

## ***Cultural Diversity, Indigenous People and Social Inclusion - EU and Latin America EVS Project***



## ***Volunteers' Testimonials January 2010 - July 2010***



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme



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## INTRODUCTION

This final publication aims at visualizing some of the results of the **EU and LATIN AMERICA EVS Project on Cultural Diversity, Indigenous People and Social Inclusion, co-ordinated by the ICYE International Office from January to July 2010**. It mainly features testimonials written by 15 volunteers while living and working in their respective host placements, reflecting their learning experiences and the contributions they could make to their respective local host communities in 5 European and 8 Latin American countries.

As reflected in their testimonials, the volunteers experienced many facets and multiple dimensions of social exclusion in EU and Latin American countries, finding out about the life situation of different excluded groups and learning about the different ways in which NGO's and local institutions are engaging themselves for more inclusive and cohesive societies. Beside an inside-outside view of their own cultures, the volunteers also gained a better understanding of the values and social realities in the respective host communities in Europe and Latin America and a wide array of skills.

On the hosting side, the participation of the international volunteers meant enrichment and added value for the young people and staff in the local host organizations which were mainly youth clubs, community development institutions, indigenous and cultural heritage protection projects and social work associations. The local communities benefited from the exchange of opinions and sharing of experiences but even more from the time, energy and ideas brought by the volunteers, as well as their personal skills and a different cultural perspective.

The volunteers' testimonials reflect their strong motivation and commitment to make a difference with their European Voluntary Service and the considerable impact of their engagement at local level.

We would like to thank volunteers and partner organisations for their dedication and good cooperation as well as for their valuable contributions to the creation of this final publication. We also thank the European Commission for the funding provided for this project in the frame of Action 2 of the Youth in Action programme.

Andreas Schwab

ICYE International Office

## Durkis Acosta HONDURAS – AUSTRIA



### **My project**

The youth centre *Margareten 5er haus* is one of more than 30 youth centres in Vienna, working with the youth and children of the city to enable them to develop active citizenship, solidarity and appreciation of different cultures.

### **A typical day**

On a normal day, children and teenagers can do what they feel like within the house parameters. We encourage them not to play alone, but to share their playtime and toys with the other children. I'm learning very much from the children and how independent they are becoming.

### **A special day**

A special day involves activities that are chosen for the children. Sometimes there are presentations of things that might interest the children and motivate them. During Easter, for example, we had an Easter egg hunt. The children were very excited.

### **Gratitude**

Firstly, I would like to thank God because I believe He has helped me very much during my time here. I must also thank the Guaruma and ICYE Organization in Honduras, and also the people and the organization in Europe who have helped so much.

### **Cultural diversity**

I had to learn to share my experience and knowledge about my home country. This also meant dealing with cultural differences and stress in the contact with people from many different cultural backgrounds. Now I have a better concept of Italian, French and Austrian people than before. I realize now that, if we never come in contact with people from other countries and cultures, it will be difficult for us to learn about the many similarities we share.





## Valentina Russo URUGUAY - BELGIUM



### *My project*

I work in an organization called *IVCA*, run by women for women. They provide support and opportunities to women from different parts of the world, giving them the opportunity to grow as persons and to get to know a place for social and cultural integration. *IVCA* offers language classes, takes care of children and runs workshops and activities.

### *A typical day....*

As far as I'm concerned I don't have a typical day, it's always different, but yes, I do have fixed days like Thursdays and Fridays. On Mondays I normally look after the children, together with other colleagues, while the women are in language class (French, Dutch) or in activities like open lunch, sports, walks, sewing classes.

I have nothing fixed during Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I normally prepare the programme for the next day or I help with some tasks. We are very flexible in this organization and we can carry out our own tasks, for example, I work with a colleague from Spain and we will start giving Spanish classes. Together with a Colombian colleague, I am also planning to start offering an arts workshop.

*Do you find a link between your voluntary work and your project's name "Cultural Diversity, Indigenous people and social inclusion"?*

I think that yes, there is a link to the theme, because of the cultural diversity I am experiencing every day; people of different cultures, people from America, Africa, Europe and Asia; different styles and ways of thinking, and there is of course also the problem of exclusion. Many women are discriminated by other persons and they are excluded from many things, but here at the organization they are welcome. It's all about opening the doors for the women that are feeling oppressed and to include them. The women need this protected space to be able to express themselves and to do what they like and learn according to their motivation and needs.



### *Cultural Differences...*

There are lots of things that are different from my culture. The ways of addressing yourself towards others are different, from how to say hello to how to grieve. It's difficult for me to deal with the coldness or the distance that mark the people in this country.

In Latin America we are usually warm and friendly people and we care about people we've only known for a short while because we know that we are all humans and we try to help in any way. I know people from other parts of the world, not only from the Americas that have the same way of thinking and we pass on affection. But there are persons that are kind of distant and it's difficult to have a conversation or to be friends with them, because friendship has to be nurtured from both sides.

Despite all cultural differences it's interesting to be able to see that, if we are open and learn to value our own culture and what is different in others we can achieve mutual respect and more unity.

