

ESC Project Outcome
"Make a step to a Change"
INEX Slovakia

Helena Kook

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Who Am I?

My name is Helena and I'm from Estonia. I'm 19 and I'm going to tell you how I ended up as an ESC volunteer at INEX Slovakia. But first a little about myself. My volunteering path started as young as 13 and I've been passionate about it ever since.

I arrived to Slovakia fresh out of high school on March 2021, thanks to me keeping an eye out for long-term volunteering projects on my sending organizations website. I wanted to travel and live abroad and this project seemed like a good way to start.

Applying/being accepted, I shortly realized that it was the best decision I have made. With my co-volunteer Christina from Greece we have had an amazing adventure.

Volunteering Activities

"Make A Step to a Change" long-term ESC project at INEX Slovakia offered me a wide range of volunteering activities from picking trash to renovating an old castle in Slovakia.

Each event, activity or task gave me so much experience and guided me to realize that coming here was worth it. I got to be a leader at a workcamp, help to put a new coat of paint to a kindergartens playground and help to walk the dogs at the dog shelter.

Tea meetings

The first tea meeting that I attended was to introduce myself and my country with a presentation I made via zoom. And I got to organize and make my own tea meeting, which I did and it was "Get in touch with your inner child".

Aside from having interesting tea meeting online we also had them outside like picking trash, painting a playground and walking the dogs.



Mikulaš 2021

Every year at Christmas time INEX helps to raise money and accept donations to gift to centers where people with disabilities are. Alongside with gifts to them INEX volunteers make a little christmas play about Slovakia's three main characters: Angel, Devil and Saint Mikulaš. This year wasn't any different and the task fell upon me and my co-volunteer. Dressing up and learning the words in slovak was fun but also a little stressful to get the words right. We made a video of the play so that we could send it alongside with the gifts. The video of it: <https://youtu.be/ZaBd-bsfbrg>



Educational Activities

Inex Slovakia offered me also educational activities to participate in and organize.

I received a certificate from the workcamp leaders training that I can use to be a leader of a workcamp in another country and the skills varied from cultural to money managing skills.

I also made multiple workshops for people with different backgrounds. The topics varied from introducing my country and it's culture to mental-health like Getting in touch with your inner child and discovering yourself.

Trainings

When I first got here INEX members trained and showed us how and what to do in the office and we also received training for leaders.

Training for leaders was meant for the workcamps that took place during the summer. It prepared us to successfully lead those workcamps by knowing how to handle the budget, team work during work, conflict resolution and to organize a camp like that.



Inex Messenger

I had to make a workshop as part of one of my study parts at Inex's workcamps. My workshop was about "Social Labeling Problem" that addressed different individuals using descriptive words against different people and how often they are wrongly used and that action could have an impact. I clarify different word meanings and where they apply. It involved fun but informing quizzes and videos and put the theoretical material to test.



