



POLITISTIKO ERGASTIRI AYION OMOLOYITON



ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙ
ΑΓΙΩΝ ΟΜΟΛΟΓΗΤΩΝ

**NEWSLETTER
MARCH 2020**



***NOTE: Please note that these articles were written throughout the month of March and some before any measures were implemented.**

“Being an ESC/EVS volunteer amongst the COVID-19 outbreak”

Hi everyone! I'm Amalia, a volunteer from Greece who moved to Cyprus in the beginning of February in order to participate in an ESC project as an education volunteer at a school in Dali, Nicosia. Being among kids and



working at a school and a cultural center is truly delightful. Every single day is unique - likewise the collaboration with the pupils. We cultivate our sense of creativity and teaching, while supporting the students in their learning process, participate at the ongoing activities and events and get to know the local history and traditions through fairs, celebrations and educational excursions.

I feel grateful for all the things I have learned, the people I have met and all the experiences I have already gained along this journey. Plus, that, the locals are remarkably giving, caring and they represent the best ever hospitalization someone could imagine.

I was living and spending my daily life with Sara, an Italian co-volunteer and I started to learn Italian and she started to learn Greek. We were having a great time together and we created a strong bond while in the countryside area of Dali. We often meet the rest of the volunteers living in Nicosia and having fun all together. The coronavirus outbreak begun to affect our voluntary services mainly from the 10th of March when the schools closed and since then, we are staying at the house, adjusting to the new reality and working on the continuation of the project from our laptops. In the meanwhile, and as we experienced the first days of quarantine, Sara decided to move back to Italy. The fact that we had to say goodbye to each other so soon due to this virus outbreak was very disappointing.

Through any storm, may we all rise! Stay positive!



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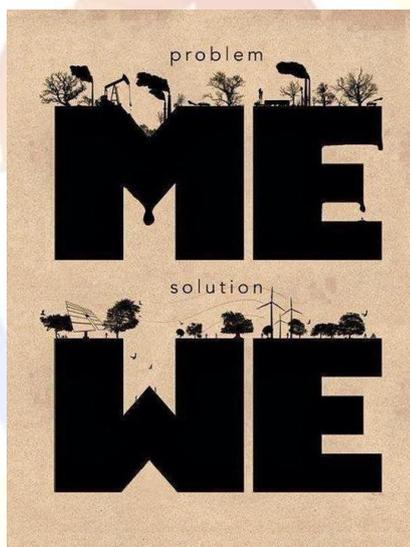
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While in lockdown, our daily routine has been definitely altered but we can still be active volunteers and solidarity ambassadors in many other aspects as well. During these tough times of acute volatility, it is crucial to stand strong, courageous, mindful yet in the spirit of service and helpfulness for those who are struggling. Small acts create a big impact and that can include an action on a local community level, or to walk the dog of a neighbor who belongs to a vulnerable group, bring the grocery to his place, offer a service for free etc. It is clear the virus is spreading far and wide quickly, hence self-isolation is compulsive. This will not only give to us and to those we love the greatest shot at staying healthy - it will also protect our neighbor and fellow citizens. Overall, I strongly believe that this period can be much creative, inspirational and an opportunity for introspection and revision of the way we live. Then we'll all become stronger, wiser and more loving amid the crises our society faces.

Let's Switch from Me to We! We Are in This Together! 😊



Amalia Michail (Greece), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers

“Being an Esc Volunteer Among the Covid-19 Outbreak”

I'm Sara, an Italian girl who started her experience at the beginning of February as a volunteer for the European Solidarity Corps, in order to live an experience different from everyday life, which has been placed in an international context allowing her to acquire new skills and new opportunities and learn about different cultures. And certainly, that's what happened! I was lucky enough to meet a really nice group of volunteers and be a part of a particularly stimulating organization. I spent my first month and a half in Dali, a village near Nicosia, with a crazy and fantastic Greek roommate. Our task is to support the A' Primary school of Dali in any need and at the same time to help a group of surprisingly active ladies (“Idaliades”), who have supported us substantially from the start.



One of the most surprising things is the hospitality shown not only by the Idaliades but by the school, the neighbours and all the people you meet.

Since the beginning of March, we have been hearing more and more alarmingly about the coronavirus threat from other nations. Honestly, although I was aware of the Italian situation, I would never have thought that this could really create problems even on this island on the borders of Europe. However, in a short time, as expected, the virus has obviously spread throughout Europe, including Cyprus.

But what is it like then to be an ESC volunteer in the days of COVID- 19?

First of all, I had to return to Italy, with great sadness, after numerous and pressing invitations from the embassy and especially under the advice of my parents. In these circumstances I believe there are really no better decisions, and therefore, following their instructions, I was forced to leave Dali. In any case, following the closure of the schools in Cyprus, our work as volunteers in the schools has totally changed and it is now possible to act directly from home. Our organization has applied itself so that we can afford to work in this situation as well.

What I find interesting is how this virus has positive as well as negative aspects. People are paradoxically more united now at a distance than in everyday life and a different, almost deeper type of communication is being established. It is also surprising to see nature's response, in the states where quarantine has been in place for the longest time, in fact, it is evident that everything is "returning to normal", almost as if our Earth needed it.