I normally prepare the workshop or give Spanish classes during Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Thursday mornings I have French class, then in the evenings I look after the children and we have, after that, an activity, "Girls in the city", which we carry out together with other colleagues. We offer a space for women that are new in Antwerp and who maybe don't have friends or places to go to. With this group of women we cook, talk about specific themes and share our ways of thinking and of our cultures. We prepare things for the following week during Friday morning, and we carry out some activities with Latin American people once a month.

This is how my days look, I feel very good and I'm learning a lot. There are people from different parts of the world and we can share our cultures, education and learn from each other.



## Lesly Muñoz ECUADOR – ITALY



*"We can't avoid the wind,  
but we can build  
windmills" Dutch proverb*

### *Our work*

Some of the activities we offer are coloration of ceramics, wool workshop (they produce different products such as sandals, key rings and bags), clay workshops and physical activities (gymnastics, dance and others like going to the swimming pool. There are as well rehabilitation activities, in which I assist one of the staff members of the Diurno Centre "Il Viaggio".

These activities are carried out every week, and I participate in every one of them, according to the work schedule. When my shift is in the morning, I work with the activities. If my shift is in the afternoon, I work two hours at the centre and then visit the communities of the disabled people. These communities are: Ulises and Penelope. In both of them we plan activities such as going out to the city, do origami or prepare dinner together. In this way, I have been able to improve my Italian language skills. I am involved in some small projects at the Centre, which are worth mentioning: The Green Project: every Monday we grow flowers and some vegetables, work on the terrace of the centre and we also do this in a vegetable garden that was created by the community, specifically for this activity.

### *My project*

*Cooperativa Sociale Villa Maria* provides services to disabled people at three different levels: assistance (focusing on the primary needs), educational (maintaining and improving the peoples autonomy) and social (improvement and stimulation of the social inclusion).

### *Thoughts about the project...*

Every project has a great number of learning points and life experiences, which permit you to grow as a human being and make you feel that the work as a volunteer really is rewarding as you share your daily life with people.

Personally, I've begun an indescribable process, which has enabled me to develop new skills and competences in all fields. For me it's the first time I work with disabled people and this has helped me to be more patient, to understand that every person has a special skill. This skill makes this person different but is at the same time a complement when relating to others; in this sense one can talk about integration with all those who surround us. Once you share more time with them, you learn so many new things and can also teach them various. This is how to attain communication and a good relationship with everyone. I've only been here a short time, 3 months, but I have made good friends with the persons who help at the Diurno Centre, in which we carry out various activities, with the purpose to develop the different abilities of the people. Thanks to a short training period of Italian, I've had the possibility to communicate with my group and share my culture with them. Like that we've achieved, little by little, a cultural interaction and a great friendship with everyone.

## Analy Coronado PERU – POLAND



### ***My project***

*Helenow* centre specializes in therapies for children with a damaged central nervous system. Not only full medical care, but also comprehensive medical, psychological, speech-therapeutic and pedagogical examinations are secured for the children.

### ***A typical day***

We eat breakfast at 7:45 am in the canteen at the boarding school together with the children and the youth from the centre. I go to the classrooms at 8 am where the children are playing, singing, painting, using the Internet etc. The second breakfast is served at 10 am. I'm there participating to support them with whatever they need help with.

Then I have a break of one hour.

I pick up the children from school and bring them to the boarding school between 12 pm and 1 pm. Between 1.30 pm and 2.30 pm lunch is served, which I share with them. We go to the classrooms after lunch to continue playing while waiting for the parents to come pick up the children. My job finishes between 4 pm and 4.30 pm.

***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: "Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion"?***

I think yes. I work here with volunteers from other countries from whom one learns a little of their languages, traditions and cultures.

And also about social exclusion connected with the centre that accommodates children and young people with infantile paralysis. Some of them live here, without their families, during the week. These persons need a loving surrounding because only the fact of being here makes them feel lonely.

### ***Cultural differences***

The climate, the seasons of winter and summer are very marked. In my hometown the climate is very tropical. This is different and it was very difficult to endure this winter. The food: I'm missing my rice since we eat that a lot in my country. I want to prepare some food from home but I don't find the ingredients in the supermarket.

One learns here to survive despite the language barrier. I got lost four times, didn't know how to ask for the way to the bus stop and to be able to return home was very difficult. Sometimes it's difficult to try to understand the children. I need patience with each tantrum, and above all to communicate with them and teach them to listen to me, and that they treat me/everyone with respect. Sometimes they just ignore me. But I have, above all been able to overcome this with time and have learnt from them. This job makes me aware that despite their limitations, these persons use all their effort and achieve lots of things. Many of them manage to understand you and they overcome a part of their limitations all the time.







**Alfredo  
Velázquez  
MEXICO -  
SPAIN**

*Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: “Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion”?*

Yes, there is a link, because within my project I deal with young people of different ideologies, ways of living and of course, different upbringings. We have to look for ways to ingrate everyone and give them the opportunity to participate in activities of their own local communities.

### ***Internet article***

The following is a link to an Internet article about my project here in Spain. This one, and other articles have been published on Internet, radio and local TV.

