

## **EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS**

### **Impact of Youth Volunteering in Iceland**

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# 1 Overview of volunteering in Iceland

Volunteer work it's not so popular in Iceland; it's not in the minds of Icelanders. Most people don't see a need for volunteering because they think governments have to deal with everything. They are also shy away from working for nothing. Nevertheless, after the Bank crisis, Icelanders are starting to participate a lot and are going abroad on volunteer exchanges.

Volunteer activities in Iceland are mainly concentrated in the following fields (listed in order of priority): homeless and drugs dependent, mentally and physically disabled, homes for the elderly, kindergardens and environmental projects.

Apart from AUS/ICYE Iceland, the most well-known volunteer exchange organizations in Iceland are Seeds and Worldwide Friends Iceland. They send and host international volunteers worldwide.

SEEDS is an Icelandic non-governmental, non-profit organization with an international scope. Their main field of activities is related to the promotion of cultural understanding through the work on nature-oriented, outdoors and environmental issues. SEEDS undertakes exchanges, international camps, research activities, on-field work, voluntary service, educational programs, seminars. SEEDS provides the participants space, time and room to face challenging situation, which will enable them to broaden their perspectives, opinions and positions about themselves, the environment in which they live, their active role in the future development of the world in terms of peace, respect, cross-cultural learning and environmental sustainability. SEEDS fosters respect for cultural diversity, mutual understanding and the work for our environment.

Veraldarvinir / Worldwide Friends Iceland (WF) was founded in 2001 as a non-governmental, non-profit organization promoting nature and peace orientated activities for people interested in spending some time in Iceland as volunteers. WF also sends Icelanders abroad who wish to have similar experiences as volunteers. The main activities offered are work camps, exchange programs and educational seminars. Veraldarvinir's main aim is to increase intercultural understanding through offering foreign volunteers the opportunity to take part in nature and peace oriented activities.

AUS – ICYE Iceland is an international non-profit youth exchange organisation promoting youth mobility, intercultural learning and international voluntary service. AUS has more than 50 years of experience of organising long and short-term exchanges combining home stays with voluntary service in a variety of community service projects around the world.

AUS is an educational organisation with the goal of giving people the opportunity to experience the culture and society of different nations. AUS enables young people to develop their personal skills and broaden their horizon doing voluntary service in other countries. AUS gives young people in Iceland the chance to work as volunteers abroad and also receives young people from different countries around the world and introduces to them life and culture in Iceland through voluntary work. AUS is run partly by returnee volunteers and is a member of The National Youth Council of Iceland. It is also a member of the worldwide ICYE Federation. AUS – ICYE Iceland was founded in 1961 by the National Icelandic Church. In 1983, the organisation changed its name to AUS, *Alþjóðleg ungmennaskipti*. Since its foundation over 1000 participants have participated in the international voluntary programme and travelled to all corners of the world. Today, AUS is a sending and hosting organisation for young people between 18-30+ years old willing to join voluntary activities abroad and experience living in a different culture, promoting peace and understanding among people and nations.

## 2 Action Research

This research is part of the impact assessment of the project EYV 2011 – Volunteering Matters, on the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, which aims to take stock, raise awareness and promote the benefits of volunteering programs and practices in the participating EU and partner countries for young people and for society as a whole. The objective of this questionnaire is to assess the benefits, pitfalls and challenges of international volunteering from the point of view of an international volunteer.

In all eight volunteers were interviewed. Their nationalities are Belgium, France, Spain, Denmark, Germany (2x), Japan, and the Philippines. One host family was interviewed and a representative of the host coordinating organisation, AUS/ICYE Iceland.

### 2.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS' INPUTS

8 volunteers were interviewed:

**VOL1** **VOL2** **VOL3** **VOL4** **VOL5** **VOL6** **VOL7** **VOL8**

#### 2.1.1 Experience as a Local Volunteer

1. Have you been a volunteer before in your community? If yes, please give the name of the organization and explain why did you decided to be a volunteer?

**VOL1**: Yes, volunteer of Belgian Red Cross for 4 years and I wanted to do something useful for the community.

**VOL2**: Volunteer for Volunteer Center for 6 years, wanted to help in making a change.

**VOL3**, **VOL4**, **VOL5**, **VOL6** **VOL7** **VOL8**: No

2. How do you think people see volunteer work in your community?

**VOL1**: Not so popular people need paying jobs than working for free.

**VOL2**: Lot of youth are participating, few people think it's embarrassing to be a volunteer.

**VOL3**: Lot of people supports these volunteer programs.

**VOL4**: Few people participating and mostly old people.

3. What does volunteer work mean to you? (How does it affect your life, if it does?)

**VOL1** **VOL2** **VOL3** **VOL4** **VOL5** **VOL6** **VOL7** **VOL8**: It's about exchanging skill and experiences. Learning and giving. Helping without expecting money payment.

## 2.1.2 Experience as an International Volunteer

1. Why did you apply for international volunteer program?

**VOL7 VOL 8**: For travelling purposes, making friends

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3**: New languages and exchanging culture.

**VOL4 VOL5 VOL6**: Gap year, wanted to learn more about myself and what I'm good at.

2. What have you learnt and experienced?

**VOL1&VOL3**: Have learnt more about myself and more patience working with mentally disabled people.

**VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL3**: New language, improving English, and making new friends with volunteers from different countries.

**VOL1 VOL2**: Improvement of office skills and my English, new lifestyle and different environment and to be a leader.

3. What were your challenges and learning points from your experience abroad?

**VOL1 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL3**: Language, getting to know people, working with mentally disabled, old people, children and drugs addict. They are not so nice sometimes. Being home sick.

4. Did you experience culture shock? If yes what was it?

**VOL2**: Yes, Icelander's are not so open people; it takes time to get to know them or be their friends.

**VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8VOL1**: No.

5. What makes you feel integrated in your host community?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8**: Participated in many community events helping and sharing my experiences.

6. How could we maximize the positive impact, or minimize the negative impact of volunteering?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8**: Doing more things for the community, awareness or campaigns, blogs, posters and school visits with presentation and involving local enterprise. That will maximize the positive and minimize the negative.

7. Have you participated in international volunteering before?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6**: No.

8. This year is International Year of Volunteering (IYV) 2010 and European Volunteer Year (EYV) 2011. What are your expectations with respect to this year?

**VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8:** More people taking part in volunteer work.

9. Do you think your EVS will help you to find a better/another job? Will it be 'valuable'?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL7 VOL 8:** Yes

**VOL4 VOL5 VOL6:** Maybe

10. Do you think the EVS program is an opportunity to take?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5 VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8:** Yes

11. If you could change something in the programme, what would it be?

**VOL1 VOL2 VOL3 VOL4 VOL5:** Train mentors to be more useful to volunteers.

**VOL6 VOL7 VOL 8:** Being introduced to other volunteers before the arrival dates. If money can be increased a bit because in other countries cost of living is too high.

## 2.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS

### 2.2.1 Information on the organisations

7 host organisations were interviewed.

**Org1 Org2 Org3 Org4 Org5 Org6 Org7**

1. What is your organization's primary mission or area of focus?

Anti-drugs	Xx
Children	X
Disability issues	Xxx
Disadvantaged	X
Elderly	X
Poverty and Hunger	Xxx

2. Background of the organisation and for how long organisation has it been running?

**Org1:** The organisation works according to a well-established international model called Fountain House. Its main goal is work-oriented rehabilitation for people who have or have had mental illness. The organisation is 12 years old but the model is nearly 70 years old.

**Org3:** Waldorf is a kindergarten that has been run for 10 years, where about 30 children aged from 1 to 6 years come every day. We follow the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, that's how we different

from other kindergartens. The way of teaching is more through art and imitation.

**Org4:** Asgaður is a protected working place for workers who face various challenges in life. All clients are disabled and all of them face limited options in other working places, and in life general. The mission of Asgaður is to give each and every client the opportunity for personal growth in a creative working environment.

**Org5:** Grund is a home for over 240 elderly people whose health and well being is cared for, as the majority of the residents using the facilities at Grund are still in a considerably good state of health and can take care of themselves.

**Org7:** Vin (Oasis) is a day centre for the mentally disabled run by the Red Cross in Iceland. The aim of the centre is to socially integrate isolated mentally disabled people (thereafter called guests), to help them to change their routines and add some quality to their everyday lives. This project gives them the possibility to have something interesting to do during the day, like play chess, physical exercise, listen to music, art, read or watch movies. Here we make it possible for people with mental illness to meet others who are in a similar situation, people can get to know each other, share their history, make new relations, get peer support and become socially active again. Vin has been running for 19 years.

## 2.2.2 Previous Experience

1. In what year did your organisation begin hosting international volunteers and how many international volunteers did you receive then? If not sure, please estimate.

Year: 2000	Number of volunteers: 16
2005	14
2006	6

2. Why did your organisation decide to host international volunteer?

As a self-independent organisation we needed extra help and new ideas, we can't afford employing a lot of people.

The reason was twofold: First, to act as support for staff (admittedly inexpensive support). Secondly, to teach young people from around the world about mental illness issues and the Clubhouse model so that they can be advocates in their own countries upon return home.

Because it gives new dynamic to our work and the social atmosphere, it's to great help, educational and expands our horizon.

3. How long do international volunteers serve with your organisation? (e.g. 6 months, 12 months) and is it enough time for the organisation?

6 months x no, six months is not enough.  
12 months x x x x x x = 6 and one year is better than 6 months.

4. How does your organisation generally determine projects for international volunteers? Please choose all that apply. Projects for international volunteers:

	Rarely or never	Occasionally	Almost always
...are created by our staff based on what our organisation needs.			XXXXXX
...are created by our staff based on community feedback and what our community needs.	XXXX	XX	
...are suggested or proposed by our partner organisations.	XX		

...are suggested or proposed by international volunteers themselves.		XXXX	XX
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### 2.2.3 Training / Institutional Support

1. How are international volunteers managed at your organisation?

	Rarely or never	Occasionally	Almost always
We provide one staff person to organise the international volunteers.	X	X	XX
We provide several staff people to organise the international volunteers.			X XXX
We have one or more volunteers who manage international volunteers.	X		
The international volunteers manage themselves.		X	XXXXX

2. Does your organization offer training to international volunteers?  
*Please indicate how much preparation the volunteer receive in the following areas. Use a scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Please check one box for each statement.*

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
They receive training on their volunteer duties at the beginning.						X	XXXX
They receive training on the host culture.				X			
Volunteers are trained by everyday tasks.							X XXXXX

### 2.2.4 Activities and Impact Areas

1. What are the most common types of projects done by your international volunteers?  
*Thinking about your experience with international volunteers, please indicate how effective they are at achieving these outcomes. Use a scale where 0 = not applicable, 1 = very ineffective, 4 = neither effective nor ineffective, and 7 = very effective. Please check one box for each statement.*

	Not applicable (0)	Very Ineffective (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither (4)	(5)	(6)	Very Effective (7)
Tutoring or teaching children, youth or adults	X				X			XX
Helping community members learn to read, speak or write English or another foreign language	X				X		X	
Providing youth with economic and social opportunities	X				X		X	
Caring for infants and/or children in a day-care	XX							XX



facility								
Promoting gender equality or empowering women and families	X							
Providing other medical or dental health care or prevention	XX							X
Providing assistance for the elderly	X							X
Providing physical therapy or other assistance to people with disabilities	X							
Collecting, preparing or distributing food, crafts, or other goods						XX		X
Improving management capacity such as fundraising or strategic planning capabilities		X						
Promoting cross-cultural exchange						X		X

### 2.2.5 Volunteer Impact

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

*Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use a scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Please check one box for each statement.*

International volunteers:	Strongly disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither agree/ nor disagree (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly agree (7)
...contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers	X			XX			
...provide more people to get our work done							XXXX
...provide a new viewpoint or perspective					X	X	X
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures						XX	XX
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nations and cultures				X	X		X
...help us attract local volunteers	X	X		X			X
...bring international attention to our work	X			XX			X
...bring credibility to our work				XXX			
...are effective						X	XXX
...help our economy by spending money locally	X			X	XX		
...generate revenue for our organisation				XXXX			
...become financial donors	XXXX						
...become advocates upon return home					XX	X	X

...are inexpensive						X	XX
...services could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member	X	XXX					
If the person had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services		X	X	X			
...help our organisation develop the relationship with the local community	X			XX			
...help to intensify networking efforts at national / international level		X	X	X			

2. If the volunteer provided an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nation and culture, please specify how?

International volunteers are always having lots of questions about everything, which gives opportunity to the community.

3. What do you think are the potential *challenges* of hosting international volunteers? Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
International volunteers:

	Strongly disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither agree/ nor disagree (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly agree (7)
...require a lot of training			X	XXXX			
...require a lot of supervision			XXX	XX			
...distract staff and local volunteers from their work	XX	XXX					
...are accustomed to different ways of doing things				XX		X	XX
...may not have the needed skills		XX		XX		X	
...may not have the language abilities needed				XXX		XX	
...don't stay long enough		XXX		XX			
...can be difficult to find	XXXX						
...take the place of local volunteers	XXXX						
...take the place of local jobs	XXXX						
...are not effective	XXXX						
...are expensive	XXXX						
...create problems within the community	XXXX						

4. If you have had other challenges, please specify how you deal with them.

Late coming and they can be lazy sometimes: XXXX  
Homesick: XX

5. In your opinion, based on your answers above, do the *benefits* of hosting international volunteers outweigh the *challenges*?