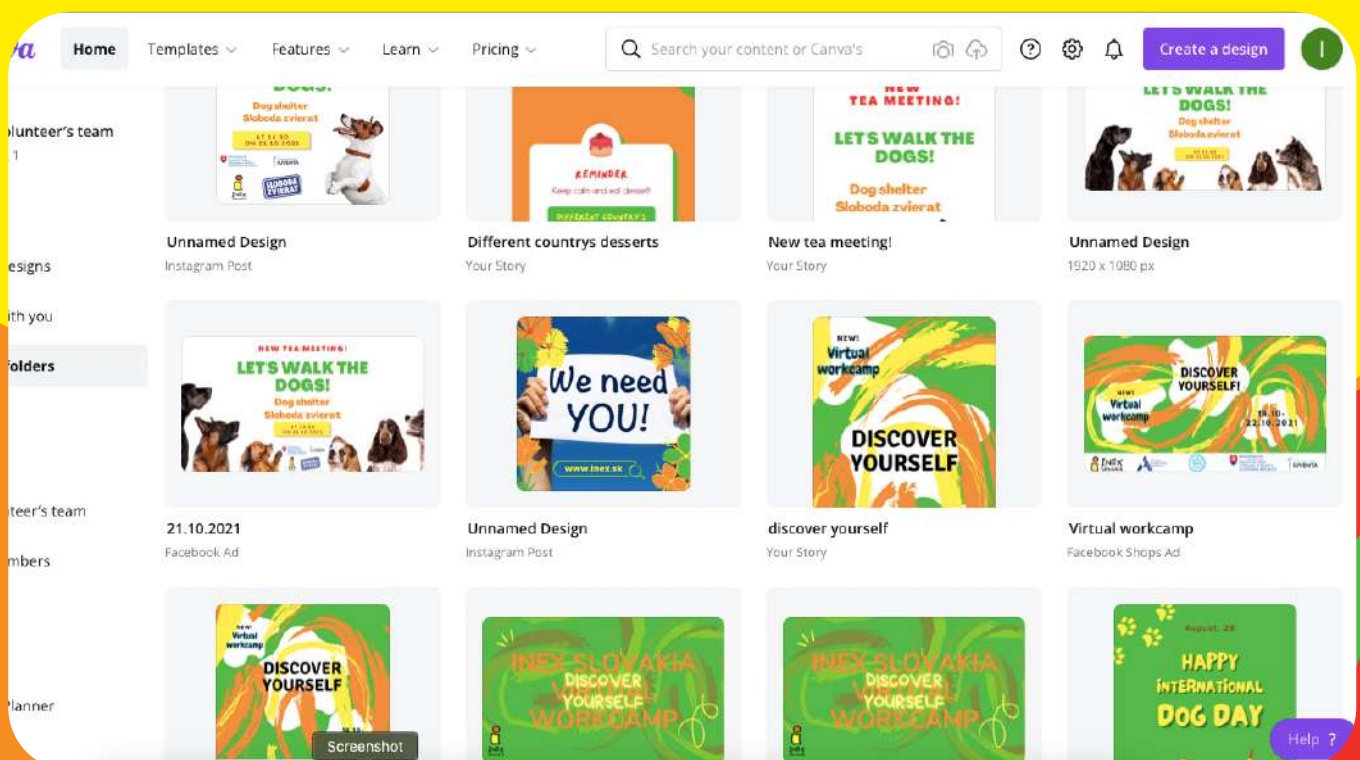
Promotion Of Volunteering

As a volunteer at Inex Slovakia one of my duties was to promote Inex Slovakia and volunteering.

I have always been interested in marketing and graphic designing and at Inex I got to put it to use.

I was more experienced in the field of handling social media and designing promotional material and I happily did those tasks.

I genuinely hope that my work reached people and made them intrigued about the events we were organizing



Office life

One of the main activities was working in the INEX's office. Me and my co-volunteer were responsible for uploading and updating workcamps on INEX's website, making presentations and promotional materials, handling social media and of course responding to emails.

On social media we carefully planned out when and what do we post on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. We added important logos to the post and searched for the right hashtags to use so that we would reach as many people as possible.





INEX Workcamps

I had the privilege and trust to lead three workcamps. One was a week long workcamp, the other one a weekend workcamp and one a virtual workcamp.

INEX offered many different workcamps this summer. The topics were ranging from castle renovation to environmental work to social work. I personally led a castle renovation camp and a festival camp and as the situation with Covid-19 I managed to make a virtual workcamp as well.

Black Castle 01.08.21-06.08.21

Leading the Black Castle workcamp was an amazing experience. It last for 6 days and each day was a new kind of adventure, there were 6 participants including me, 3 Slovaks, 2 Estonians and 1 Croat. Considering that we only accepted participants who were in Slovakia, the diversity was super.

On that workcamp we helped the local partner renovate the old, old castle with care while teaching us its history and how renovating a castle actually looks like.

Besides the work we did, we also took a day trip to a bison farm and got to hike every day and enjoy the nature and each others company.



