

Rural youth - implementing multicultural youth work in rural Finland through ESC volunteering

Name of the organisation

Kalajoen Kaupunki / Rieska LEADER

Website of the organisation

<https://kalajoki.fi> / <https://rieskaleader.fi/>

Location of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Intercultural understanding
- Volunteering/voluntarism
- Youth work in rural areas
- Cross sectorial cooperation

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

Because of geographical isolation, rural youth in our area are getting fewer opportunities regarding internationalisation. Higher than concrete obstacles (economical resources, long distances, lack of transport network...), the biggest impediment lies in young people's mindset, lacking awareness about foreign experiences they can benefit from.

Despite lots of efforts done, offering multicultural activities and organising diverse Erasmus+ school exchanges, it appears that a large range of young people still feel insecure, disinterested, even distrustful towards the rest of the world. By welcoming volunteers we want to ensure our rural youth grows a strong sense of tolerance and understanding.

To tackle these negative attitudes and foster international mindset, we rely on direct human contact, provoking the encounter between local youth and inspiring foreigners. Rieska LEADER and the city of Kalajoki, included within its Lag, have been working together to implement ESC volunteer projects. During their year-long project, volunteers get an active role in broadening local youth's international mindset. Through meeting with youth, both during and after school time, interacting in English and sharing about their culture, they participate to create a habit of interculturality and trigger interest for alterity.

Good practice description

Rieska LEADER's main goal being to develop local activities and deepen cooperation between local actors (municipalities, companies, schools, NGO's...) they contacted the Christian college of Kalajoki in 2017, offering to implement ESC (formerly EVS) welcoming program. After a successful first exchange, the city's youth department got also interested in these services. The system goes in such a way that Rieska LEADER, as an ESC labelled supporting organisation, takes care of project management, budget and administrative issues. As a Local Action Group, Rieska LEADER indeed benefits from a very wide expertise in E.U. related project management and procedures. These skills are offered to support the municipality, labelled as ESC hosting organisation. Thanks to this support, the city of Kalajoki is left only with the tasks of dealing with accommodation, mentoring and supervising working missions.

This system, implying costs and responsibility splitting as well as tasks sharing, helps to prevent risks that volunteers might be facing during their stay. More generally, it allows resources to be shared and saved (workload, funds, time), improving the quality of receiving volunteers.

Since 2018, a total of 14 young volunteers have been welcomed to Kalajoki, from all over-Europe, all of them for long term-projects. The Christian College of Kalajoki, another local actor, is also implied in the cooperation as a receiving organisation for some of those volunteers.

Good practice result & concrete effects

The most obvious positive effect is, as expected, impacting local youth. Youngsters get to meet and have informal interactions, using a foreign language, with our volunteers in various contexts (class time, after school clubs, youth evenings, international cafés...). Those experiences are sometimes the first time children get to meet in real life with a foreigner. In some cases, young people get to simply understand the importance of English learning, in others, they feel more motivated to make progress in language learning.

As a result, we noticed a slight but growing change in young people's attitudes towards foreigners, years after years. We are glad to notice that they are overall more open to use English, feeling less intimidated and chatting more spontaneously while facing volunteers at school, during summer camps etc...

We have high hopes that growing up, those young people will show more interest in interculturality, feel less overwhelmed with the idea of international initiatives (Erasmus+ projects, school trips, volunteering...) and cultivate their feeling of European citizenship.

On another matter, the support provided by some extra pair of hands, all year long, is an obvious help for the city's services, allowing ourselves to improve our youth and cultural offerings.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice