



POLITISTIKO ERGASTIRI AYION OMOLOYITON



**NEWSLETTER –
MARCH 2021**





THE ESC PROJECT – Francesca

I Looking for gap year opportunities during an ongoing global pandemic is not easy and if you would have told me in August how things would have turned out, I would have struggled to believe it! My ESC service at Politistiko has been a bubble of air, a refreshing experience where I had the opportunity to discover myself by undertaking very different projects at the Cultural Center and at the school.

I was in the ESC Educational project at Politistiko where I was assisting the primary school of Agion Omologiton from September 2020 to January 2021. As I was the first volunteer that the school had, and not speaking any Greek, finding your “role” within the school can be difficult at first. However, I soon realised that it was also a luck and a great opportunity for me as it was the first time where I had so much freedom in a project.

I was involved in any kind of interactive classes Gym, English and particularly Art which is a topic that really interest me. I would help the teachers in preparing the lessons and sometimes, they would also let me teach to the children. I was always very happy about those opportunities, as children are always very receptive to anything new and different from usual. Together, we learned French, discovered Belgian comic strips and painted Magritte paintings – each time with a lot of curiosity and excitement.

This positive energy and opening to new idea was also something I felt every time I wanted to implement something new at the school. Teachers were always very cooperative and open to new ideas. Throughout my service, I implemented games during break time where I would take a different class to play collective games, organised some special days where all educational volunteers would come at my school and finally the Christmas in a box project.

Managing the Christmas in a Box project was one of the highlight of my service. With volunteers from another school we gathered goods and food donation from the families over Christmas. We then sorted them and put them in shoeboxes that were decorated by the children and later offered to teenagers in a refugee centre in Nicosia. The whole project was a pleasure and something very satisfying to do. Dealing with all the donations from the families willing to do something for teenager coming from very difficult situation was heart-warming...

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Throughout that project, my role of "Educational Volunteer" felt like it took all of its meaning as I was able to educate children on the values of Volunteering and Sharing throughout all this project. On the side I was also very happy to discover the Cypriot lifestyle and culture. Cyprus is a vibrating Island with a lot of beautiful places to discover, interesting people to meet and nice food to try! I enjoyed leaving the "siga... siga..." lifestyle and taking it easy over the the very long summer that these 5 months have been.

– Francesca Dorrell (Belgium), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers



MY ESC PROJECT IN CYPRUS – Sali

Kalimera, my name is Sali and I am going to tell you about my ESC experience in Cyprus... The word I would use to describe my ESC experience in Cyprus would be UNPREDICTABLE... Unpredictable because I did not expect to spend the end of the year and beginning of 2021 on this beautiful island and live such a phenomenal adventure... The whole experience got off to a flying start... I arrived in Cyprus in an intense heat and got a warm welcome from my future flatmate! Could not have asked for a better start... In the next days, the other volunteers arrived in Cyprus and we got a few days to enjoy the island because the school start was postponed... #covid19

After enjoying the amazing beaches and scenery around the island, I took part in a training week with the other volunteers... We got to know each other better and learn about our volunteering at the schools... On the 14th of September, I went to school for the first time! I am not going to lie, the first two months were boring, I did not like spending time at the school at all because I felt useless. I did not feel comfortable taking initiatives or proposing ideas... Step outside your comfort zone Sali, do not be shy but it took me some time to adjust to this environment. Faced with this frustrated situation, I decided to talk with my coordinators who talked to my headmistress... After this, things improved gradually... we received new schedules and were able to attend the classes of our choice and the headmistress started to give us more little tasks outside the classrooms...

Little by little, I eventually started to appreciate my time at the school, better later than never!! In parallel, I was enjoying my stay on the island, making friends, partying, travelling around the island, going to the beach, discovering local food and beverages...

I feel really grateful for this experience, I would do it over and over again without a doubt & I had such a great time here and met such amazing people that I decided to extend my stay on Aphrodite's island!



-Salimata Diaby (Belgium), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers



My ESC Educational Voluntary Service Experience 2020/2021



The project here in Cyprus was my first time ever being alone in another country with people I haven't seen before, speaking another language and living in another culture with international fellow volunteers. Now five months of working as a volunteer of Politistiko in Cyprus has almost come to an end. Time has passed by incredibly quick and what is left are lots of new experiences which I am very happy and grateful for!

