Visually Impaired Education & Work Support

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**Aleksandra (Slovenia):**

New country, new people, new customs, new culture ... All this makes me confused sometimes, but the great time and new friends remind me very soon that despite being a foreigner in a country, I can enjoy just as anyone else!

I am working at the coordination of the part of the city where I live. Although work there is a little bit more serious, kind people make me forget about that. There I write articles in the bimonthly newspaper and participate in the several meetings of the coordination and other little associations.

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This leaflet is the outcome of the training course organized and held by VIEWS International in December 2011.


Costica (Romania):

I work at the school called IRHOV. It is a specialized school for blind and partially sighted children and also for children with hearing impairments.

The major activities that I do are braille reading, informatics supported by synthetic speech and playing chess for those who are interested. With some pupils I consider starting with origami as well. For blind people it is very important to develop their imagination. The chess game and the origami can help them.

In my spare time I take care of the housekeeping at the house where I live, I also cook together with a person who assists me. Another monitor teaches me mobility skills. He helps me to discover the area and learns me all the routes I need to know.

Training Course

In December 2011 VIEWS International held a training on “How to organize adapted EVS for VIP’s?” wishing to enlarge the network of hosting/sending organizations of visually impaired European volunteers. There are organizations who would do it but they do not have all the necessary skills. So VIEWS International invited them to a training.

The Objectives of the Training course were to increase the capacity of organizations to develop adapted EVS project for visual impaired persons, to learn how to develop adapted EVS project for persons with visual impairment and last but not least to exchange practice concerning EVS project for visual impaired persons.

The partners to this project were Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Turkey, and Germany.
What is European Voluntary Service (EVS)?

According to the user’s guide, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a service under the Youth In Action Program which is economically backed up by the European Commission and offers European youngsters the opportunity to participate in the reinforcement of the European Union through unpaid and full-time voluntary activities in a foreign country within or outside the EU.

The objectives of EVS pursue the ideas of solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance at the same time promoting active citizenship and stimulating social cohesion.

Conditions
- Age of the participants should be between 18 and 30
- Participation is free for the volunteers
- Accommodation, insurance and 90% of travel costs are covered. Additional-

Testimonies of the volunteers

Magda (Poland)

If you would ask me if I had fears I would say yes. New people and unknown places, language I knew just a little bit. I like new challenges, so I treat my stay here as a big challenge and a possibility to get new experiences.

During the first week of my work I had no doubts that I made a good choice. The children and youth accepted me very quickly and I’m in very good relationships with them.

Teachers, who I work with, are very open and helpful. When I proposed a few ideas for activities they accepted them. A few times I brought adapted games and my little friends liked them very much. My proposition to talk about Polish Christmas tradition was immediately accepted by the class.
2012

VIEWS International coordinated three volunteers Patricia (Murcia, Spain), Gellert (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), Fabio (Napoli, Italy).

They arrived to Liège for their 6 months EVS projects in the beginning of the year. Views International helped them to find their way with mobility, adapted French classes, daily living skills classes, supporting in establishing social relations and much more.

- Patricia with an association *Sante Nord-Sud* was involved in collecting glasses for people in need in Congo (RDC).
- Gellert with *Sainte-Marguerite* and *Pink Orchid* helped facilitating French classes activities with immigrants
- Under the coordination of *IRHOV* Fabio assisted working with children in a specialized school for the Blind in Liège

- There is an allowance provided for the duration of the project.
- Special conditions apply to encourage the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

**Personal Development**

EVS is a true ‘learning service’. Beyond benefiting the local communities, young volunteers can develop new skills and improve their personal, educational and professional development. Volunteers can benefit from specific training throughout the activity and agree on their expected learning outcomes, processes and methods in advance. Their learning experience is formally recognized through a Youthpass.
What is Adapted European Voluntary Service (AEVS)?

AEVS is a concept evolved from the need of creating equal opportunities for blind and visually impaired young people throughout Europe.

The Inclusion strategy designed by the EC places a particular emphasis on ensuring that all young people, especially disadvantaged ones, have access to its activities and are included in society in general.

Who are disadvantaged young people?

The Youth in Action Programme defines disadvantaged young people as youth “with fewer opportunities” than their peers due to socio-economic factors, physical or mental disabilities, health problems, cultural differences, or educational or geographical situations/obstacles.

2006  Aliénor from France worked as a EVS volunteer in the UK during 3 months to organize the youth exchange in Birmingham, like Anca and Lorie did so in Belgium in 2005.

2007  VIEWS coordinated simultaneous 3-month EVS in Liège with the help of a local network of hosting associations. Vanessa from Italy, Hanna and Aleksandra from Poland were the first to benefit of the new adaptations, more than the arrangement reviewed by the EC as special monitoring. Mobility and daily living skills, agenda modified, adapted apartments and workpost, French sessions adapted. EVS has also been useful for Magda from Poland, Aleksandra from Slovenia and Nelly from Latvia for 4 months.

2008-2010  Hajnalka and Ana Maria from Romania and Bulat from Russia came to help Belgian associations, followed by Anna Rita from Italy and Ola from Poland, Costi from Romania, Fassou from France and Boyan from Bulgaria.

2011  VIEWS hosted Javier from Spain, Marek from Poland, Carmen from Romania and Linda from Germany between 4 and 8 months.

Simultaneously, some Spanish partners observed our way to organize adapted EVS and proposed places in Murcia and Granada: Aurelie, Pascal and Arnaud, from Belgium went there for 5, 8, 9 months EVS respectively.
• provision of all necessary working equipment and documentation in an adapted form
• assistance in working and leisure time if needed
• at least basic knowledge of French is required; French language classes are provided.

Examples of EVS coordinated and hosted by VIEWS

Pioneer volunteers

In 2005, Loredana and Anca, from Romania, went to Belgium for 6 months for an EVS. They were trying to identify during their voluntaryship stage the aspects which would be subject to adjustment and adaptation for the blind and visual impaired volunteers. One sighted and one visually impaired, they worked hard, and completed each to the other very well thus setting up the first set of adaptations for making an adapted EVS.

In 2006 Verity from England did one month EVS in Belgium. The experiences of these pioneers were important to assess the ways in ensuring that the EVS is accessibly adapted for the visually impaired.

Promoting inclusion is based on one of the Programme’s general objectives of fostering social cohesion and combating all discrimination based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and with regard to sustainable development.

What is VIEWS International?

An international NGO with its executive office, based in Liege (Belgium) created in 2008 which continues VIEWS activities at an international level.

VIEWS International coordinates a network of organizations in 15 European countries working on various international projects connected with visual impairment.

Since 2008 VIEWS International continues the activities of the Belgian organization VIEWS on international level.
What are the activities of VIEWS International?

- Coordination, sending and hosting of young EVS volunteers in Belgium
- Organization and coordination of Youth Exchanges for and with blind and visually impaired people in various European countries
- Trainings, seminars, job shadowings, etc.

VIEWS International and AEVS

Since 2005, VIEWS (and since 2008 VIEWS International) has developed various EVS projects involving young persons with visual impairment and has built little by little a set of adaptations which customized a regular EVS project.

During his EVS, the volunteer is supported by a mentor who guides and support a visually impaired young person providing practical guidance in achieving specific tasks that are proven difficult for him or her and if the volunteer asks, the mentor may help offering psychological counseling.

Working 20-22 hours per week, a visually impaired volunteer integrates in a local community acquiring important skills and getting to know another culture.

Conditions of AEVS organized by VIEWS International:

- first 2 weeks of the EVS are dedicated to acquiring autonomy and to deepening of the contact with the hosting association’s activities and daily tasks for the volunteer
- mobility and daily living skills sessions according to the needs of volunteer to encourage him to be more independent