

Introduction



T-Kit
on International
Voluntary Service

"International voluntary service is not an aim in itself but a tool"

Ever since the beginning of the movement, volunteers have been driven by the wish to contribute positively to today's societies, working towards peaceful and just living conditions through a common effort. Peace and international understanding, friendship and co-operation form part of the overall aims of voluntary service. These are pursued through a common commitment based on a free personal decision and through the coming together of individuals and groups of different backgrounds. At the same time the volunteers contribute to concrete projects in need.

But not only society or concrete projects benefit from volunteering. These international voluntary service (IVS) projects also have an educational impact both on the participants in such projects as well as on the communities in which they act. Through working and living together, volunteers and local people exchange their views, learn new skills from each other and hopefully adopt an open and constructive attitude towards (cultural, religious, sexual, organisational, etc.) Difference. The international dimension allows them to learn from and with people from another background than their own.

These aims and objectives are at the centre of an IVS. However not all of them are self-explanatory, nor do they become automatically apparent to everyone involved in an IVS project. A lot of the learning processes outlined above need to be facilitated, otherwise a project intended to foster intercultural learning could well turn into an experience of cultural frustration, if, for example, the volunteers are not properly prepared for the experience abroad. Even though an IVS project is based on a voluntary and unpaid contribution of individuals, the organisation of such a project needs to be carefully planned and requires adequate preparation and follow up and considerable human and financial resources.

This T-kit has been developed as a tool for youth workers to support the process of organising

an IVS project. We will describe a number of framework conditions, which contribute to a successful voluntary service project. The T-kit outlines some of the traps to avoid and offers ways of introducing both the volunteers and the organisations to the voluntary service adventure. At the same time it can be used as inspiration for trainers in the field of IVS activities.

Given the limited number of pages, we were obliged to narrow down the focus of this T-kit. In the framework of the Partnership between the council of europe and the european Commission for Training and Youth (European Partnership for Training and Youth), we will mainly cater for a European audience, even though most of the described principles also count in national or inter-continental projects. We will focus on youth projects, but you can use or adapt the tools for all ages. And for the sake of accessibility to IVS programmes, we will specifically address projects with non-specialised volunteers (see also Chapter 1.2 Different dimensions of voluntary service). So it is up to you to pick and adapt those elements from this T-kit that you feel appropriate for the kind of project you are organising.

The T-Kit is divided into six chapters and three appendices

Chapter 1 goes more deeply into the concept of IVS, explaining the meaning of some words (1.1), the dimensions of voluntary service (1.2) and a socio-historical framework (1.3). It reflects on the reasons why people volunteer (1.4) and gives some examples of possible fields of work (1.5) for inspiration.

The concrete implementation of an IVS project will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 will address issues related to planning the project, describing who the actors are and their responsibilities (2.1). It gives an overview of the specific project cycle of an





International Voluntary Service (2.2). Last but not least it gives some attention as to where to find money and how to manage it (2.3).

Chapters 3 to 5 give a chronological overview of the IVS and the actions to be taken. First of all chapter 3 describes how to get ready for the departure of the volunteers, addressing topics such as partner finding (3.1), recruitment (3.2) and the preparation of all actors involved (3.3). Chapter 4 tackles the tasks which would ideally be carried out during the IVS: induction and on-arrival training (4.1), keeping volunteers and also staff motivated (4.2), providing the necessary support for the volunteers (4.3) and dealing with conflicts if they arise (4.4). Chapter 5 gives suggestions as to how to use the end of an IVS as the beginning for something new: evaluation and taking stock is an important element in this process (5.1) but also ideas for follow-up arising from the voluntary service abroad will be commented on (5.2). And increasingly on the agenda of different institutions is the recognition and certification of such non-formal learning experiences (5.3).

Chapter 6 aims to bring up topics that are often forgotten or discarded. What about organising an IVS for young people who normally would not have the opportunity to do so (6.1)? Did you take gender into account when planning your International Voluntary Service (6.2)? And do not forget to recognise and fight the obstacles to mobility (6.3). And even if you think that crises only happen to others, it still does not hurt to be prepared for them (6.4).

In the appendices you can find additional resources to these different chapters. Appendix 1 gives you the definitions of some of the key words that the authors of this t-kit uses. Appendix 2 gives an overview of different organisations and their IVS programmes, and their contacts of course. Last but not least Appendix 3 provides you with suggestions for further reading if this T-kit gave you the taste for more...

Get inspired!