I hope that this crisis will be overcome as soon as possible and that it may be possible for me to return to that beautiful land and to those people who have been so hospitable with me, because I hope that this beautiful and intense experience will not end so soon.

Sara Costaglioli (Italy), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers

“Being an ESC/EVS Volunteer among the COVID-19 outbreak.”

My name is Melissa, I'm 19 years old and I'm volunteering in Cyprus for 5 months. I live in Paris, France. The situation in France is worse than that in Cyprus because there are more or less 9000 cases. I don't really realize how is the situation in France because I'm not there. However, I'm still worried for my family and my friends and more particularly my father, because despite the total isolation he still has to work. My father is 53 years old and he is diabetic which makes it more dangerous for him. Moreover, it's a difficult year for France. Because of the Coronavirus, all schools are closed for the second time this year. Everything is happening in the same time so I'm glad I went volunteering this year, so my scholarship is not affected. Schools are also closed in Cyprus, but Cyprus looks more prepared which is reassuring. A lot of institutions are closed or if they're still open, they have to follow rules. These rules are well applied which comforts me. However, it's annoying because I would have loved discovering more about Cyprus but travelling is a risk. We are 8 volunteers living in one apartment, we must think of each other and be responsible because if one has the COVID-19 there are chances that we all catch it. I hope the situation in Cyprus won't get bad and I really hope we won't have to live the total isolation stage. I'm also scared that we will have to be repatriated before the end of the project. We were working in schools but since the schools are closed, we are working at home for the cultural centre of Politistiko Ergastiri Ayion Omologiton and we also try to help the teachers online as much as we can. Despite all of this, I think that living this health crisis abroad is an experience that not a lot of people can live, we are affected in another way than if we were at home.

Melissa Chamblain (France)), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers



“Being an ESC Volunteer in the COVID-19 outbreak”

Coronavirus: *What now?*

I'm Liliana, I'm 18 and I'm an educational ESC volunteer in Cyprus during the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020. The first question I asked myself when things started escalating so rapidly was: *What now?* In a matter of weeks, days even, we went from talking about an unknown virus on the other side of the world that didn't affect me, to a universal crisis. The whole world has shifted so *What now?* What can I do to stick to the core of my project: *solidarity?* Let me take you through what this process has been like for me so far.

Two months ago I was at home in Brussels guessing what these 5 months in Nicosia would be like. I had made a vague timeline in my mind where March and April 2020 would feel calm, warm and trouble-free. At school, I would feel more comfortable in my workspace because I would know the teachers and children better. I imagined myself enjoying a walk around the old town, a picnic in the park, a cool lemonade on a terrace somewhere or a swim in the blue sea on a weekend trip to the coast. All the things you could think of doing on a sunny paradise island during springtime. But my expectations didn't meet up with reality. Let us go back to that crucial word that everyone is going on about lately: *solidarity*. I now see what it means. At the moment every day is a constant battle between my primary impulse of being lazy, my selfish curiosity to still do things that could put more people at risk and my responsible conscience telling me to act wisely. I feel like it's my duty to show *solidarity*, change my habits and not make any selfish decisions. I have always been very aware of inequality and the repercussions it has on our society. But now I see my privilege on an even larger scale. For many of us, our rights to travel, consume, act and receive care freely have been restricted or taken away. My European passport and my pale skin are no longer such a big gateway to worldwide privilege in this natural crisis. We are all exposed and have taken too many things for granted. Two weeks ago schools closed from one day to the other. I thought that my educational project wouldn't make sense anymore but I wasn't ready to give up on it. I immediately came up with ideas on how to fulfill my tasks from a distance. I have been left to spend the 24 hours in my day freely, I know that I must self-organize and use the precious time that is given to me wisely. Overall this period is helping me find out things about my life and habits: what I like, what I would like to add or change and what I miss.

During this confusing time, I can undertake some of the things I have always wanted to do but have never had the time to. It's my chance to surpass myself, accept a challenge and rediscover myself.

Liliana Paez Civico (Belgium), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers



“Volunteering during the corona virus crisis”



Hi, my name is Luca and I want to share my experience as a volunteer during the corona virus crisis. First of all, I am a volunteer in Cyprus, and I've been here since the 3rd of February. The virus arrived pretty late in this country. The first case was confirmed on the 9th of March. The island reacted very fast and intense. They immediately closed all schools and one week later all shops, bars and clubs except the supermarkets and the pharmacies. Some restaurants are still open as well, but only for delivery or take away. Up until then, I was working in a primary school, but they are closed now so I am looking for another way to use my time.

Compared to other countries, Cyprus seems pretty safe, but a girl of our project decided to go back home because she wants to be with her family during these unsafe times. We now decided some rules for our apartment to avoid getting and spreading the virus. For example, only close friends can visit us

in our apartment. We are trying to avoid going out, but according to the fact that we are many people in our apartment, we have to leave the apartment sometimes to get a clear mind. I am a bit worried about my family in my home country. If one of them gets sick, I am not sure if it is possible for me to go back to them because the airport could be closed then. That's also a reason why some of us are thinking about going back

home. I am also a bit sad that now I can't go out in bars or clubs, because this way I used to meet new people here in Cyprus. Anyway, the mood is still all right and that's the most important. I hope that it will be over fast so that I can continue with my volunteering service.