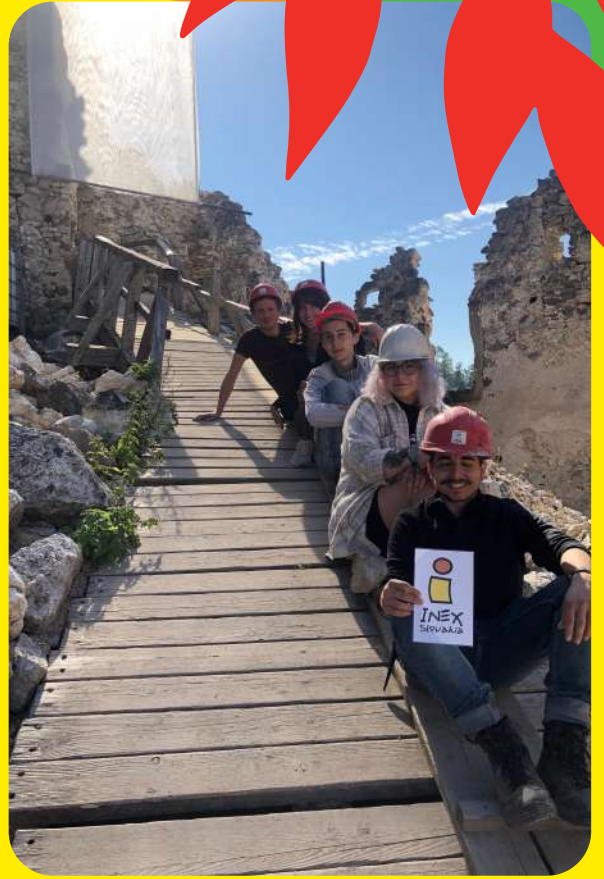
Night At The Castle Uhrovec

24.09.21-26.09.21

This weekend workcamp was about helping the local partner to prepare the castle for the night festival and again it was amazing seeing another old castle and the landscape surrounding it.

On this workcamp the workcamp participants were mostly international: 2 Greeks, 1 Croat, 1 Slovak and 1 Estonian. I was happy leading such a diverse group of people.

Although the bus connections were really bad and we had to hike a steep mountain to the castle, it was totally worth it 100%!



Discover Yourself virtual workcamp

18.10.21-22.10.21

I made my own workcamp which took place online for three days. At first I was nervous to do all of the tasks that you need to do in order to have a successful workcamp. But I was happy to do it and especially a workcamp linked to mental-health which is an important topic in today's world.

My camp was about discovering who you are and understanding yourself more. I made presentations, quizzes and we had wonderful discussions where everybody was free to be themselves. I helped the participants to start their journey and gave them homework which included worksheets and recommendations on books and apps and journals.



Trips

Since I had already decided to travel and stay in Slovakia for almost a year, the ESC project gives volunteers the freedom and time to travel and explore the country where you are staying and also the surrounding countries, I traveled often and looked for new adventures inside and outside of Slovakia.

I had fellow volunteers around me who also saw this as an opportunity to broaden their sight of the world. We took trips together and also alone and we shared our experience and gave good advice to others if they plan to travel to the same place.



Slovakia

How would I describe Slovakia and my experience here.... AMAZING! When I first applied, I didn't know much about Slovakia, its people and culture. That's also why I loved experiencing this adventure first hand.

The capital of Slovakia Bratislava has been my home for 10 months and I was lucky to be settled right in the heart of Slovakia where it's never boring ;). Of course there is soo much more to Slovakia than just it's capital. The tiny villages, lots and lots of hiking trails, mountains and beautiful castles are what make Slovakia unique.





My workcamps, ESC trainings and friends took me to amazing places in Slovakia like Poprad, Slatinka, Zlaté Moravce, Žilina, Kysucké Nove mesto, Nitra and Trnava.

Sure I didn't get to explore lots of other places because of the difficult situation with covid but in my mind I made the best of what was available. I saw the beautiful Tatras, old old castles and the nature surrounding it. The best was offered and Slovakia will always stay in my heart because of the memories I made here and I left my mark here by volunteering at INEX Slovakia.



Prague

I had a pleasure meeting a fellow ESC volunteer from France and we became very close. One night i traveled to Kysucke Nove Mesto where she was staying. After 30 minutes of talking we decided to go to Czech, Prague for the rest of the weekend. That decision came to us at 1am which isn't usually a good time to make important decisions like travelling to another country. But this was the best decision we both ever made.

We fell in love with the architecture in Prague, the nice people, the food, the museums and the historical and cultural atmosphere surrounding us. We walked all over the city, every inch that we could explore, we explored. I can honestly say it's one of my favorite places now.



Vienna

Since Vienna is only an hour by bus away from Bratislava, I just had to go there and explore the historical city myself. I went alone but I had made a friend who lives in Vienna and he offered to be my guide for a day.

I saw the magnificent palace and its garden, you could walk there for hours and not get bored of its beauty. I saw the city centre where the old town is and I must say everyone should go there and explore it, there is so much to see like the famous opera building where you can still go and enjoy the classics.

Travelling on my own and exploring new cities and countries with new friends is an experience I would recommend to everyone.