The Beginning

My journey began on the 2nd of September. The first week here in Cyprus was dedicated to get to know our Project Managers Eleonora and Alexis, who told us about the project in general but also about Cypriot history, culture, the cultural center and all the necessary information for the next five months. But most importantly, they made us feel very comfortable in this new environment and working and living place from the very beginning, which made the start so much easier for me. Me and the other five educational volunteers of Nicosia and Dali and Eleonora and Alexis met for one week to play games to get to know each other and to break barriers of fear and insecurities and to welcome us as comfortable as possible. Thus, I was very happy how the first week went and it helped me a lot to settle into this new environment slowly and relaxed, since it was also my very first time being alone in another country living and working by my own. To conclude, my initial fears and overwhelming feelings turned into enthusiasm and curiosity quite quickly, which I am very grateful for.

The Educational project

In the first week I got told that my new working place will be the primary school of Palaichori, which is outside of Nicosia in a small village in the mountains. I accepted the offer for the school from the very beginning. However, I was also a bit concerned in the beginning about how the work will be when all the other volunteers are working in closer area around Nicosia and I am the only one depending on the teachers working time. Some days I was very tired in the morning because I had to wake up very early in the morning to go to school and the car ride in the mountains made me feel exhausted and tired. I also had some problems with the air pressure on my ear in the beginning. Now I can say I am very happy to have worked in the Palaichori Primary School because I felt very comfortable around the teachers and the school environment from the very beginning. My teacher who brought me to school every day always offered me a lot of help and support if needed. Not only about school but also in general for my time here in Cyprus to make sure I have a nice and pleasant experience. We scheduled a weekly plan for me in the first week based on my interests. I chose to have classes in English, Sports, Art, Music, Greek and Computer class. Although it was difficult sometimes to participate in classes and to assist the teachers, especially in classes like Greek, there were also classes where I felt really implemented and helpful. For instance, I thought of games to play outside in Music or Sports class. I also helped a lot in cooking class. Besides the actual lessons in school, I also lead my own environmental group which consisted of around 8 children who helped me in different tasks regarding topics like environment, health, sustainability or recycling. For example, we organized a school clean-up where everybody in school cleaned the yard or put signs on the bins in school saying which trash belongs in which bin. The children also taught me some Greek and in exchange I taught them English or some German words.

Working in the afternoon at the cultural center

Besides our main project, working in the primary school, I also had activities around the cultural center to work on. Unfortunately, due to the Covid Situation, the activities changed and we had to think of different ways to help around Politistiko. The first month I assisted the weekly movie nights at the cultural center. I really enjoyed it, the location was set up in a cozy and nice atmosphere and I am into movies, so it was very interesting and a lot of fun! I was in charge of setting up tables and chairs for the movie night, to check the reservations and guide the guests to their seat. After the

screening I helped cleaning up. I was really sad when I heard the screenings were canceled due to covid. Luckily, Eleonora had a good idea for a project instead, even though it was not movie related. Another volunteer and me were capable of redesigning and fixing the book fridge in front of the cultural center. I was very happy about this idea because we can be as creative as we want and it felt good to have a little activity after school. Especially when the schools had to close because of the measures.

Living in the apartment

Living together in a shared flat with six people, especially when there is a lockdown, is of course not always easy. However, I really enjoyed my time in the flat and I really liked all of my flatmates. For me it was not a problem to share my room with another volunteer. We were also lucky to leave the house in different times in the morning. In the end I am very happy I could spend the lockdown time in an apartment with five other volunteers because I got less bored and it was good to have friends around me when we were not allowed to go outside due to curfew for example. One little problem we had was our kitchen, which had to be renewed during the Christmas holidays which was a bit stressful, especially because most of us were at home the whole time while the workers fixed the tiles. I also learned how important it is to have rules for living together in a shared flat when it comes to noise, cleaning and sharing the same rooms.

