

Experiences from 11 months as a volunteer on Åland

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Discovering, learning, helping, growing, loving, smiling, understanding, thinking, travelling, disappointing... equals EVS. This is what I think about my 11 month stay in abroad as volunteer. But there is one thing, that probably every volunteer will accept, that EVS changes one's life.

Last year this time I was sitting at my job and thinking about my next 10 months, how it is going to be? Now I am sitting in my room where I worked during the last 10 months and looking at the sea, trying to write how these 11 months actually were, which is really hard to express.

Well I did not believe or probably did not want to accept that this time will come and I will complete my EVS in Finland. Does anybody have the feeling that time is just running so fast? I have. I feel like time is bits too fast and wonderful moments of Voluntary Service are running through my fingers like sand. It seems to me that it was yesterday that I landed in this beautiful Åland Island with huge luggage and with many questions in mind. How would I live and work in a different country alone, where I do not know anybody? I am not in my own country, own city, even the air and sun shine are not like I used to have: I am in a different country, I am in Finland! With these questions in my mind I thought I had two paths in front of me... either I fight to succeed, or I go back home without any experience.....

Now these questions seem to me almost laughable. Now I have another question, how is my life going to be after my EVS? Because I found out that I have good sign from this situation also, nobody knows me; I can start something new, new life, like a new-born baby. There is only one thing needs to do in such situations is: to be flexible, it will never be the same as at home and better not to think too much about it and just go with the flow. I decided that for the EVS period I tried to be away from my life in my home country, because I think it doesn't have anything to do with my life in my home country. In my on-arrival training with other volunteers in Finland I found out that I am not the only one who decided to live in that way. It's probably like living another person's life, you can build up whatever you want., and you are responsible for everything you did. I had a chance to know if I could live without help of the people I know, in a new life, with new people.

This is what I did almost 11 month, here on the Åland Island. I became part of this island and people, I was welcomed, accepted, appreciated. All this happened due the people I met here from my work colleagues to local people. I think all my thanks is not enough to these people for their kindness and for the being part of amazing experience that I got here. Every person was different and kind in their own way.

For me the EVS is not only a break from my routine life, but also it means to live my life in unknown place, and return back with a lot of treasure that I got through everyday life experience, and which is more valuable than any gold, it is unforgettable impressions, experience. Yes, this is what EVS means for me and I believe for most of the volunteers that I met during my stay in Finland, and this is how we introduce each other: nice to meet you, here I am, a European volunteer!

This past 11 month I learned, learned and learned. I had a wonderful experience being a volunteer in the Åland Islands Peace Institute where each day brought me new challenges and surprises. I had the best work I could hope for and I have ever had. I worked in an organization that has strong team with kind people. Learning from them while working with this team was a pleasure for me. Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work (Aristotle). It was really a pleasure for me to work such a kind people which were helpful in so many ways. I will always remember all of them in a very special way. I want to give my "tusen tack" (thousand thanks) to this special group of people and I will definitely miss them all. Because

of them I have enjoyed my time here. Many thank all of them for their support, patience, and friendship all this time.

I enjoyed my volunteer place because Åland is something special for me, it was not place where I used to live, but now I feel like I already have been living here for a long time. I fell in love with Åland, it is so different and the same time so similar for me. I love the beautiful forests as much as the landscape, the pure air, jumping into cold water after sauna which make you feel so fresh, the language (even I have basic knowledge) kind, calm people, the sun as much as the wonderful views of Åland. This is all makes Åland so special for me for many ways. It was another life for me in Åland. I tried many things here in Åland for the first time in my life. I learned to be independent, gained more self-confidence in myself, my skills and abilities. Independent life for me means making hundreds of decisions every day, it also means being responsible for own health, time, work, money. From first sight responsibility seems sometimes hard, but together with it I learned to enjoy personal freedom and deeply appreciate help from people around me. The lesson that I got here is: take you time out, you do not have to be social all the time, everyone needs its own space and peace sometimes and do not be afraid to take it and use it.

Of course sometimes you feel little bit stressed being alone, without your family and friends especially in special days or in holidays. But this also makes you strong and you get new ideas about how you are going to celebrate all these events with your family and friends in a new way next year. I probably felt mostly disappointed when I hurt my foot two days before leaving my EVS home. Every time when I spoke or thought about leaving I felt that I am not ready for this. But last week of my staying here I already felt ready to travel home and to meet new challenges at home. After that accident I thought that it was the biggest unfortunate that could happen to me. Once I was told that if you are leaving place and you feel that you are not done with that place, then you will definitely come back to get it. Before the accident I was thinking how the island going to be in summer, especially in July and I thought I will come back one day to see it. But now I almost saw how actually beautiful the island is in July and if I ever get the opportunity to come back, I will definitely do it in July. So I decided not to be disappointed with everything in life just take it as the advantage from other points. This is how EVS changes your attitude to things happening to you or around of you.

Anyway, I think there are so many impressions regarding my EVS period in Åland. It feels like one word is not enough to hold all my feelings and impressions. The place that was question mark for me before, now became part of my life and my second home, my EVS home. I think my EVS in the Åland island is something amazing, unknown, lovely, friendly, rainy, snowy, charming, learning, meeting, trying, sleepless, cold and warm at the same time, distant, dreamy, safe, peaceful, unbelievable and all together just Wonderful.