

Making self-efficacy tangible: developing own projects at the European Solidarity Corps in a public library

Name of the organisation

Stadt Dornbirn - Stadtbibliothek

Website of the organisation

[Stadt Dornbirn - Stadtbibliothek](#)

Location of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in implementing youth activities (planning, preparing, carrying out, etc.)
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Recognition/validation of learning
- Intercultural understanding

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

Our aim is to empower young people to create, invent, and explore their own ideas while working independently. It is important for us as a public library to provide a supportive environment where young individuals feel encouraged to take initiative, express themselves, and develop projects that reflect their interests and creativity. A key part of this approach is mutual learning: As a team, we learn from the volunteers — their ideas, interests and innovative approaches inspire us to improve our work. At the same time, we support them in building their own skills and confidence.

By offering space and resources for youth-led workshops and activities, we create opportunities to actively shape what happens in the library. This not only makes the library more dynamic and relevant but also opens new perspectives and possibilities. It highlights the diversity of the library world and shows that it is a place for innovation, inclusion, and inspiration.

Our goal is to continuously offer innovative projects and workshops that reflect the diversity and creativity of the young people involved. This not only enriches the library's program but also broadens everyone's horizons. It continues to evolve with each project, keeping the library a vibrant and ever-changing space.

Good practice description

Our good practice focuses on giving young adults the freedom, trust, and tools to create their own innovative projects in the public library of Dornbirn throughout their stay of 9 months as a volunteer of the European Solidarity Corps. Rather than offering fixed working schedules and programs, we provide a flexible framework where young volunteers can explore their interests, develop new skills, and shape the library in a way that reflects their ideas and passions. The goal is to promote independent thinking, peer-to-peer exchange, and mutual (even intercultural) learning—between the library team and the volunteers, as well as among the young people themselves.

Each volunteer brings their own unique strengths and interests, which has led to an exciting and diverse range of projects. One example is the “Escape the Library” game, developed and programmed by a young volunteer. She designed riddles, puzzles, and a storyline that turned the library into an interactive adventure, blending digital tools with traditional library resources in a fun and educational way.

Another example is the “Silent Book Club”, initiated by a literature-loving volunteer who wanted to create a calm and inclusive reading space for teens. The idea was simple but powerful: everyone brings a book, reads in silence, and then shares thoughts or recommendations in an open and friendly discussion. This project attracts people of all ages and backgrounds, showing how shared reading can build community.

In response to today’s digital challenges, one volunteer developed a “Digital Wellbeing Workshop”, focusing on how to manage screen time, navigate social media mindfully, and find a healthy balance between online and offline life. The workshop sparked great conversations and gave participants practical tools to improve their daily digital habits.

Another volunteer chose to focus on global and social issues, such as creating a mini exhibition on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting themes like climate action, gender equality, and responsible consumption through interactive displays, discussions, and creative workshops. She also started a seed library, encouraging visitors to borrow and share seeds, learn about urban gardening, and support biodiversity in their communities.

Topics like LGBTQIA+ inclusion, literature education, digital literacy, and creative arts — including sketching and illustration projects — have all been part of the wide range of initiatives brought to life. The latter part of the volunteers’ stay is typically marked by the initiation of these projects, as they require an adjustment period to acclimatize to a new team, country and, in most cases, a different language. What unites all these efforts, however, is the motivation and authenticity of the young people behind them. They are not only contributing to the library, but also shaping its identity as an inclusive, vibrant, and future-oriented space.

Good practice result & concrete effects

Implementing this has had a powerful and lasting impact on our library. The learning process is twofold: while we support young people in developing their ideas, we also learn from them. Their creativity, perspectives, and fresh approaches challenge us to see things differently and continuously improve our services. At the same time, the volunteers gain valuable experience—they develop practical, social, and creative skills, learn to work independently, and grow in confidence as they see their ideas come to life. They experience self-efficacy through the realisation of their very own projects.

A particularly meaningful outcome is the peer-to-peer exchange that has emerged in our library. Volunteers inspire in creating a dynamic, inclusive space for shared learning and collaboration. The sense of ownership and responsibility they develop has led to diverse and innovative projects that reflect their unique interests and values.

This practice continues to grow and evolve, showing how transformative it can be when young people are given the freedom to lead. The library becomes not just a place for reading, but a platform for dialogue, exploration, and empowerment. Built on trust and collaboration, this approach highlights the value of youth-driven initiatives and serves as an inspiring model for libraries looking to become more inclusive, engaging, and future-oriented.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice