



# How to run a volunteer mini project

Practical Manual  
for European Solidarity  
Corps' Volunteers

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## BENEFITS OF DOING A VOLUNTEER MINI PROJECT

A volunteer mini project is an activity volunteers can carry out in addition to their main/ everyday tasks. Once you have settled in and feel confident in performing your main volunteer tasks, you can expand your experiences and take on a new challenge or work on your own ideas. Doing a volunteer mini project is a great opportunity to step out of your comfort zone and acquire a new set of skills. It can be relevant to your interests but also fill a need of your host organisation or the local community. Ideally, it should benefit to all parties involved.

You can carry out the volunteer mini project on your own or together with other volunteers as well as with people you meet at the on-arrival training. The more people are involved, the more challenging the whole process can be. On the other hand, working with others brings new perspectives and you can learn from each other.

### You should keep in mind that...

- **A volunteer mini project has a purpose:** it has clearly defined goals and results. Its purpose is to solve a problem or a need which you notice in your community. A project works best when people involved understand its purpose.
- **A volunteer mini project is unique:** a project is a complex product of your ideas and curiosity. It is innovative and inspiring.
- **A volunteer mini project is based on a vision:** a common vision unites individual activities and efforts. The big idea behind a project should be clear enough to show how the project will make a significant difference.
- **A volunteer mini project is realistic:** the main goal has to be achievable, unreachably goals would make your experience unpleasant. You want to have a good time while carrying it out.
- **A volunteer mini project is an adventure:** every project has different dynamics and various stages, moreover, it always involves some uncertainty and risk.
- **A volunteer mini project is always an opportunity to learn:** no matter how successful your project is or how much you struggle; you always learn something.

## What forms can a volunteer mini project take?

A volunteer mini project can take various forms. There are no limitations to imagination. The choice is up to you, your preferences, skills, and interests. In the list below, you can find the most common forms of volunteer mini projects:

- **a workshop**
- **a presentation**
- **a show**
- **a seminar**
- **a training**
- **a campaign**
- **an initiative**
- **an event** (environmental / sports / humanitarian / fundraising / multicultural / celebratory)
- **a competition or a contest**
- **language lessons / cooking lessons / dance lessons / sport lessons**
- **a cultural event** (an exhibition / a theatre play / an art performance / a movie screening / an international night)
- **a research / a study / an analysis**
- **communication outputs** (a video recording / photos / social media posts / a blog or an article / a publication / a booklet / a diary / print media / broadcast media / digital media)
- **a youth exchange**
- **a solidarity project and many more.**

## Planning

Set a clear starting and ending date. Dividing your main goal into several sub-goals can help you follow your timeline. When is the best time to start a volunteer mini project? This is very individual - some may prefer to start 3 to 4 months into their volunteer project, others may like to play it by the ear and pick up a volunteer mini project when they have extra time for new activities or want to change up their routine. However, it is always important to consider your project as part of your volunteer programme from the very beginning as it requires long-term planning. Although you take full responsibility for your volunteer mini project, other people may be involved. You may get support from the programme coordinator, the sending organisation or your mentor. Feel free to approach anyone who can offer help or inspiration.

## Fundraising money

A part of running a volunteer mini project is also managing the finances. You can, of course, ask your host organisation for financial support, but it is possible that your project may require more funding. The challenge of fundraising money in the local community and managing well your project can be a great hands-on experience. You could organise a bake sale, a benefit dinner, a movie night, a multicultural fair with other volunteers or any other fundraising event. You can also try getting help from the local authorities.

### Before fundraising, check that:

- you know the project inside out,
- you have a list of everything needed to carry out the project,
- you believe in the project and you are prepared to defend its importance,
- you have the support of all partners involved.

## Implementing

Implementation of your project is a phase when your plans and visions become reality. However, it can evolve differently than you expected. You might need to adapt to new circumstances, or you might realize that your target group has also other needs. Anyway, making changes is a normal part of project implementation. Also, don't underestimate the promotion of your project and make others aware of your results. Choose a way that is appropriate to your project and capabilities. You can also inspire others and raise awareness about volunteering in general. By putting ideas into practice, adapting and finding solutions, you are developing your management skills. Look, how many roles you must take over:

- **an organiser**
- **a strategist**
- **a motivator**
- **a fundraiser**
- **an activist**
- **a visionary**
- **a community worker**
- **a social worker**
- **a teacher and student.**

## Evaluating

Don't forget to evaluate your project in the end. Evaluation is a powerful tool for planning, and especially, for improving your abilities and the quality of your next project. It is not only checking the results but also the process leading to these results. In a nutshell, you should evaluate your volunteer mini project to see what you achieved, what you learned, what challenges you faced, and what competencies and skills you developed.