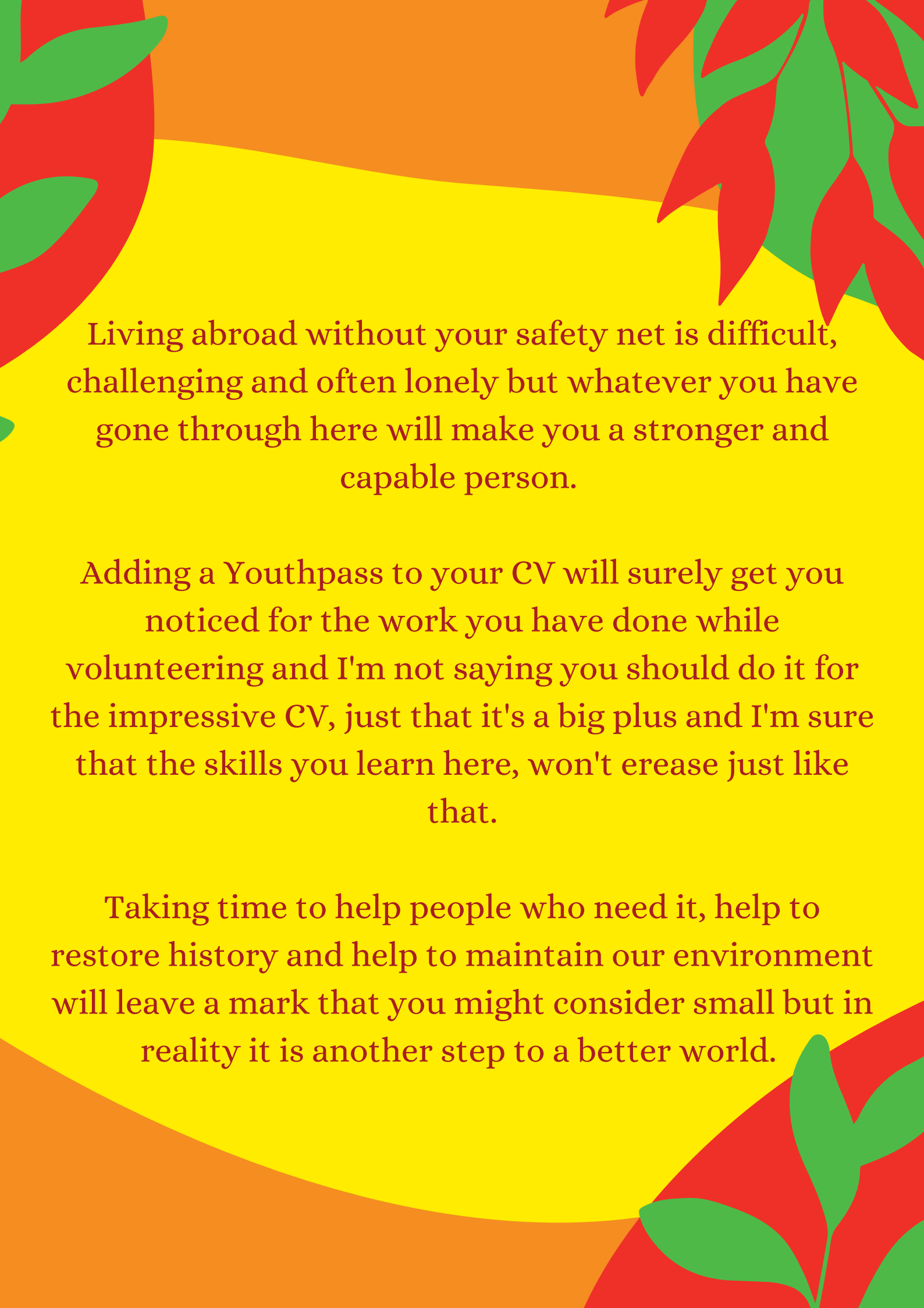




What Have I Gained From This Experience

What I gained was life long new friends, independence, more of myself, skills to help me now and in the future and of course memories that will surely help me even in my bad times.

The whole 10 months were so inspiring and helpful to me. The competencies I improved and new ones I learnt will take me further with either my career or life quality or most importantly take me further to where I want to be.



Living abroad without your safety net is difficult, challenging and often lonely but whatever you have gone through here will make you a stronger and capable person.

Adding a Youthpass to your CV will surely get you noticed for the work you have done while volunteering and I'm not saying you should do it for the impressive CV, just that it's a big plus and I'm sure that the skills you learn here, won't erese just like that.

Taking time to help people who need it, help to restore history and help to maintain our environment will leave a mark that you might consider small but in reality it is another step to a better world.

Special Thanks

I would like to thank all the amazing people I have met while being on this journey, other ESC volunteers across the world who also picked Slovakia for their home for a year, my mentor Julka who made sure I was settling in nicely, my absolutely fantastic roommate and co-volunteer Christina who I will cherish always and made each others loneliness go away, my family who supported me at any step I took and reassured me that I'm doing the right thing and that they will always be with me even if I'm 2000km away.

Last but not least my wonderful INEX family and team, thank you for receiving me and welcoming me and putting your trust in me. Thanks to you my 10 months in Slovakia were the best months of my life.