Luca Mertens (Belgium)), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers

“Outbreak of COVID-19”

My name is Aila, I live in Austria and I came here to Cyprus almost 2 months ago. I started to join a social project where I work in a primary school to help the teachers out in any way I can. My first month was really great. I met a lot of new people, I was going out on the weekends and travelled to other cities. The work at school went quite well and slowly there was a process in-building a relationship with the pupils in school. Unfortunately, all this would end soon.

Before I came here, the topic of COVID-19 was already spread in the news and I had heard about the breakout in China. My family was back then worried about me going to Cyprus. But honestly, for me, all this seemed so far away, and I was just too excited so that I did not want to think about what might happen as well in Europe. And then it began. One country after the other was hit by the pandemic. When the first cases appeared in Cyprus, which was by the way a bit later than the other countries in Europe, the panic was also palpable here. Now, all that what seemed to be so far away from me and my new experiences has arrived. The first measure that was set was all the schools closing. At first, they told us the schools will be closed for only three days. But then they extended the measure more and more. For now, the schools will be closed until the end of April which sums up a period of more than a month. The next measure was closing all the restaurants and bars and so on, until the complete lockdown came. The city does not seem how it was before. You can see less cars and almost no people on the streets. Before entering a supermarket, you need to disinfect your hands and wear gloves and you can notice a difference in how people hold a bigger distance to you while passing by. Besides all that, my family back home started to worry even more about me and my health. I felt a big pressure and was stuck between the decision of staying here or flying back home before the borders close. Even if I am afraid of my family members getting infected by the virus, I decided not to quit my project and to take care of me and the people around me. Two of the volunteers already left and went back to their home. The difficulties we have to face now is to keep ourselves still busy and to be productive. We are seven people in the apartment and fortunately we have the possibility to go the cultural centre of POLITISTIKO ERGASTIRI AYION OMOLOYITON to work on projects or just to relax in the yard and enjoy the sun. All we can do now is to stay as much as possible safe, to wait until the virus eases up and the work at school starts again. Despite everything, I try to keep my mind positive and to enjoy every single moment. Now we have the time to reflect and appreciate all the small things in life.

#staysafe#stayhome

Aila Cavkic (Austria), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers



“Being an ESC Volunteer among the COVID-19 outbreak”



Hey, my name is Isabel, I'm a 20-year-old girl from the Netherlands. I graduated high school, so I decided to take a gap year. Through the ESC programme I got this great opportunity, to go to Cyprus for 5 months.

We went to school every day from +- 08:25 till +- 13/14:00, which was nice. I loved working with the kids, and it's weird that we are not able to see them every day. On Tuesday I was going to the cultural centre of Politistiko Ergastiri Ayion Omologiton to help with the dancing groups for children. I like dancing so it was nice to help in every way possible. But then, something happened: after a month in Cyprus I got hit by a car so I couldn't go to school or help the dancing group. A week later, on Monday, I thankfully got back to school, not knowing this would be the last day there. On Tuesday they announced that all the schools and places with more than 75 people would close. This was life changing, because a few days later they were talking about closing all the borders. The question that immediately popped in my head was “for how long am I supposed to stay, if I wouldn't go home now?”. This scared me so much that I decided to go home. It was supposed to be this nice project, 'Unity – iOS Education Volunteers', which it was, until the COVID-19. My family thought it would be better if I came home, so unfortunately, I had to leave the project. It is weird to be back home, I miss living with my roommates, school, the project, and even the island. I had so many plans to do. So, I really hope I will be able to come back after everything is safe again. I want to thank my roommates and Politistiko Ergastiri for everything! Guys stay safe and take care of each other.

Isabel Van Den Berg (Netherlands), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers

“Living along COVID-19 “

My name is Maria Kusheela, I'm 27 years old and I'm from Italy. I am here in Cyprus for an ESC project. My tasks concern the administration and the management of ESC projects. About the virus, like most of the people, I wasn't expecting that it would be spreading so fast and all over the world.

Like everyone, I'm most of all worried about my family and friends even, because Italy is one of the most affected. Here in Cyprus, the Government activated strict measures as soon as the virus started to spread!!! I'm glad of it, even if that means that we are not able to go around and visit the Country.

But Health FIRST!

During these weeks I'm working from home. Me and other volunteers are able to go to the association's cultural center to work but we need to have our certification with us otherwise we are going to get charged by the police and pay a fee of 300 euros. This situation challenges you in a psychological way, but I'm trying to keep myself busy with books, online-course and series.

To be honest there are some days where I am feeling a bit down and unmotivated but I'm trying to overcome this feeling and keep myself productive. Even in this situation, I consider myself lucky because I'm able to get in touch with new people by WhatsApp or Skype and I'm in a new country with different people and surrounded by different input. I hope this situation will be over soon, so I'll be able to embrace this experience to its full potential!

Maria Kusheela Maroni (Italy), Unity - iOS: Volunteer Expertise