

EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Impact of Youth Volunteering in Costa Rica

April - September 2011

**By Susanna Mühlberger,
Volunteer from Austria**



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.

Contents:

1. Action research.....	3
1.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS´ INPUTS.....	4
1.1.1 Overall Perceptions of Change	4
1.1.2 Impact of volunteering	5
1.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS´ INPUTS	7
1.2.1 Motivation	7
1.2.2 Recruitment	7
1.2.3 Volunteer impact	8
1.2.4 Conclusion.....	8
1.3 ANALYSIS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES´ INPUTS.....	10
1.3.1 Motivation	10
1.3.2 Volunteer Impact	10
1.3.3 Conclusion.....	12



1. Action research

Interview participants

14 Volunteers - 9 female
5 male

Nationalities: United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany,
France, Taiwan and USA

Age: 18 – 26

6 Host Families

14 Host Projects

The host project include:

8 Social Projects (long term)

Elderly people, children, homeless, education, women, youth, health, medicine, ...

- ✓ Hogar de Ancianos Carlos Maria Ulloa
- ✓ Casa Luz
- ✓ Centeno Guell
- ✓ Hogar Baik
- ✓ Cen Jaco
- ✓ Oratorio Don Bosco
- ✓ Casa de Pan (short term/socio) (1Family, Project, 2Volunteers)
- ✓ Obras del Espirito Santo (short term/socio) (Project, Volunteer, Family??)

6 Ecological Projects (long term)

Rainforest, turtles, environment, agriculture, ...

- ✓ FUDEBIOL
- ✓ Refugio de Vida Silvestre La Marta
- ✓ Fundacion Madre Verde
- ✓ ASVO Matapalo
- ✓ Heliconias Lodge
- ✓ La Marina (short term/eco) (only Project)

1.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS' INPUTS

1.1.1 Overall Perceptions of Change

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
It affected my ethnic, faith or religious identity.	7	2		1	1	2	
It greatly increased my appreciation of other peoples' cultures.				3	2	4	4
It increased my participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities.				2	4	5	2
It exposed me to communities different from the one(s) that I grew up in.					3	3	7
I was exposed to new ideas and ways of seeing the world.			1	1	1	4	6
I gained a better understanding of the community where I worked.				1	2	3	7
It improved my chances of finding a job.		1	1	3	3*	2	3
It improved my performance on the job.				4	4*	2	3
It encouraged me to make positive career changes.	2			6	1	2	2
It challenged my previous beliefs or assumptions about my home country.	1	4		2	2	2	2
When I go back home, I want to join efforts to promote social or economic development.		1		6	3	1	2
I sometimes feel guilty when considering my privilege.	2	2**		2	6		1
Overall, I am highly satisfied with my volunteer experience so far.						5	8
It has been a "transformational experience" (one that results in significant changes in my life that probably would not have occurred if I had not participated in volunteering).			1	3*	3	5	1

*future

** very lucky

1.1.2 Impact of volunteering

Their own personal development	Organisational development (host project)	Local community development
<p><u>Challenges and learning points:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to became more confident -to share the host family with another volunteer (it is a different and difficult situation) -to see “something else” (standard, culture,...) it helps to open the own mind -mixed feelings to go back home, because it is not the same to live here in Costa Rica as in the home country and adopt again. -to be relaxed, to see what has changed in life back home -to be more grateful about all we have -keep the idea of volunteering (back home) -family life can be totally different from what he/she knew so far -differences in a religious way (the strong faith from the “Ticos” made him/she to think and to take more care about her own religion) -discussions about the way of somebody is solving a problem or performs a task -rules- what is a volunteer allowed to do and what not -to see that the stuff of the project is able to learn and developed in the way of treating/handle a volunteer -in general to be more relaxed -to adopt easily to new situations -life can be healthier, because of walking to the project every day (45 min.) -the ability of speaking another language – Spanish. -this 6 month are the most expensive ones in my live 	<p><u>Challenges and learning points:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -everything is OK -sometimes it was hard, because there were two head organisations (ACI and ASVO) -in general, to educate the awareness of which task volunteer work is and which not! -to learn how high the demand on volunteer work is -to get the focus on people who are doing volunteer work. Who they are? (For example a top manager is spending 3h a week on the weekend at an elderly home and is listening to their stories). -volunteer work does not only mean to work in the social area. 	<p><u>Challenges and learning points:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -food: at the beginning problems, there was not enough food and no self-service in the kitchen -it is a different and difficult situation to share the host family with another volunteer, because there is not enough time and attention from the hosts for both. -that the host father is not really interested in the volunteers and what they do -cultural differences, and different focus on life, world -the talks are not very profound -to get used to the traditional food -to live in a “Volunteer house” and be hosted at the Project → Sometimes it is hard to live with so many people in one house (privacy and space). -to be hosted in a family again (when you lived on your own before) -to live in a community, like a stranger -he/she does not really feel integrated in the host family → family change -the family is very different from him/her and not really interested -bring a high effort to come along well with them -to be only accepted to just live with them in one house, but not a part of the family -cultural differences, misunderstanding, language problems -no will of hosting someone -not really caring