You can distinguish between the expected and the unexpected results. You should also evaluate the extent to which you succeeded in reaching your objectives. You might have set some measurable targets such as a certain number of views, visitors or completed questionnaires. You can evaluate the process, as well. Try to summarize what you went through or what could be have been done differently. An important part of every project evaluation is the financial review, where you note your expenses. Take your time and plan your evaluation in advance. Ask other people involved in the project to give you their feedback and share the project results with others to inspire them.

## SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTED VOLUNTEER MINI PROJECTS



## Aim at support



**E**mili, Lilli, Mariam, Maxi, Pia and Yuliia volunteered together at the nonprofit organisation Aim at support. They decided to write small books about their own experiences with volunteering in The Czech Republic.

Each of them described why they decided to do volunteering, what their first day after arrival was like, how they were coping with a different culture, how they prepared for their activities, who they worked with, the challenges of learning a new language, how they spent their free time or compared the positives and negatives of participating in a volunteering project.

Here are short extracts from their books: 'So, you've arrived. You'll need to register yourself at your local Foreigners' police and get officially 'czeched'. Just a piece of friend-

ly advice – never worry about anything, it's important to understand since the very first moment that no obstacles can tarnish your experience. It won't be easy, but you'll learn a lot. During the first month of your stay, you'll participate in the on-arrival training. It's an awesome four-day-long adventure which will help you to understand what a wonderful year you're going to have.'

'Dear friend, it's been about six months. You've probably experienced some ups and downs. And that's fine. You missed home, your friends, pets, the streets of your city. Then you cheered up, right? You started to feel at home in the Czech Republic, more comfortable, got used to some strange Czech ways. The Czech culture is wonderful, believe me. Prague is endless, visit it as much as possible, don't just stay in your city/town /village all the time.' ■

## The stories of hands

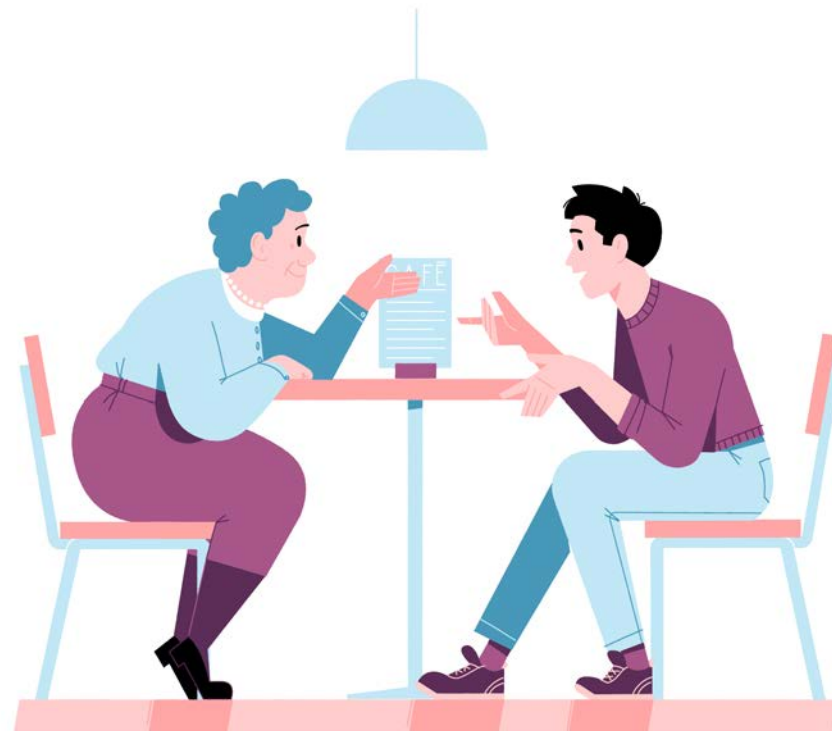


**S**vetlana volunteered in the daily centre for people with mental disabilities at the charity organisation Slezská diakonie.

The impulse for starting her mini project was her belief that 'most people prefer not to pay attention to the people with special needs.' According to her 'there is a stereotype in society that people with mental disabilities cannot be beneficial to others.' Therefore, she decided to prove them wrong and began taking photographs of the hands of her clients when they were making clay bowls, Christmas toys and Christmas wreaths, small car-

pets, embroidering or knitting. She displayed her work at a photo exhibition at a market where her clients' products were sold. This way the visitors could see how the products had been made. The photo exhibition was also hosted by the organisation.