Yes, I think international volunteers generally provide more benefits than challenges for our organization: XXXXX

No, I think international volunteers generally create more challenges than benefits for our organization: None

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

It is very worthwhile for us because it broadens our members' horizon and they very often develop a much more relaxed relationship with the volunteers than with regular staff. The volunteers are often able to talk to the members about things which staff may find difficult to broach, thus facilitating their rehabilitation.

Yes because it gives new dynamic to our work and the social atmosphere, it's to great help, educational and expands our horizon.

They bring new energy to the organisation, new ideas and the exchanging cultures and languages.

7. Did you know that this year is the International Year of Volunteer (IYV) +10 and European Year of Volunteer (EYV) 2011?
- Yes
- No XXXX XXXX

8. Do you have any suggestions as to how one could maximize the positive impact, or minimize the negative impact of volunteering?

More advertisement on television, radio and newspapers, posters around and to raise awareness. That will maximize opportunity and there more people know more about it then the negative will be minimized.

## 2.3 ANALYSIS OF HOST COMMUNITIES' INPUTS

There was just one host family interview.

### 2.3.1 Previous Experience

1. Did you know that there are international volunteers working in this community? Have you encountered any of the volunteers? Can you tell me about it?

Yes. I knew that there are volunteers here but I had never met anyone. On the other hand, I knew some people who had gone to other countries as a volunteer.

2. In what year did your community/home begin hosting international volunteers and how many international volunteers did you received then? If not sure, please estimate.

Year: 2011

Number of volunteers: 1

### 2.3.2 Motivation

1. Why did your family decide to host international volunteers?

Because I saw from a friend of mine who had been volunteering that they needed a home for a girl. I asked my parents and they said why not, we had extra room and we wanted to give something back.

2. How long do international volunteers stay with your community/home?

	Rarely or never	Occasionally	Almost always
2 weeks or less			
Between 2 weeks and 1 month			
1 to 3 months			
3 to 6 months			X
6 to 12 months			
Over 1 year			

3. Do you think this is a good amount of time for them to stay here? How long should they stay?

She has been here for almost six months and everybody in my family would love to have her here for a longer time so we think it's a short time but we know that she's excited to meet her family.

### 2.3.3 Community Engagement

1. Do you know what the volunteers do in the community? Please describe.

She is working at the AUS office. She is writing a report about volunteering here in Iceland.

2. Thinking about your experience with international volunteers, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use a scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Please check one box for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I / we am very interested in getting to know the volunteers.							X
I / we feel they have the ability to make a difference in my community.							X
They try to find the time to make a positive difference in my / our community.							X
I / we speak with the volunteers about their experiences.							X
I / we have read a journal or blog from the volunteers about my experiences.					X		
The volunteers are always part of community activities						X	
Any other Experience:							

### 2.3.4 Volunteer impact

1. Do you think international volunteers can help improve things in the community? Can they contribute to 'development'? If so, how? If not, why not?

Yes I truly think that volunteers can make a difference. They are really active in the community and are eager to help. The volunteers that I have meet are so amazing, loving and caring and always in a good mood. They always make other people smile and be happy.

2. What do you think are the potential benefits of hosting international volunteers? Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use a scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Please check one box for each statement.

	Strongly disagree			Neither agree/ nor disagree			Strongly agree
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
...contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers						X	
...provide more people to get our work done	X						
...provide a new viewpoint or perspective							X
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures							X
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nations and culture							X
...help us attract local volunteers					X		
...bring international attention to our community						X	
...are effective							X
...help our economy by spending money locally				X			
...generate revenue for our community	X						
...are inexpensive						X	
...services could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member.	X						

3. If the volunteer provided an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nation and culture, please specify how?

The volunteer could talk to us about what he/she thought about the community, what we can do better and what is good about it. It is always good to get feedback from someone who is new to the community.

4. Did you ever learn anything new from an international volunteer? Can you explain what have you personally experienced?

I have learned that I should be grateful for what I have, do not take anything for granted. I love my life and she has thought me to do that. My volunteer makes me so happy and she has made my heart bigger.

