteers, leaders and I had lunch and as soon as we finished we started the workshop. It was very interesting how the topic flew on them. They got involved with the discussion and were quite participatory. Only in the Games” the more you do, the more they get” they were joking a bit with the circumstances of the roles. However some of them were really into the “smile makers - puppets”. On the other hand it was hard to make the conversation between the group who were thinking that the toys were for children and the others who thought it was just for money. They all thought that the puppets were for children, so I could not lead them to discussion between paid and unpaid work. Finally I proposed the domino effect, but they were a bit tired and asked me to do it another day, with what I agreed.

The next trip was one of the main ones. I travelled for more than ten days from one workcamp to another. Firstly I went to Banská Štiavnica, to a scout house. Volunteers were working in the Calvary, but unfortunately it was raining and we worked inside of the pension. I did not have the opportunity to climb up the mountain and have a look. During the smile makers (puppets) I found out that it was not so good idea to divide them and present different meaning of the puppets, owing to the fact that they already had information about the destination of the toys. Then, I rethought about the approach of this activity and decided not to continue with it. I would make the puppets but I would explain what they were for to the volunteers.

Again I undertook my adventure, this time to Slatinka, where I spent all the weekend. I met there very kind people and I had lots of fun, we even went out. Volunteers, leaders and I were in a tee house too and we had a great Slovak lesson by a medicine man. But I had to leave and the next stop was Saris, a wonderful castle in the top of a mountain. This castle was the most reconstructed and we incredibly slept inside one of the towers. It was amazing and the atmosphere was unique. The weather was not very good, it was raining, what did not allow us to make the normal activities. Even though, we managed to make the puppets outside when it stopped raining. After two days in this wonderful place I continued my travel again. I made my way towards Senne. A cozy house was waiting for me. After more than one week without a regular toilet, I really appreciated having a hot shower and a bed. The group was also friendly, they had created a welcoming atmosphere. I stayed one day longer than it was planned and then I went to Hanigovce. They had there the hardest conditions among all the workcamps. Fortunately I was there when they decided to go to the thermal baths that were close to the village. We spent some hours there having fun, but after the shower, we should go up to the climb up the mountain again, which took us more than an hour through the forest. Afterwards we were not that clean as before, but I was leaving in the morning. My last stop was Brekov, it took me all the day to get there, because the transport does not run so often on Sundays, but finally I arrived safe and sound. It was the same day that the volunteers arrived, so everybody was meeting to know each other. Even so, the group was great, and they gave me a very friendly welcome. I did enjoy the day after working cooking and making the workshop. However, after all these workcamps I just wanted to come back home and have a rest. I met some of the volunteers in Bratislava later though.

I had a week off of travelling and I could enjoy Bratislava and the advantages of a city before coming back to the road. Then I went to Sklabiňa, another steep slope. But the view from my window was incredible. The volunteers were working in a museum, close to a castle. This group was one of the most cheerful and interesting ones. I learnt how to play a Turkish game and I tried Czech food, what was very tasty. After two days I went to Stratena, the most beautiful place in Slovakia in my opinion. It was a place of one of the two Youth Exchanges that INEX organized. I only spent one day there, but I could enjoy the spot and the people. The following day, they were to High Tatras, another nice place in the country but I had to come back to Bratislava because I was not feeling very well. Therefore I missed the Stone tower, another workcamp. The summer was ending and I had almost finished my journey too. Just one more Youth exchange and the very last workshop. It was one of the best, people were very involved and they liked the discussion. It was a very good end for my EVS project. I was satisfied with the results and hopefully volunteers too.

CONCLUSION

This EVS-project gave me the opportunity to travel around Slovakia and meet a lot of people. I also discovered how to deal with different types of people and groups, and how to take the best from each while I am learning from them. Of course there were some difficulties, but they made me stronger and the journey made me realize how few we actually need to live and made me appreciate the comforts of modern life. I feel that my communication skills improved as well and my self-confident grew.

Of course I would love to do an EVS again in every country, although I have to say that it was a bit tiring. The fact that you are moving all the time and that you don't have your own space was a bit hard. Regarding to the volunteers i didn't have enough time to get to know them, what was a disadvantage for me. At the end of the project I felt tired and it cost me more effort to keep my interest on. Besides they also noticed that I was a nomad, and probably their behavior was different respect with their colleague. I like saying that "what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger", but if i had to change something, I would make the stays longer, or some more free time between workcamps would solve this drawback.

However, it wasn't so much time in each workcamp, I discovered how to deal with different types of people and groups, and how to take the best from each while I am learning from them. If I had to choose something between the experience, I would take all the nice conversations that I have had. All the interesting things I have found between all these people. The fact that the first impression is not the most accurate and try to go deeper, to get to know all the volunteers. Also the feeling that they value what you are doing and they make you a part of their workcamps. Absolutely it has been a fulfilling experience.