And how did Svetlana evaluate her mini project? 'The exhibition was visited by many people, and I hope that I helped them understand that there are no 'useless' people, and everyone can be beneficial to society.' ■



## Intergenerational speak dating



**S**ara from Spain volunteered in the Intergenerational and Volunteer centre TOTEM, in Plzeň. As TOTEM is an intergenerational NGO and Sara's main task during her stay was teaching languages to seniors, she decided to organise the Intergenerational Speak Dating.

Sara wanted to involve young people and therefore, contacted an English teacher from a high school in Plzeň, who was willing to participate in the project. She had great support in her coordinator, who helped her communicate with the high school teacher, but also organised the venue, installed a data projector and talked to the guests.

The main purpose of this mini project was to give people an opportunity to exchange personal experiences about their travels, music or sports interests. To achieve this, Sara created a presentation with different questions. Every fifteen minutes, a new question was projected, and the students moved from one table to another so every time they spoke to a different senior.

'TOTEM clients liked the activity and enjoyed sharing time with the youths and the students realized that it is never too late to learn English and improve,' Sara said. ■

## Typical German food



Anja spent her project in Dům dětí a mládeže Domino in Hronov, which is an organisation that offers leisure time activities to children.

For her mini project, Anja decided to set up a baking lesson for the traditional German pastry – pretzel. 'My aim was to make children curious and more open-minded about the food of other countries and of course to have fun by preparing typical food of my country' Anja explained.

First, Anja met Domino's cooking teacher and discussed her ideas. She had to

translate the pretzel recipe to Czech due to the language barrier and also prepared her entire baking lesson in Czech, so the children would understand her.

According to Anja, the main activity went very well. *'The kids had fun and were really excited about preparing food from another country. Moreover, they had many questions about Germany. I had to speak Czech the whole time and I was grateful that the kids were so patient and considerate towards me. I'm really satisfied with the results of my mini project.'* ■

## Vegan workshop



Leila, a volunteer from Germany, spent one year at the intergenerational and volunteer centre TOTEM in Pilsen.

While thinking about the topic of her mini project, Leila wanted to do something she loved and to invite others to share it with her. That is why she decided to organise a vegan workshop.

Leila started planning her mini project two to three months in advance. She got support from her project coordinator and her colleagues and promoted the event in

TOTEM's leaflet/newsletter. Ten, mostly old-age, women, registered for the workshop during which they prepared a four-course vegan menu and baked a cake. At the end, they ate it all together.

*'It was great to cook together and to tell them more about veganism. It was really interesting and enriching to organise this workshop and to get good feedback from the seniors and my colleagues,'* Leila described her experience. ■



## Quilling workshops for children and adults



Uliana spent her volunteering project in the leisure time centre Děčko Náchod.

Uliana considers herself to be a handy person, so she was excited to get the opportunity to lead a quilling workshop. After her first experience, she decided to organise more quilling workshops for children and adults and make them into her own mini project. Altogether, she organised four workshops - some just for kids during a summer camp, some were about autumn and winter-related topics.

The preparation was quite easy because the only necessities needed for the workshop were strips of lightweight paper, glue and some pad to roll the paper onto.

Uliana commented that *'it was a great experience. We did an amazing job. And even those who did not believe in themselves were amazed by the results. I was pleased to share my skills and teach others something new.'* ■

## Local solutions of global problems



Ewelina, a volunteer from Poland, spent her project in Děčko Náchod which organises leisure time activities for children. She decided to create a mini project about global education for local high school and a kinder garden in the nearby village of Šonov.

For the high school students, Ewelina prepared lessons on stereotypes, access to education and poverty. She wanted to promote the values of tolerance, solidarity, equality, justice, co-operation, and non-violence, and, to raise awareness of global problems and give a space to critical thinking.

Because she taught similar classes in Poland, she could compare the results: *'Young people in the Czech Republic seemed to be more open and tolerant to others. However, both Polish and Czech*

*youth have similar ideas on how to make the world a better place. They offered some ideas about charity, helping people and spreading knowledge about global education.'*

As for the kinder garden, Ewelina cooperated on an activity called *The Afternoon for Health*, which was organised for both kids and their parents. She created a poster and was in charge of the games and other activities during the event. *'Our aim was to promote healthy lifestyle in every age group. I wanted to show how we can use and also protect the environment. The second dimension of the activity was intercultural understanding and so I invited volunteers from Spain and Estonia. It was a chance to meet new people and spread the idea of forest kindergarten,'* Ewelina described her experience. ■



## Tolerance day



Ineta, a volunteer from Lithuania, worked at the primary schools in Nové Město nad Metují and Nový Hrádek.