5. What do you think are the potential challenges of hosting international volunteers? Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree			Neither agree/ nor disagree			Strongly agree
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
...are accustomed to different ways of doing things							X
...are not always welcome in our community		X					
...may not have the skills needed	X						
...may not have the language abilities needed		X					
...don't stay long enough				X			
...take the place of local volunteers		X					
...are not effective	X						
...are expensive	X						
...create problems inside the community	X						
...are not interested in the community	X						
... are difficult to communicate and interact with.	X						

6. Is there anything that should have been done better by the hosting organisation? And would you like to host again in future?

The AUS office here in Iceland have been nothing but kind to us, they want to help us in every way. After this experience we would love to host again, so when we are ready we will be in touch.

7. Do you have any suggestions as to how one could maximize the positive impact, or minimize the negative impact of volunteering?

Do it with an open mind and you will love it ☺

### 3 Conclusions: Impact of Volunteering

<b>Input from volunteers</b>	<b>Their own personal development</b>	<b>Organizational development</b> (host coordinating organisation)	<b>Local community development</b> (host project(s), host family, etc.)
	<p><u>Challenges:</u> -Language, adapting different lifestyle, being on your own, express yourself in foreign language. Self-dependent</p> <p><u>Learning points:</u> - Patience, myself, opens to new things, different cultures and behaviours, new languages, way to socialize, team work and creativity. -</p>	<p><u>Challenges:</u> -Short of staff lead to less support sometimes.</p> <p><u>Learning points:</u> -Group activities Participation, sharing languages and culture, support, communication skill.</p>	<p><u>Challenges:</u> -Language, to get to know people, new way of doing things, different behaviours and communication skills.</p> <p><u>Learning points:</u> -Communication, making friends, to be open minded and to new things, adapt easy.</p>
	<p><u>Recommendations for optimising volunteer's learning and impact:</u> - You should be open to new things. - And never be shy to ask when you don't know something.</p>	<p><u>Recommendations:</u> -You have to be ready to take care of yourself and to be sure about the project you choose.</p>	<p><u>Recommendations:</u> -Don't be too hard on yourself it takes time to settle in a new country.</p>
<b>Input from Organization</b> (Host coordinating organisation)	<b>Personal development of volunteers</b>	<b>Their own development and growth</b>	<b>Local community development</b>
	<p><u>Challenges:</u> -Be away from their family and homesick, the cold, dark winter nights here in Iceland could make the volunteer depressed. I would not say that the language is a challenge because most Icelanders speak English, but in some of the projects you might have to learn the language.</p> <p><u>Learning points:</u> -Learn Icelandic, Icelandic culture.</p>	<p><u>Challenges and learning points:</u> Most volunteers who come to Iceland live with other volunteers so they have to be able to take care of themselves, cook, clean, make dinner and so on. Make new friends, other volunteers and Icelandic friends, might travel together in Iceland. After their stay in Iceland they will be more independent.</p>	<p><u>Challenges and learning points:</u> -Icelandic people can be closed, so it might be a problem to make new Icelandic friends. Iceland is expensive so volunteers have to think twice before they spend money.</p>

	<u>Recommendations:</u> -Read about Iceland, the weather, etc. -Prepare the host family that the volunteer might be homesick.	Optimising organisational development and growth	<u>Recommendations:</u> -Check if the rate (currency) is high or low compared to your country. Save some money before you come to Iceland. -Find people who live in Iceland maybe on facebook or other websites, then you can get to know someone before you come to Iceland. Ask the hosting organisation if there is a volunteer who has been in their home country so the volunteer can prepare before s/he arrives in Iceland.
<b>Input from local community</b> (Host projects and host family)	<b>Personal development of volunteers</b>	<b>Organizational development and growth</b>	<b>Their own development</b>
	<u>Challenges:</u> -Volunteer's can be lazy and late sometimes, language is one of the challenges too, homesick and adapting to a new way of living.  <u>Learning points:</u> -Exchanging languages, skills and culture.	<u>Challenges:</u> -If a project turns to be different from what the volunteer expected, they may be less supportive.  <u>Learning points:</u> - New ideas and different ways of doing things. From different cultures or countries.	<u>Challenges:</u> -Different cultures, communication, languages.  <u>Learning points:</u> -Dealing with different people, making friends, to be open.
	<u>Recommendations:</u> -Need to be open-minded and know what you want to gain out of your project.	<u>Recommendations:</u> - It is good to share your views and if the project is not what you expected or wanted, never be shy to say that.	Optimising local community development