

What volunteering in open youth center is about

Name of the organisation

Gargždų atviras jaunimo centras

Website of the organisation

www.gajc.lt

Location of the organisation

Klaipėdos g. 74, LT-96122 Gargždai, Lithuania

E-mail address of the organisation

gargzdaiyouthcenter@gmail.com

Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in activities (planning, preparing, carrying out, etc.)
- Participation of young people in decision making
- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Segregation/integration
- Intercultural understanding
- Environmental/climate
- Employability
- Arts and culture
- Sports
- Outdoor activities
- Safe/secure youth work environment
- Youth information and counselling
- Digital and information literacy
- Cross sectorial cooperation
- European/International cooperation/projects
- Community work
- Youth work in urban areas
- Youth work in rural areas
- Digital youth work
- Volunteering/voluntarism
- Competence development of youth workers
- Organisation
- Planning
- Documentation
- Follow up/evaluation
- Research
- Lobbying/advocacy for youth work
- Sustainable development

Good practice category

Good practice aim & purpose

Our organization has long been aware of international volunteering projects, but since we were a newly established institution, we just did it gradually, which is extremely important. In Gargzdai, our institution was the first to submit international volunteering projects and as a result 2 volunteers came to Gargzdai. Our goal was to mobilize the community, raise their intercultural awareness, enable young people to operate in an intercultural environment, encourage the youth of Klaipėda District and give them more knowledge from live practice about international opportunities. International volunteering projects are a long-term learning process for us as a host organization, for our visitors, for the community, and for the volunteer. We are pleased that our work and efforts already have a “body”. After 1 year of volunteers in Gargždai, after the head of the institution has presented the program to partner organizations in detail, we have 2 more organizations accredited to become host and our Center has become a coordinating organization. We hope to have 4 volunteers in Gargždai in 2020, 2 at the Youth Center, 1 at the Public Health Office and 1 at Gargždai Culture Center. Gargzdai is not a big city, so it is difficult to find other foreigners to talk to, emotionally supporting each other in times of crisis. Gargždai City Municipality has allocated a 4-room apartment, which is a great incentive to continue programs.

Good practice description

Please describe your good practice based on the above given information (Explain your practice as such, in ‘technical’ terms and as clear and simple as possible.)

Gargždai Open Youth Center 2018 received the status of a host organization, and since then has been intensively preparing for international volunteer projects, having found a coordinating organization – the youth center filled out the application itself, so it was immersed in all the processes from start to finish. In 2018, two volunteers – Italian and sakartvelian – came to the youth center after winning the project “International Volunteering at Gargždai Open Youth Center”, who unexpectedly got involved in the activities of the youth center. We will give our Italian volunteer experience as an example of good practice. The youngster graduated from 12th grade and chose the path of volunteering. After volunteering in Lithuania in a few months, we clarified his strengths and weaknesses and focused on revealing his strengths (most of Lithuania tries to strengthen his weaknesses, which we don’t think is quite right). The volunteer was an amateur photographer, so during our volunteering we sought out a variety of tasks together as he could develop other competencies through photography. Our result: A photo exhibition organized by retirement home residents and youth center youth shared a photo of a volunteer on Jess Glynne’s Instagram. We volunteered to volunteer at our music festival in Karkle 2019, where he spent 3 days with a tutor and other volunteers. After 1 year at our Center and various experiences, the volunteer has left Italy with a study contract in Italy, where he is currently studying Photography. So far we are in touch and interested in each other.

Please describe eventual challenges and problems related to the creation, implementation, and/or running of your good practice? (Explain the eventual difficulties that you have come across, so that others know what to think about if they want to implement your practice.)

We had a difficult time when one of our volunteer left us after half a year. Since these were the first volunteers we were thinking about what our institution is not doing, what we need to change and how to keep volunteering at all costs in the institution. We began to indulge, suggest a variety of activities, fail to change, or volunteer to agree to whatever she wanted. It became like meeting the whims of a

little girl. One of the key tips for anyone who will implement projects is to keep your spine clear, clearly define the volunteer's rights and responsibilities, and of course, as much as possible before the volunteer arrives at your institution, to show footage and introduce the activity and concept. Everything was known to us in theory, but very new in practice. We are delighted that we did not lose hands in the aftermath of the crisis; The volunteer left but did not feel any grief or guilt as the superintendent clearly put all the points together. What have we learned from this? The process of selecting volunteers is a very important part of the project that requires no time or effort. It is necessary to delve into intercultural differences and to have a clear understanding of the volunteer's expectations, When deciding on an international project, we think it is very important to discuss all possible options and scenarios with the team, the team itself must be ready to work with the volunteers, and have some thoughtful tools. When a volunteer arrives, he or she must feel as safe as possible, and this will not be possible unless team members have a clear work plan. Meetings are extremely important, both for the tutor individually and for the volunteer and, of course, the mentor, and for the entire team. Systematic work brings great results.

Please give the names, roles and tasks of eventual partners involved in the creation, implementation and/or running of your good practice.

In terms of our good practices, it is clearly important to have good relationships with the various organizations in our city. We made it possible for volunteers to visit most of them with our facility staff or youth and try to make sure they stay at least a day and see even more of our systemic things, traditions, culture. For example, the Cultural Center provides free tickets to the events they organize, gymnasiums and schools facilitate the presentation of the program and engage the volunteer in a free lesson where we can spend more time getting to know each other. Our partners have helped to diversify the daily tasks of volunteers, as well as provide more opportunities for volunteers to get to know our country, traditions, and country. The Dean of Partners ensures the dissemination and visibility of the project results in the city, which influences the sense of the volunteer throughout the project. Being open is always a better option than acting in your own small community. Of course, working with partners takes time.

Please give an overview of the resources needed in order to establish and run your good practice. (Please describe the human, financial and other resources that are needed. Please also explain if you have got external financing from sources available for others, and if so, from what funding scheme(s).)

Tutor, mentor and one of the most important motivated activities coordinator in the institution itself. The Coordinator is particularly important because his / her Dean integrates into the organization and often influences the motivation of the volunteers. This project has covered almost all of our activities from our institution's funds, so some preparation is needed. In our case, being a budgetary authority, it was not difficult. Likewise, if a volunteer has the desire, it is always possible to sign a project of local significance to carry out their activities, the activities being planned - of course, the plan should be very flexible if the volunteer has not yet identified his / her areas of expertise. It was ideal for us when the national volunteers of our institution engaged in activities with international volunteers, such as teaching them Lithuanian, introducing them to our area and country. Additional funding was needed to implement volunteer activities. Not financially, but through various other means, our various sponsors - furniture for a better life for volunteers and so on - helped.

Good practice result & concrete effects

For young people:

Volunteers encourage young people to develop English skills and learn other languages. Also youngsters have a very good opportunity to get to know other cultures, they know more about opportunities going abroad for projects or international volunteering. We believe that volunteers arrive to help “break the ice” and get young people into Erasmus + exchange programs or volunteering is not that scary. It is also a great opportunity for young people to learn mutual understanding and develop a sense of tolerance.

For youth workers:

The staff of Gargždai Open Youth Center has had and has the opportunity to improve by organizing work with foreign youth. Helping young people and at the same time themselves develop and acquire competences such as foreign language learning, learning to learn, technological skills, social and civic competences, initiative, cultural awareness and expression, and developing a sense of citizenship and solidarity. Youth workers have a great opportunity to learn mutual understanding and develop a sense of tolerance.

For your organisation as such:

We have established long-term partnerships with partners that will enable us to carry out more diverse international projects in the future. The project, together with volunteers, takes into account the empowerment of excluded young people at the center, the promotion of diversity, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and places great emphasis on common values: freedom, tolerance and respect for human rights; in the field of media.

For youth work in general:

The project, together with volunteers, takes into account the inclusion of excluded young people, the promotion of diversity, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and places great emphasis on the common values of freedom, tolerance and respect for human rights, critical thinking and young people’s initiative, in the field of media. The development of competences and the adoption of methods by youth workers are encouraged are needed to pass on the shared values of society, especially to marginalized young people.

For society/your community in general:

Intercultural cooperation is encouraged in the whole community of Gargždai city and Klaipėda district. Getting to know another culture and learning other languages. In the communities where the Gargždai Open Youth Center is staffed, residents and young people are accompanied by various stereotypes about foreigners and foreign cultures, and volunteers arrive to help break down stereotypes. They learn from each other and develop a sense of tolerance.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work