During Ineta's stay, she noticed that some children are being rude to their classmates and teachers. *'I got an idea that I can show them how they should treat each other and show respect to others,'* Ineta explained. She realized that Lithuania celebrates The International Day for Tolerance and decided to prepare her mini project on that date – November 16.

Ineta prepared a presentation for pupils in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Older children also wrote letters to students in a Lithuanian high school to learn more about tolerance between different nationalities. They also connected and communicated on Facebook.

Ineta also prepared an activity for younger children who made bracelets and then distributed them to pedestrians on the street. Before giving them the bracelets, the children asked questions about tolerance and people told them examples of tolerance in our society.

*'International Day of Tolerance went better than I expected. After that, I felt more comfortable in the classes and I noticed less bullying in the school. All in all, my mini project included almost everybody in the school and some citizens of the city. We managed to spread tolerance around us, and hopefully, somebody will take on this responsibility and continue this activity.'* ■

## Healthy life



Ulrike from Germany participated in a volunteering project in forest kindergarten Dobrá dědina in Provodov-Šonov, a small village situated near the Czech-Polish borders.

Ulrike considers a healthy lifestyle to be a source of a happy and balanced life. She also believed that it is very important to raise awareness of this topic as early in life as possible so that children grow up and accept it as a natural way of living. Therefore, Ulrike decided to approach her mini project as a chance to educate kids in the forest kindergarten. In cooperation with other volunteers, Laura organised a small race for the chil-

dren, a cooking workshop for children and their parents about preparing easy, healthy and funny snacks, as well as a barbeque.

*'It was very interesting to see what snacks both children and adults made up. Furthermore, it was great to experience their joy when finally, savouring their products! Families were chatting and eating together, and a successful mini project slowly ended in a great and friendly atmosphere. I was very happy about the smooth and problem-free run of the project as well as many delighted faces and very positive feedback. A great experience to have been made.'* ■

## Colours from the world



Dolores from Italy volunteered in DDM Kamarád in Česká Třebová, which is an organisation that provides free time activities for children and youth.

Her mini project revolved around inviting young people to take part in an ideal trip around the world. Thanks to the help of other volunteers, participants had an opportunity to 'visit' different countries like Georgia, Italy, Germany, Ecuador, Lithuania, and Armenia. Each room in the DDM centre represented a country and visitors could participate in some workshops and games there.

Dolores believes people are prejudiced against other cultures and countries and scared of differences. She wanted to show the participating teenagers how beautiful the world is and to encourage their curiosity to explore and learn more from people who live in other countries. She received support from her coordinator who understood her point of view. The other volunteers were also essential to the project's success. Moreover, Dolores used only the things that were available in DDM Kamarád. ■

## Making birdhouses with children

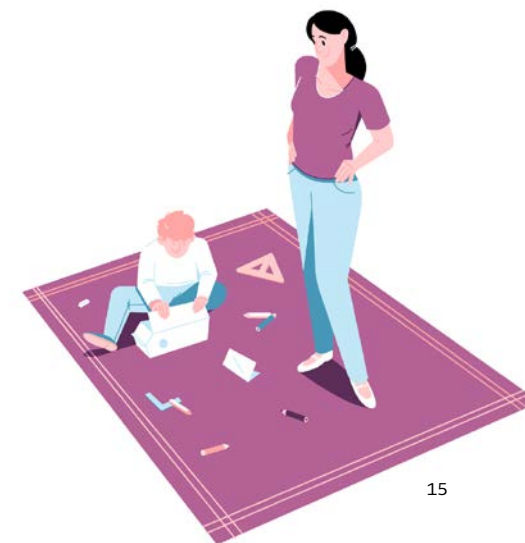


Felicitas from volunteered at a primary school Dolní Radechová which is located in the Krkonoše mountains region, in the north part of the country.

From the very beginning, Felicitas knew her mini project would be about the environment. She came up with the idea of making birdhouses with children. *'Birdhouses are very important for birds today. Because of the impact of humans on nature, it is getting harder and harder for birds to find enough food and materials to nest,'* Felicitas explained.

To make it the easiest for children to build a birdhouse, Felicitas decided to make them out of milk or juice cartons. First, she designed a prototype to make sure everything worked well. Then, she prepared the materials for children and do the steps that would be dangerous for them, like cutting a hole with a knife.

During the workshop with children, Felicitas explained the importance of birdhouses and what the children have to consider before they hang them on a tree. Afterwards the children could start designing and colouring their own birdhouses.



## Portfolio of the Duke of Edinburgh's award



Niklas from Germany volunteered at primary school and prepared his mini project for English lessons.

The topic of his mini project was The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which is a youth awards programme founded in the United Kingdom. It aims at encouraging young people to develop positive skills and lifestyle habits.

The first part was a presentation about the programme, in general, to make the students aware of its existence while also providing useful information and real-life experience. The presentation was conducted in the 9th class during an English conversation lesson. It lasted 45 minutes and included interactive parts with questions.

For the second part, Niklas organised two expeditions for his students – one training expedition and one main expedition in which the team reached the Czech Republic's highest mountain, Sněžka, and stayed there overnight. The intention was not only to participate in the trip itself but also in the planning and preparation work in order to improve his organisational skills and learn responsibility for himself and the group.

The outcome of his mini project is a three-parts portfolio consisting of two reports about the expeditions and a presentation about The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. ■



## One year in the Czech Republic



Laurette, a French volunteer, spent her volunteer project at the French Alliance of Brno. An outcome of her mini project is a booklet called 'One Year in The Czech Republic – A bit of Change in Everyday Life' in which Laurette illustrates the cultural, gastronomic and other differences she noticed during her stay in the Czech Republic. With humour she compared life in France and the Czech Republic:

*'No, knedliky are not vegetables. For lovers of colourful plates, go your way. Czech dishes are ... meat-filled with the proportion: meat vs. vegetable about 80 % to 20 %.*

*Another difference is that in a lot of restaurants you have to pay for water (unlike in France where the free carafe of water flows from Decree No. 25-268 since 8th June 1967). Frustration: water is more expensive than beer!*

*A 100% Czechoslovak drink. The Kofola is a Czechoslovak soft drink produced in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It is the*

*main competitor of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in these two countries. In order not to hurt the feelings of Czechs, do not call their Kofola – Oh yes, your mean the Communist Coke!'*

Czechs and dogs is a great story of love. Judging from people's looks, it was obvious right from the first time I dared to admit not liking dogs that this was not a good thing to say in this country.

*'The double meaning of 'Ahoj' - ahoj also serves as 'goodbye'. A-MA-ZING: finally, a simple thing in Czech language!'* ■



## Jeopardy game



Laura, a volunteer from Estonia, joined a project in Děčko Náchod which organises leisure time activities for children. One of the tasks during Laura's project was to cooperate on English lessons at the local school.

And so, she decided to play the Jeopardy! game with the students. It is an American television game show which has also become quite popular in Estonia, where it is called 'Kuldvillak'. The main objective of this activity was to teach chil-

dren a foreign language in a different way and help them practice free speaking, not just repeating textbook phrases.

Laura used an online tool <https://jeopardylabs.com/> that was created especially for this game. At first, students have to understand the question, then think about the correct answer, and finally, say it in English.

*'In my opinion, the activity was successful, and kids enjoyed. Teacher even asked me to prepare another class,'* Laura said. ■

## Take care of you and your world .....



Sara spent her volunteering project at Komenského Primary School in Nové Město nad Metují.

Her mini project aimed to share her passion for food, health, and the environment with the pupils at school. She wanted to show them not only how they can cook healthy and stay fit, but also what the advantages of healthy and sustainable lifestyle are.

To achieve her goal, Sara used presentations and workshops. She prepared some healthy recipes for the school cooking club, presentations about healthy and

sustainable lifestyle for English lessons, and also two fitness workouts for the afternoon sports club.

*'All in all, I'm happy with my mini project because I could share my passions with the students. Especially cooking was well received because the children were interested in new dishes. My presentation and fitness workouts weren't that successful because of the language barrier and the demotivation of the students. Anyway, I could give them the inspiration to take a bit more care of themselves and the world.'* ■

## Improving the mini zoo Tlapikárna .....



Povilas, a volunteer from Lithuania, was working in the mini zoo 'Tlapikárna' where he took care of animals.

*'When I came to the Tlapikarna for the first time I saw that there was a lot of work to do. Therefore, I decided to dedicate my time to improving the welfare of animals,'* Povilas shared his motivation for starting his volunteer mini project. For example, he used some wooden leftovers to build the feeders to hold grass and hay for the animals, so they would not step on it and mix it with sawdust. When Tlapikárna got new inhabitants – six energetic kittens, he made for them a little 'cat door' so they could freely walk outside whenever they wanted.

*'Working in 'Tlapikarna' was such a great experience for me and I am more than happy that I could help to improve this place. I miss my little friends a lot!'* ■



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