What I have learnt

During the last five months I gained a lot of new experiences I never had before. I learned a lot about Cyprus in general, its history and political situation, about the people and their lifestyle on this island. I learned quickly to adapt and to live in a new culture. I started to like the Cypriot lifestyle, as I perceived it, very quickly. I met a lot of open minded and warm welcoming people, whose way of living is very interesting. One of the most difficult part for me was to learn Greek language. Yes, I learned some words and sentences in school and during daily life but in the beginning I was hoping to make bigger achievements. However, I can definitely say that my English language improved a lot over the last months. One of the reasons are the international friends I met here in Cyprus, by whom I learned how to speak freely and less afraid. For me it was very helpful to get to know different people from different countries in different stages of life and to connect with them. It opened a lot of new perspectives for me and I have a bigger and more colorful view on the world now, which I am very grateful for. In general, I improved my social skills, which had been one of my main goals for this project.

In the end I am super thankful I could have made this experience. I will never forget the time I had and I really wish the project would last longer. I met very nice people and learned a lot from them. Even when people from two completely different places and stages of life meet each other, they always find similarities and ways to connect.



-Linus Pawlowski (Germany), Unity - iOS: Education Volunteers

MY FINAL ARTICLE ABOUT CYPRUS – Sara



When I arrived at the school on my first day I was welcomed warmly nevertheless not all of the teachers introduced themselves to me. I was pretty excited when I came to the school but the first few days I just got to put up the chairs in the yard and spray them with antiseptic due to the corona virus regulations.

And as I was finally got to go to class I only had the first grade. On the one hand this benefitted getting to know all children in this class better and learning their names. I started to learn the Greek alphabet and some vocabulary and as a result I was mostly able to help in the first grades 'Greek lessons. However, I just had the ability to support the English speaking kids. Although I could contribute in some of the lessons like Greek, music and physical education, I felt like I was useless in some other lessons I had to attend like religion and life education and also left out by the teachers and not really included in the lesson for instance in the subject English.

Therefore, those lessons were really boring and monotonous as I just had to sit in the class room and listen to the teacher carry out their lesson. However, Sali and me had the opportunity to present our home countries to the children of all grades in the frame of an interactive presentation and quiz.

In November I got an individual schedule which was built upon English, physical education lessons and preparing teaching materials for the teachers. In further detail, I tried to make them more motivated by playing tennis and football with the children. Moreover, I got to teach an english lesson in which I repeated vocabulary of topics the kids had already learned by playing games like hang man, bingo etc.

In December I continued to follow the already mentioned schedule. Additionally, Sali and me got to do a gardening project, put up the christmas trees in the entry hall and organised the 'christmas in a box'-project where the pupils brought food and non-food items which were donated to a refugee youth center.

In January the pupils could not return to school due to corona virus measures which were introduced by the government. Nevertheless, I got a permit to go to school and I carried out some maintenance work like repainting floor games with water-proof colours.

-Sarah Morxbauer (Austria), Unity – iOS: Education Volunteer

Create a story that will be unforgettable. I'm not here to tell you how (I am not the right person). I'm here just to share my experience.

Volunteering has always been a part of my life because I discovered that it makes me happier. But in the volunteer program in Cyprus I discovered many things about myself and our society. Let's start with the basic. I am grateful that I met good people with a good heart. Multicultural people who have always been by my side. I only have memories with a lot of laughter and a lot of food.

In primary school and the daily contact with the children was very creative. You get a different imagination through their eyes. Children may forget what you said, and children may forget what you did, but they will never forget how it made them feel. It was the best feeling to see them happy.

Volunteering it is a way of helping others without expecting anything in return. It involves caring, loving and sharing of our time, our heart and our soul. I believe volunteering makes a person feel empowered because we made someone else's life better or we helped our community in some way. I wish I had the option to carry out this volunteer program earlier. Do not miss the opportunity of a volunteer program! This will change your life!

My ESC project – LAURA

The past 5 months as an Educational Volunteer in Cyprus have been an enriching experience. Working in a school in another country and another context broadened my understanding of other cultures and other approaches to teaching. The children were very open to get to know us volunteers and were always happy and eager to learn from us (of course, we also learned from them). Also the teachers were very welcoming and tried to include us in their lessons as much as possible. This gave me the chance to put my knowledge into practice and use my skills to teach the children about water and waste management. Of course, the circumstances of the Corona-measures made it always a little complicated and some things could not be realized, but especially the children were still full of enthusiasm, which in turn also motivated me to keep the good spirit.