<http://www.hoy.es/v/20100411/villanueva/mexicano-adentra-realidad-juvenil-20100411.html>

### ***My project***

*Ayuntamiento de Villanueva de la Serena* was established with the aim of favouring the social, cultural and economic integration of local youth through their participation in decision making processes.

### ***A typical day***

My normal day consists of tasks such as planning events, workshops, courses, school visits, promotion of and spreading activities for the youth in the office. Other tasks may be to add events to our network, investigate what activities are interesting for the youth and search for a way to create an event.

### ***What is different and how do you deal with the cultural differences in your host country?***

In the beginning, there seemed to be many similarities between my culture and Spanish culture for historic reasons, but once I've gotten in the local culture, I see that there are obviously big differences.

The life priorities in each culture are different; work punctuality, beauty are among things, which are perceived differently.

Young people in my country have a lot of initiative and a strong will to better themselves, besides being competitive by nature, they are also very creative and with a good sense of humour. Young people here have other, more material or playful aspirations. As time goes by, I've come to get used to these differences and I have learned to be more tolerant and respectful when it comes to accepting new points of views. Also, as you make new friendships, these differences begin to vanish and an integration of both cultures starts.



**Aleksandra  
Kania  
POLAND -  
BOLIVIA**



***My project***

*Machaqa Amawt'a* is a non-profit institution promoting high quality alternative education generating better living conditions in native and indigenous populations. The vision is a society with respect for diversity and intercultural dialogue.

***A typical day***

Normally we start our day travelling to one of the neighbouring villages from where we bring the kids by bus to our foundation (every week from different schools). There, during three days, we organize some educational activities for them, we share meals and play. Some other days we carry out workshops for high school youth, normally we visit them in their villages or houses. Once a week I travel to two of the neighbour villages to give English classes to students. All the workers of my centre stay in the project during the week, so apart of working we spend a lot of time with each other, cooking, visiting places around or preparing activities for the next day.



***What is different and how do you deal with the cultural differences in your host country?***

I have to admit that in spite of many cultural differences I feel really good in Bolivia and there are very few things that make my life difficult here. But they do exist, and one of them is the Bolivian sense of time expressed very well by the word "ahorita" what literally means "now" but in fact can mean in some time, in two hours, tomorrow, maybe never... And that's how it is in many situations; the only solution is patience and a good book for the time you would have to wait. Apart of this and some other small things I would say that the cultural differences I rather find interesting. I really enjoy living in the community that is very different from our European individualist style of life, I like the relaxed attitude of people and the fact that they enjoy and appreciate the simplicity of the life, of the present moment.

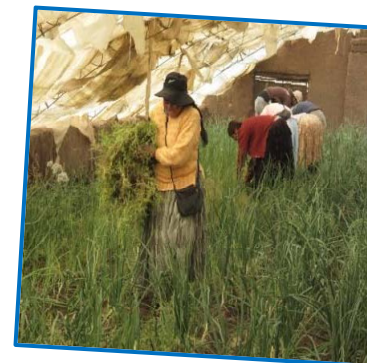


***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: “Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion”?***

I find a lot of connection although in a little bit different meaning than I imagined before. The project is located in the indigenous village Aymara in the Bolivian Altiplano, and one of their main aims is to give an alternative education to the kids and youth. Why alternative? Because at school they don't learn many things related to their own culture since the educational system is based more on the Spanish and western standard.

Bolivia is a multicultural country, each region has its culture, language and traditions, but education is still quite similar in all the places. So “intercultural” in the context of work in my foundation has a meaning of giving them knowledge not only related with western culture (that sometimes is very far for their everyday life) but also with their own surroundings and traditions, for example workshops of natural medicine, organic production, animal's health, or learning their language Aymara. On the other side my role is to teach them about cultural differences between their own and the general Bolivian culture, which very often is really unknown and abstract for the kids.

I think that the work of the foundation helps to create better opportunities for the kids from a village school, if we compare their possibilities with children and youth from the cities. We organize some workshops of the occupational counselling helping them to plan their future and focus on the opportunities their community can provide to them.





## Fanny Lingqvist SWEDEN - COLOMBIA

### **My project**

*Corporacion Servimos* offers health and educational services both on individual and on community level to marginalized communities so to improve their health, access to education and participation in society.

### **A typical day**

A typical day in my project usually starts around eight o'clock in the morning. Two other volunteers and I begin the day with helping out in the public library of Ricaurte. There are often two or three people coming in early for us to help them to read and write. We help them practicing the alphabet, writing and reading. Helping an adult to learn their own language, to spell and to read their own name is a very rewarding work because you can see the result at once and the happiness of finally understanding something almost everyone takes for granted. It makes me realize how fortunate one is to be able to read without thinking. I will always have these people in my mind knowing that the ability to read and write is not something everyone can take for granted.

Every other day, at ten o'clock, I have an English class in "Jardin infantil" (kindergarten, which is also a part of the same project). We sing English songs, talk about the colours, fruits and animals in English. The children in my classes aged 3-5 years and they are about 15 children in one class. After my class in the kindergarten and onwards until 11.30 I help students with homework or other people with similar things in the library. At 11.30 I accompany the teacher of "casa hogar" (a home for 16 girls aged 7-15 years during the weeks) to meet up with the girls after school and then accompany them to go to the lunch-hall in our project. After lunch, I usually have one or two language classes in the library; English, German or Swedish. The people coming to these classes are about 7 – 60 years old. Many of them have never studied another language nor have they been in a non - Spanish speaking country. We therefore try focus our conversations on other countries and cultures, travelling etc. The groups are mixed and are sometimes 10 people up to 60 people in one class.

### **Cultural differences**

The differences between Colombia and my home – country, Sweden, are of course many. Sweden is a very small country with very few habitants and a very cold climate compared to Colombia. During my stay in Colombia, I dealt with many cultural differences such as the attitude towards time, religion, family-structures, gender-equality, privacy and many, many other things. Here briefly, some of the differences I noticed and had to struggle with and to overcome during my stay in Colombia:

Time in Stockholm, where I live, the time - factor; to be on time and trust being on time is very elemental in our daily-life. Like "Momo - and the struggle of the time" I am always running after the time in Stockholm. Punctuality is very important and losing one train or bus can destroy all plans for the day. In Bogotá the transport-system is always overcrowded, there are simply too many people to be travelling at the same time. I simply learned that I cannot always control the time or the situations, and also how to be calm about it. In general, using the time to a maximum is not as important in Colombia as it is in Sweden. Being Swedish this was probably a very healthy thing, and I hope I will continue to have a relaxed attitude towards time in the future.



### ***A typical day continued...***

In between the classes there are often many people that need help with homework or other things. Sometimes it is busy; sometimes it is not, depending on the day.

We also have a “meeting-point” in a park, opposite the centre, called “La P”. It is a place where anyone can borrow a book and sit down for a bit of reading or just have a talk with the people from the library sitting there.

### ***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: “Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion”?***

The link between social inclusion and my volunteer work at the project is very evident. I am working in one of the poorest areas in Bogotá. Most of the people entering the library, the lessons and especially the girls of “casa hogar”, are people from poor backgrounds and low education. Therefore, helping these people to learn new languages, to pass their school-exams and to learn to read from scratch, is a good way of helping them to get more included in the society. A life without being able to read signs, fill in application forms, travel to other parts of the city, write and read your own name often ends up in exclusion of the society why I think this project met the name of “social inclusion”. It is also very clear that the knowing English or at least another language is a key tool for travel, and also in many cases, an obligatory for getting a better job. Almost everything costs in Colombia, why free language classes and help in between these classes provides a chance for people with less money to also learn a new language without having to go to the university.

The general aim of the foundation is to integrate vulnerable people into the society, vulnerable people such as the girls of “casa hogar”. These girls often come from very tragic and horrible family-situations. Very often drugs, alcohol, or violence-related problems at home have caused their stay at the house. Due to lack of help from the parents or other adults in their surroundings, many of these girls have big problems passing their exams at school, concentrating in general and feeling comfortable in a learning situation. These girls need a lot of support with homework, but off course also social support. I think, just having an adult listening and being interested in their daily-life means a lot. We often just sit and talk with the girls in the library or read stories together.

### ***Cultural differences continued...***

Many people coming to the centre and many people in Colombia in general have never had the opportunity to travel abroad and will probably not have the money to do so either. Having people from other parts of the world with different cultures and backgrounds is therefore important. There was not one day passing by without the question, “where are you from? Why are you here?, How is it in your country?” etc. Many people I spoke to did not know much about Sweden and had never met anyone from my part of the world before. I think, just me being there and explaining a little bit about the culture of Sweden and how life is in my country can be considered as an exchange of culture. I think a meeting with a new culture wakens questions about identity and differences of different societies, which I see as an embryo for an open-minded and diverse thinking.





## Raila Turunen FINLAND – COSTA RICA

### **My project**

*Casa de Nuestra Señora del Refugio* is a religious organization, which acts like an NGO. It offers a home to girls at risk. They provide the children with what they need in order to stay away from difficult or threatening situations.

### **A typical day**

I go to work around 9 am. In the morning I play with the girls who don't have classes. We often go to the little library, which they have at the Refugio and paint, do bracelets, play or read something. Some days, around lunchtime, I walk to the nearby school with younger girls. After lunch we, the volunteers, have a break. And after that we open the library again for the girls. Afternoons are usually time for homework. I help the younger girls doing their homework, especially English. Sometimes I'm just there to watch that the girls actually do their works, and they also like to have company around.

Girls at the Refugio really love doing bracelets so we often make different kind of bracelets, which is also a really good practise for their patience and concentration, as well as for their hand- and mind-coordinating skills.

I'm also playing with the girls at the playground. Swinging is the number one activity there.

### **Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: "Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion"?**

I do find the link for cultural diversity and social inclusion. The girls at my project have been socially excluded because of their home situations. Many of their families are really poor, or live in the slums.

At the Refugio, or shelter, they have a safe place to live and be children. It is also important to have other young people (volunteers) there to show them a good example and being a sort of a role model too. The girls are really excited to hear some words in our own languages and I think it is really good for them to meet people from different places. They like to hear little things about our families and countries and to talk about the differences.

It is also very important that the girls have normality in their lives. Someone sets them rules and they have some duties to do. They also go to normal school with all the other children, which also help them to get socially included.

### **Cultural differences**

For me it is very different to be surrounded with so much Catholicism. I haven't had any problems with that, but it is very different compared to Finland and many other European countries where the religion is not as visible as here.

It was rather funny, and also very different compared to Finland, that when I first went to visit my project, the first question the girls asked me was if I am married. Not what is my name, or how old I am?

Many little things are really different here, at first I didn't pay much attention to them but now I am starting to get annoyed with some small things. I know it is a different culture and so on, so I am trying to just think about it that way.

There are also differences in the way people act and talk. And what is said out loud and what is not. It took some time to get the manners, but now that I have more or less assimilated them, I think I am doing pretty well.





**Ida  
Ingmansson  
SWEDEN -  
ECUADOR**



### ***My project***

The bilingual school *Mushuc Pacari* wants to save and promote traditions of a typically indigenous neighborhood in culture, linguistic and identity. The school offers bilingual education in both Quechua and Spanish.

### ***A typical day***

During my time at the project I have been one month with the first graders, one with the second graders and one with the third graders, so my responsibilities have looked a bit different from time to time. For example when I worked with the first graders I almost exclusively worked with a few students that were in need of extra help, although recently I decided to stay with the second graders for the rest of the time. The days with them always starts with a dictation, that I sometimes lead and that I correct. Than they have different classes, with different teachers but I'm always there assisting. In the classes of physical education artworks I take on a more leading role than in the other subjects, because there is an opportunity to communicate by showing when my Spanish skills are not sufficient. This was of course more of an issue when I arrived but I still enjoy and have some more responsibilities in these classes. Some of the activities are making paper figures; paint self-portraits or cutting paperclip figures. I also led activities in English, which is very fun though it offers flexibility and creativity in the way of working. We often sing songs, make strings of words and play games, in English and we are trying to integrate art and fiscal activities here as well to make it more fun for the students learn. It could be for example drawing and painting a person and write the parts of the body or singing a song or planning games where they have to move around in the classroom. In the other subjects, like math or Quechua help mostly by walking around and give individual help to those who need it, or help by correcting homework's or preparing material for upcoming classes.

In the lunch break I help to serve lunch for all the students in the school, which is nice because this is the only time I have to meet the older students. When I am done in the dining hall, I usually hang out at the sweet stall, where one of my friends works, or I play with the kids.

***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: "Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social Inclusion"?***

I can see a clear link between my volunteer work and the name of the project. There are many of indigenous children (and teachers) in the school and we constantly make an effort to make the children feel proud of their culture and history and to respect cultural diversity and see it as something enriching and positive. One clear example is the classes in Quechua that the students get twice a week. They also always sing the national anthem in both Quechua and Spanish. The third and second graders have a schoolbook, which is only about different cultures in Ecuador, and the teacher brings up the issue of cultural diversity in the everyday teaching.



### ***Cultural Differences***

I experience a huge difference between the culture I'm used to and the one I'm experiencing here. I live in a very small village, which I would like to say is quite conservative in their way of living and their values. To me the difference between big city/village seems bigger than between actual geographic differences. For example the difference between Quito and San Miguel (my village) feels greater than between Quito and Stockholm, where I'm from originally. But I guess it depends on what you look at. It has been a bit of a conflict for me, because I have many friends in Quito with completely different costumes than the ones of the people in San Miguel. My family and me have been trying to solve these disagreements by conversation and showing mutual respect and compromising. It is rough at times, but I think we both have learned a lot. By talking and sharing everyday life I have come to understand although not always agreeing about points of view that to me at first just seemed to not make any sense. The last months my family and me have got to understand one another better, because the way of communicating, except the actual language part, is different in our cultures. In the beginning we both kind of assumed that the other part would understand certain things that to us were certain, but now we learnt to be straighter forward, which really helps!







**Fabrizio  
Rosano  
ITALY -  
HONDURAS**



### **My project**

*Guaruma's* mission is to promote environmental awareness and conservation through educational programs in the Rio Cangrejal watershed on the Eastern edge of Pico Bonito National Park. The education program offers photography, English, computer and environmental education classes. *Guaruma* also offers local ecotourism services by training students to give tours on the trails that surround their communities. The organization promotes and sustains its programs by selling calendars and postcards designed by students and featuring student photography.

### **My work**

My work is different every day, making it impossible to be bored here. Most days, I teach computer classes to students ages ten to twenty. I have seven classes that are divided by level of ability and each of those classes is named after a different animal.

On Mondays and Tuesdays I have classes with the Gavilanes (sparrow hawks), the Zompopos (leaf-cutter ants) and the Iguanas, which are all groups of local children. El Pital is a community a few kilometers above of Las Mangas. We arrive here by foot, hitchhiking, or on the bus if it is available. Four years ago, *Guaruma* amplified their management by opening an office in El Pital, and began to offer educational services to the children of this community. On Wednesday I have classes with the Tucanes (Toucans) and the Aguilas (Eagles) here where I live, in Las Mangas. Thursdays is the most dynamic day since I have class in El Pital with the Mariposas (Butterflies) and later have a meeting with the guides, and then finish the day off giving a class to the Jaguares.

On weekends, there is almost always an activity to assist with or participate in. I participated in "Clean up Day", which was organized in El Pital as well as the one organized in Las Mangas. We decided to organize the clean-up day once a month in each of the two communities in order to keep a clean environment and develop a culture of respect towards nature.

I was recently invited to a Tourism workshop organized by Recoturh (Community tourism network of Honduras) in order to represent *Guaruma*. This workshop was very interesting and I learned a lot as well as getting the chance to meet many people who work in the world of sustainable and community tourism.

## **Cultural Differences**

The 'Cultural diversity, indigenous people, and social inclusion' project seems to fit in perfectly with my lived experience here. I believe that it is important to continue this project in partnership with *Guaruma* in the Cangrejal watershed. There exists a variety of cultures here in the watershed and the struggle for inclusion is strong. Sometimes I remember old pictures my parents used to show me and I feel like I am living in those times.

In any case, this experience is something very special for me. Living here makes me grow, makes me understand, and makes me smile. Once here one opens the eyes to a new reality and one puts life in a new perspective. It is incredible how happy people are, despite the poverty. Here, human values take precedence over material things. People smile; they look in your eyes and are sincere.

I am not having any trouble integrating myself or adapting to the local culture. Every day I learn something new. Also, the climate, the sea, the energy of the people, and the chaos of the city streets are things I know well. They are all very similar to traditional Naples.



During Easter week, we participated in an ecological and touristic activity here in the Cangrejal watershed. During this time, many tourists arrive to enjoy the beauty of the area. This year about 13 000 tourists arrived. Plastic bags were distributed in order to avoid people throwing garbage on the ground. Furthermore, information about the attractions and structure of tourism present in the watershed was provided with the objective of strengthening touristic activities which leave the area adjacent to the river clean after a week of holidays.

From time to time, on weekends, we accompany students on touristic excursions or in activities such as "Earth Day" and "Earth Hour" where we participated and collaborated with various Guaruma volunteers. All of these activities are described in our Guaruma blog ([www.guaruma.org/blog/](http://www.guaruma.org/blog/)).

During free time, we always go with local children or volunteers to visit trails, creeks, waterfalls, and swimming holes. There is always a site or natural pool to enjoy. It is such a wonderful opportunity being here.

The children are great. I really enjoy spending time playing with them and you can find them everywhere. Here in the Cuenca-villages more than 50% of the children are born from a teenage mother. It's an actual problem and the reason for the abundance of children. I learn a lot from these children; they are always so polite and show a great amount of respect. So young and already prepared to the sacrifice like a grown up. Once or twice a week I stay in El Pital to hang out with the people in the community and to chat with the other Guaruma-volunteers that live in El Pital: Melissa and Annais (two French women doing an environment investigation for their university) and Dave (Canadian that gives the environment classes and his own agro foresting investigation).

I'm coordinating the tourist visits and guides. When tourist groups come for our trails I arrange everything with our main office, the cabins/hostel of the village and with our local guides. Once a week I meet up with the guides for different activities and further training in guidance. At the same time we also keep up with the maintenance of the trails by cleaning and arranging signs etc. The last part of my work is to tutor two students from a tourism institute that won a scholarship to do their practicum with Guaruma. The girls are called Maria and Marlyn and I take them on the trails to teach them about guiding so that they can complete their practicum related investigations.



Something that is entirely new is my continual discoveries in the natural environment. Although I walk the same street every morning, it feels like I am walking it for the first time. Every weekend we hike, swim, or climb to places of incredible beauty. Living in this type of environment is hard to pin down on the page. I feel like I am becoming part of something fresh and yet ancient, something ephemeral and yet as fixed as a boulder. Every time I head down to the city I can't wait to get back up the valley. It's like falling in love.

On top of the beauty of the mountains, valley and rivers of Pico Bonito, a few kilometres away rests the Caribbean. Right in front of La Ceiba are the Bay Islands. Although I have not had the opportunity to visit them quite yet I plan on making it out to these earthly paradises. Also the food is delicious; there are many new dishes for me to taste, especially the great flavours of the tropical fruits.



**THANK YOU!**

I would like to thank the staff of ICYE Honduras for the great welcome and their good work. They helped a lot and gave me very good advice. They introduced me to the very first people I met, also the family they selected for me was really good. La Ceiba is a nice place for night life and is known for its festivals. I feel very connected with all the different tunes and dances. In this country I have found many good friends, during my leisure time, we get together for different activities. As well I have many friends from the communities; we're always searching for new adventures, finding awesome places in the woods, the sea, rivers, islands or lakes. Honduras is an awesome country and I hope I could explore and learn so much more of it. This year is historical for Honduras, this is the second time they are in the world cup, so we're living an exciting atmosphere, and all I can say is: "Forza Honduras!" (Come on Honduras!)...