<p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -at the beginning the language caused some problems, but if you practice a lot it is getting better and better. -appreciate the things you have got at home - Responsibility in the project, which makes her feel integrated -to be more aware of different cultures and ways of life -do not be shy to work with people (elderly, children,...) -open minded To know what you want, and what not -the work with children and the host family situation is a wonderful experience; I would recommend it to everyone!!! -Pura Vida! 	<p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -more communication between host organisation and project plus host organisation and host family -sending and receiving volunteers should be done more carefully -“double check” of the project ability to find out if it is good that they receive volunteers -inform everyone timely who is included in the whole “volunteer process” about the rights and duties -the host organization should work on solving problems and show their efforts! -it should not be “normal” to have no project or no work at the project! -there should be consequences when the rules are strongly broken -train the projects or to make them more sensitive how to treat/use volunteers!!!! -to make sure that the host families are good and well proofed -more support (benefits all over the world) for volunteering abroad -it will be good giving information in advance to the volunteers about the host family/project so that they know where they are ending up -that the association (ACI/ICYE) should also take care of the short-term volunteers, make sure that everything is fine in the project/family and if not be MORE active to help and find a solution -contact person for every volunteer (a further volunteer who is Tico, but he already has the experience of volunteering abroad→ special for volunteers far away from the ACI office) -if someone is unhappy or the project is not working out, send them to “ Obras Espiritu Santo” people are always needed!!! (to a project that works) -ICYE and ACI should recheck how much they are charging volunteers because it is a little bit too much what we are paying just for helping. One price for both agencies would be correct. 	<p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -be open minded -the family should be more interested of hosting a volunteer -to think about, what does it mean for me/ for my family to host someone strange in my house?! -spend time with them -talk to them -tell them something about the country, culture, ... -food is a good topic to talk about -try to have fun (jokes) together -integration starts on both sides (volunteer/family)
--	---	---

1.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS

1.2.1 Motivation

What is the motivation to host international volunteers and how important is the volunteer in your project?

- *They do not have money to pay more employees.*
- *Very important!!! Intercultural exchange + perspectives for the children, the children need a lot of attention that the teachers cannot give them all permanent.*
- *Volunteers are important to protect that place and the sea turtles, in general to work there, because the monastery sends only 2 or 3 people and that is not enough and so the volunteers are filling the missing space.*
- *They are fundamental because they bring new ideas and also help with translations.*
- *Because elderly people like to socialize with young people and they also have empathies with different countries and they also love to listen to the stories of other cultures.*
- *They bring additional attention to the people and creativity or other innovations and information about other countries. (Yoga classes)*
- *Support for children*
- *Bring intercultural exchange*
- *They are multifunctional!!!*
- *Their appearance is very important for this institution, represent another culture and the children love it.*

1.2.2 Recruitment

How does your organization get most of your international volunteers?

ACI	Kolping
AFS	U-volunteer
I Volunteer	Planet conservation
Maximo Nivel	i-to-i
ASVO	crla
gap adventures	Technical school
Peace Corps	Direct contact to the project/organisation
Universitys	

How are international volunteers managed at your organization?

We provide one staff person to organize the international volunteers.	5
We provide several staff people to organize the international volunteers.	11
We have one or more volunteers who manage international volunteers.	2
The international volunteers manage themselves.	3

1.2.3 Volunteer impact

What do you think are the potential *benefits* of hosting international volunteers?

International volunteers:	Yes	No
...contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers	12	
...provide more people to get our work done	13	
...provide a new viewpoint or perspective	13	
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures	12	1
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nations and culture	8	4
...help us attract local volunteers	6	6
...bring international attention to our work	10	3
...bring credibility to our work	10	2
...are effective	12	
...help our economy by spending money locally	11	1
...generate revenue for our organization	11	2
...become financial donors	6	7
...become advocates upon return home	9	4
...are inexpensive	10	2
... the volunteer service could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member.	6	6
...help our organisation develop the relationship with the local community	8	5
...help to intensify networking efforts at national / international level	10	2

Overall, do you think that it is worthwhile for your project to host international volunteers? Please explain why or why not.

7 out of 13 said yes!

1.2.4 Conclusion

Personal development of volunteers	Their own development and growth	Local community development
<u>Challenges and learning points</u> -the volunteer is not motivated -the volunteer brings no interesting ideas to do the tasks -it always depends on the character of the volunteer, if s/he is willingly to learn something -food -climate could be not good for the health -maturity	<u>Challenges and learning points</u> - volunteer don't stay long enough - volunteers are expensive - may not have the language abilities needed -may not have the skills needed - are effective - are accustomed to different ways of doing things - require a lot of supervision -it is necessary to spend a lot of time in communication, because of language differences -culture shock on both sides -to learn from the volunteer to do things in a different way	<u>Challenges and learning points</u> -are not always welcome in our community -take the place of local volunteers -create problems within the community -the relation with the local community and their interest in working is lost when they listen to stories of volunteers

<p><u>Recommendations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteers need more information about the project before they start work (work is outside, lot of sun...) - More communication and more project visits. - More information about the significance of "volunteering". - Support the activities of the volunteers. -Have more economic resources for volunteer work -More information about the coming volunteer (photograph, CV, Video) -Bring specific skills, more responsibility and ability to compromise 	<p><u>Recommendations -</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More communication and more project visits!!! -Do more publicity -improve conditions for volunteers (bathrooms, microwave...) -more communication with the volunteers and the projects -the best way to maximize is that the work profile fits to the project description, it would really help and benefit -sometimes there is space for more than one volunteer 	<p><u>Recommendations</u></p>
---	---	-------------------------------

1.3 ANALYSIS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES' INPUTS

6 host families were interviewed

Number of volunteers hosted in the past: For 3 families it was the first time to host an international volunteer. The other 3 families had a lot of experience.

What host mothers told us about their experiences? Some quotes:

Miss M. believes that volunteers are a part of the family and they are able to adopt to the dynamics of the house very well.

It is a very nice experience, and they will lack.

The family and the community liked the experience; it is not easy because we are not used to share the house with someone strange. We had to learn to be patient and understandable.

It is a very nice experience, they sometimes had problems, but they could solve them. It is a nice form of living, but also a lot of work.

One of them had 20 years experiences of receiving volunteers, and had total around 80 people living in her house from different countries.

1.3.1 Motivation

Why did your family decide to host international volunteers?

Get to know other customs, persons. They wanted to "experiment".

They were asked from their company to host volunteers.

Because the children can practice English (for example the girl in the house), train and educate their listening of a foreign language.

Decide to live this experience as a challenge. (Their daughter went to the UK for one year so they had to place an international volunteer in their house (because of the contract).

There is a bad economic situation where the volunteer can help to solve and they liked to live the experience.

1.3.2 Volunteer Impact

Thinking about your experience with international volunteers:

	Yes	No
We are very interested in getting to know the volunteers.	6	
They try to find the time to make a positive difference in my / our community.	5	1
We speak with the volunteers about their experiences.	5	1
The volunteer is always part of community activities	1	5
When he/she is not at work, do you see them often?	5	1

What do you think are the potential benefits of hosting international volunteers?

International volunteers:	Yes	No
...contribute needed skills not found in local staff (Costa Rican)	5	
...provide a new viewpoint or perspective	6	

...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures	6	
...bring international attention to our community	6	
...are effective	6	
...are ineffective		6
...are inexpensive	5	1
If the person had not volunteered, a local staff member would do his/her work?	1	5

What do you think are the potential challenges of hosting international volunteers?

International volunteers:	yes	no
...are accustomed to different ways of doing things	5	1
...may not have the skills needed	4	2
...may not have the language abilities to communicate	4	2
...don't stay long enough to build a relation	5	1
...can be difficult to find	1	5
...take the place of local volunteers or jobs	2	4
...are expensive	1	5
...create problems inside the family		6
...take advantage of their status to travel around	5	1
...are not interested in our familylife	3	3
...are difficult to communicate and interact with.	2	4
...are ungrateful		6
...don't fit into our family	3	3
...common interests / topics of conversation?	5	1

1.3.3 Conclusion

Personal development of volunteers	Organisational (ACI) development and growth	Their own development
<u>Challenges and learning points</u> -	<u>Challenges and learning points</u> -Good. There are meetings for the host families at ACI or phone calls. -In case of a problem with the volunteer, they try to follow the “guide” for the family. There is information about it, how to handle a struggling situation with the volunteer.	<u>Challenges and learning points</u> -to get over misunderstandings and communication problems -to be patient -they have a girl or a boyfriend from the community -take drugs, alcohol -do not like the food they cook -another language (English) -the customs from England and the traditions, how to live in England -Food and manners from Europe -volunteers bring new ideas - The communication with the volunteer, but it always depends on her/him, on the character!
<u>Recommendations</u> - To learn Spanish before -family expect more openness on the side of the volunteer	<u>Recommendations</u> -More communication with ACI would be good. -More communication before the volunteer arrives. -give more information about the volunteer -give the information in time!	<u>Recommendations</u> -when they volunteer arrives, he/she should speak Spanish, basics -they should know something about the country -they should know something about the customs in Costa Rica - More communication before the volunteer arrives. -enough information about the volunteer before arriving!