But not only the project itself was very fruitful. Meeting other people from all over Europe, getting to know the different projects and travelling the country made these months an unforgettable experience. Personally, for me it was also a time to reflect on my life and gain some distance from my daily life in order to get more focus about my future.

All in all, it was probably one of the best decisions in my life to do an ESC project. It changed my perspective, gave me new ideas, I gained new friends and learned a lot about myself and another culture.



-Laura Birkelbach (Austria), Unity – iOS: Education Volunteer



My ESC - NATURERUSH- Marie

My name is Marie, I'm from Marseilles in France and I just participated in an ESC environmental project called "NatureRush" in Cyprus. I chose to participate in this project because I had difficulties to find a job related to my studies (marine biology) and I didn't participate in any ERASMUS exchange before. I wanted to have the experience to live aboard and participating in an ESC project seemed a good opportunity for that. Thus, I found this project and I decided to go to Cyprus for six months and it was a great decision! We were three girls to participate in the project and, even if we faced few difficulties, we really were a good match and we get on very well. Regarding the project, we didn't really do what we expected and we were disappointed by our tasks, but we dealt with this situation by proposing ideas and organizing our own projects. However, even if on a professional side this experience was quite disappointing, I'm very glad to participate in because it was a great experience on a personal side. Indeed, it allowed me to discover the island of Cyprus, to learn about its history, its culture and to meet a lot of new people, from Cyprus and other European countries. The best part of my volunteering was to participate in a project called World Wide Village. During one month we were 15 participants from different European countries to collect carobs in order to support the local community in a mountain village. It was a great experience because we were very close from the inhabitants and we could discover the culture and learn a lot. For example, we learnt how to play tavli, a board game very popular in Cyprus, and we organized a tournament between the volunteers and the locals, it was a really good moment! The time spent in this village was really meaningful and it's there that I finally get what volunteering means, by helping the inhabitants and having real exchanges with them. I felt useful and I found what I was looking for when I decided to leave for this ESC opportunity.

One of the other best moments of my volunteering was to celebrate Christmas and New Year's eve with the other volunteers, it was the first time that I celebrated Christmas without my family but I found there an "ESC family".

To conclude, when I decided to leave for this ESC in Cyprus, I didn't expect to live such a great experience, so many moments of happiness, exchanges of culture and to meet people with who I have so much in common and I really felt connected with, they became real friends. I am very grateful for living this experience. It was so rewarding! It was very difficult for me to leave Cyprus and go back to France! Being back home after this is very weird and one week later I still feel disconnected from here... And after being with people all the time during six months (we even share rooms) it seems very empty now! But I went back with amazing memories and new friendships and I'm looking forward for new adventures!

- Marie Fevotte (France), Unity – iOS: NatureRush

My volunteering experience in Cyprus – Deborah

I've spent 6 months in Cyprus in the volunteering project "Nature Rush".

6 months full of new adventures, new experiences, new friendships.

I've lived this experience with my 2 co-volunteers: Marie whom I met at the airport just before leaving France and Nika whom we met when we arrived in Politistiko in Nicosia. I didn't know yet that a great friendship would be born, that they were going to become my sisters. During this experience, we lived and shared so many things, we discovered the Cypriot culture and what really means be a volunteer.

We've worked with the forest department, collecting Calabrian pine seeds to plant new trees after forest fire, we organized events about plastic pollution in ocean to rise environment awareness of Cypriot people. And we worked in fields with locals, trying to be integrated in their culture and life. I met a lot of new friends all around Europe. These new friendships and the cheerful memories we created are what I really want to keep from my experience.

I learn a lot about myself, what I like and what I don't like by living and working with other people. I know myself better and I have more self-esteem than before. Now I feel more confident to know what I want and to take decision to realize my projects.

Since I am back in France, I took times to meet my family and my friends to tell them about my experience and the journey I lived in Cyprus. We met many times with Marie to hike in the south of France where we are living and a part of France we love.

I plan to travel again and to work in social and environmental organisations because I am sure now that I want to make a difference by helping people.

- Deborah Ranger (France), Unity – iOS: NatureRush