**María del  
Carmen Ramos  
Muñoz  
SPAIN - MEXICO**



### ***My project***

**Foundation Tláloc** is a non-governmental non-profit civil society organization which jointly with different actors of society works towards sustainable development and protection of the environment as well as for the protection of the cultural heritage of the Otomi indigenous communities in the Federal State of Mexico.

### ***A week at the project***

Every day looks different. We carry out the office work on Mondays; making contacts via e-mail and doing follow up of the various projects we carry out. I also work in the office during Tuesday mornings and sometimes have meetings with partner organisations and institutions like the university or with different experts that advice us about projects and all volunteers meet during the afternoon. On Wednesday mornings we meet with "Somos Mundos", another civil society partner organization. We organise a radio program, search for news, guests to be interviewed and music. We broadcast the radio program "Con Sentido" live in the evening. The program is mainly about environmental issues, although it provides a space for different cultural expressions and initiatives and to citizen participation. On Thursday we visit the indigenous community (Otomí) of San Mateo Capulhuac monitoring different projects carried out by Fundacion Tlaloc such as ecological agriculture, making of Oxocal handicraft and bags, the construction of a Holistic Training Centre. We talk about environmental education in the schools and universities on Fridays. Every week is different, and this is what I like most - there is no routine.

### ***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: "Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion"?***

I think that there is a link between the work I carry out and the theme of the volunteering. But a big part of my work consists of searching for resources, human resources as well as economical for helping the community, and I would like a more directly involved job. I would have liked to live in the community. But I understand that the work I carry out from Toluca is important and possibly more useful for the development of the community than if I would be there all the time.

### ***Cultural Differences***

I really like Mexican food and the Mexican hospitality. Everyone is very open and it is possible to make friends wherever you go. I also find some words, which they use, funny. I think that it is very easy to make contact with persons who have the same interest. What I like less is the pollution and traffic. I wake up every morning hearing noises from cars and I go to bed every night hearing the same noises. I neither like the garbage, above all plastic and Styrofoam, on the streets.

One of the difficulties I've had is to go back to live with a family since I'm very used to be independent and to always have friends over in the house. Living with the family is complicated, but it's for sure true that I've enough liberty to do what I want.





## Marlene Reichel AUSTRIA - PERU



### *My project*

I enjoy very much the work here at *Brigada de Voluntarios Bolivarianos del Peru (BVBP)*. I work in a local organization, *Caritas Felices*, which deals with sexually abused children. But there are also orphans, street children without education and children whose families cannot take care of them.

Because of bad life experiences, some of the children are mentally and physically disabled. The project hosts 30 children from 4 to 18 years, but the numbers change constantly.

As a volunteer, I am responsible for the free time activities. I can decide myself what activities I would like to do together with the children.

### *A typical day*

There is no typical workday for me. Actually, every day is a little bit different. I usually cook the lunch with the children and help them with their homework.

However, the days during the last school holiday looked completely different. Other volunteers, the children and I rehearsed a theatre play during this time. Because of that we made masks, built a small stage and practiced our roles. We hired a dance choreographer so the children could learn how to dance. The rest of the time when the school was off, we did bracelets and played volleyball on the beach.

So as you can see, the work varies. Sometimes, there is also a day when the children together with me tidy up and do the washing in the house. Often, the nuns or the social workers come to visit and do some activities with the children.

### *What is different and how do you deal with the cultural differences in your host country?*

There are lots of differences between the country I come from (Austria) and Peru. Actually, everything is completely different. But I think that I have managed well to adjust to the new culture.

The only thing that bothers me is that almost everyone is very religious which I am not at all. The children from my project for example go every day to the church.

I also noticed that the people are either extremely religious or don't believe in God at all: for example the people from the jungle who have a completely different culture.



## Nina Wolfs BELGIUM - URUGUAY



### **My project**

I work at *El Puerto*, a shelter for women and children victims of exclusion and domestic violence.

### **A typical day**

I work from Monday to Friday, and work all the morning shifts except on Monday, then I do the late shift from 3 pm to 9 pm.

I start at "El Puerto" at 9 am, at that moment there is only one other educator, Gabriel and on Thursdays Valeria. Also Nestor, the cook is at the project and at 10 am Agustina enters.

Every Tuesday and Thursday I give a plastic arts and Agustina helps me with it. It's a workshop for the smallest children because in the morning there are not many adolescents. We work with kids from 2 years old until 6 years. The workshop is from 10.30 am until lunch but most of the time the kids finish earlier.

At 12h I prepare the tables to eat and help serving the food together with Nestor. The population of 'El Puerto' eats in two shifts because there are not enough places for them to eat all together so lunch takes quite a while. When they all have finished eating I clean the table and put the chairs on them.

From then on it is a lot quieter in the house because its 'hora de la siesta' so all the kids are in their rooms with their mothers and should stay there until 3 pm but most of the times when the kids wake up they come down to play. During this time I mostly talk with Gabriel and Agustina, problems that have occurred that day or about a mother that is violently towards her children and how we best respond to it and if I have doubt or questions about something this is always the time that I talk about it with them.

At 2.30 pm I go to 2 schools nearby 'El Puerto' to pick up the older kids, it depends from day to day how many kids there are. We all go back to the house together around 3 pm and that's when my workday ends.

### ***What is different and how do you deal with the cultural differences in your host country?***

I don't really know how I dealt/deal with the cultural differences but I think that I just need an adaptation time and information. When there is something new or weird then I mostly just ask my host family or my colleagues for more information, about why it is like that, where it comes from and then I get used to it. I didn't have many problems with cultural differences because to me it seems that most of them are positive or logical and it is also really interesting to see how this culture has evolved differently from my own.

### ***Do you find a link between your volunteer work and the name of the project: "Cultural diversity, Indigenous people and Social inclusion"?***

When I work & live here as a volunteer, I think the social integration is achieved. I live in a Uruguayan host-family, take public transport, work with Uruguayans, party and share "mate tea" with them. With indigenous people I don't have any contact since there are none, due to historical reasons. The main population consists of former immigrants, mostly from Europe, so there are a lot of cultural similarities but also differences.



**Jacob Bech  
Sillesen  
DENMARK -  
URUGUAY**

### *Changes...*

There is no doubt that my time so far has changed a lot of my previous points of view. I have always known that there is poverty in the world, and that there is happening a lot of violence, but seeing it on TV, or reading about it in the newspapers is very different from working with it every day, and constantly getting faced with the fact, that there is a lot of people out there who lives a life radically different from yours, and that you are so very lucky to be born into a family, with sufficient money, sufficient love. This is a truth that I find hard to believe. I would not have been able to experience this without the help of this program - thank you.

With all the external changes come a lot of personal changes as well. An easy and effective way to deal with these changes is, at least for me, to get them out of your head - to talk express them and talk about them. This is did with friends, those at home as well as those over here, and my family, again - the one at home and the "family" over here. But with that said - for me there is no doubt that my friends and family from Denmark, can have a very hard time understanding whatever problems I'm experiencing over here.

### *My project*

My work is at a home, *El Puerto*, for children and their mothers of either extreme poverty, or of violent families, or as in most of the cases - both. My work is not to save the families from poverty, or from whatever destiny they seem to be going towards, but to be there, and to help out in any way I can. I want to help, but I can only do that by being realistic at the same time.

### *Half way through...*

I have been here for now 3 months, being half of my stay, and am already getting quite used to the thought that I'm here. Of course there are still barriers that are in the way, and I would lie if I said that I am totally adapted, but I'm definitely going there!

At this point I'm able to make conversations in Spanish, and have already friends from Uruguay, which helps a lot on the language.

My work is great, but there is no doubt about that it's really hard sometimes, especially in the beginning, when I couldn't understand a lot, and felt thrown into everything, but now that I have been here for some time, I really appreciate the whole experience!

I mainly spend time with the children, playing games, and trying to "educate" them in any way, through the game. This is not always easy; as the children - of course - are marked by the violence they have experienced from their dads, and therefore are very violent themselves. The education is to be understood as learning to work/play together, learn to understand the other children, and how their actions (such as hitting) will trigger a counter-action (such as hitting back), and how violence never seems to solve anything. This is of course bloody hard, as my language is limited but as time goes, I can better explain these things, and in general be there whenever the aggressions get out.

### *Changes continued...*

Both because it is so far away (geographically, as well as culturally), but also because the friends and family over here can provide a much stronger support, because they are there in the moment of the present feeling - you don't have to write an e-mail and wait for a reply, before you get another point of view, of whatever you are feeling.

This is the greatest way to deal with so many changes - for me.





## REFLECTIONS BY VOLUNTEERS

I have always known that there is poverty in the world, and that there is happening a lot of violence, but seeing it on TV, or reading about it in the newspapers is very different from working with it every day...*Jakob, Danish volunteer in Uruguay*

There are lots of differences between the country I come from and Peru. Actually, everything is completely different. But I think that I have managed well to adjust to the new culture...*Marlene, Austrian volunteer in Peru*

I really enjoy living in the community what is very different from our European individualist style of life, I like the relaxed attitude of people and the fact that they enjoy and appreciate the simplicity of the life, of the present moment...*Aleksandra, Polish volunteer in Bolivia*

One learns here to survive despite the language barrier...*Analy, Peruvian volunteer in Poland*

Every project has a great number of learning points and life experiences, which permit you to grow as a human being and make you feel that the work as a volunteer really is rewarding as you share with people your daily life...*Lesly, Ecuadorian volunteer in Italy*

...this experience is something very special for me. Living here makes me grow, makes me understand, and makes me smile. Once here one opens the eyes to a new reality and one puts life in a new perspective...*Fabrizio, Italian volunteer in Honduras*

As time goes by, I've come to get used to these differences and I have learned to be more tolerant and respectful when it comes to accepting new points of views...*Alejandro, Mexican volunteer in Spain*

By talking and sharing everyday life I have come to understand although not always agreeing about points of view that to me at first just seemed to not make any sense...*Ida, Swedish volunteer in Ecuador*

## Contact and Copyrights

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[http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc82\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc82_en.htm)

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