

**Hands on guide to...**



# **Mentoring in European Voluntary Service projects**



Education and Culture DG  
"Youth in Action" Programme





### **What is a mentor in the European Voluntary Service?**

A mentor in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme should be an independent person who will provide support for the volunteer(s) during their placements. The mentor will mainly focus on helping the volunteer to adapt to their new environment and will assist them in monitoring their progress with the EVS project in general.

### **Who can be a mentor for our EVS volunteers?**

The best arrangement (where possible) is for the mentor to be independent of the hosting organisation. The following are some ideas on how to begin a search for a mentor:

- Local volunteer centres (**[www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)**) may be able to put you in contact people with experience of supporting volunteers.
- Cooperation with other EVS organisations is a good way to start the search for a new mentor. Other EVS hosting organisations might be willing to engage in a swap of mentors to bring some new people into the programme. This would also help to strengthen links between organisations and to transfer ideas and best practice.
- It is also a good idea to ask the EVS volunteer for his/her feedback on the effectiveness of the mentor at the end of the project. This is to help ensure that future volunteers will be well supported.

### **Can a mentor be a staff member of the host organisation?**

There can be a conflict of interest in this situation so it is generally advisable, where feasible, for the mentor not to be a staff member. If the EVS volunteer is comfortable with discussing a problem relating to the supervisor with the mentor then the arrangement can still work. What should be avoided is the volunteer not feeling able to speak to the mentor because the mentor and supervisor are too close. This situation will not help the volunteer to utilise the support of the mentor.

### **How does the mentor role differ from that of a supervisor?**

The mentor will look after the support of the volunteer outside of the work environment (i.e. giving advice on how to access different activities in the local community) and will also liaise with the project supervisor if necessary. The mentor also has a role in helping the volunteer with their Youthpass accreditation and this can be a useful topic to give structure to regular contact between the mentor and the volunteer. The supervisor will deal with all work-related areas (including induction to the organisation and implementing a training plan for the volunteer). It is also important to have a good working relationship between the supervisor and the mentor.



### What are the key qualities a mentor should have?

The following are some characteristics of a good mentor that have been put forward by EVS hosting organisations. The mentor should:

- be independent
- be concerned with the social and personal welfare of volunteer
- be willing to provide support/assistance in conflict or challenging situations
- encourage and facilitate non formal learning
- provide feedback to the volunteer's supervisor

The mentor should not see themselves as the EVS volunteer's best friend and side with them on every issue. There is a need for the relationship to be supportive but also professional at all times.

### What is the time commitment a mentor should devote to the volunteer?

There is no standard time commitment relating to mentors in EVS projects. Usually there is a meeting between the mentor and EVS volunteer during the first week or two of the project. This is usually followed by regular meetings that should take place roughly every 2-3 weeks to see how the volunteer is progressing with the placement. These meetings can also be used to support the Youthpass process for the volunteer. It is advisable to have a mentoring plan for the duration of the EVS project. This would include setting out how often a mentor will meet with a volunteer, what areas to be discussed etc. The plan should be devised at the beginning of the project and can be reviewed with the volunteer during the project.

### Is a mentor paid for his/her support for EVS volunteers?

No, as part of the grant from the European Union for the EVS project there is no separate amount for mentor payment. It is up to each organisation to see how they approach this issue. In practice, mentors take on the role voluntarily as they have an interest in helping the volunteers to adjust to their placement and to maximise their learning throughout.



### **How does a mentor assist with the Youthpass process?**

Youthpass is a record of the learning gained by the volunteer throughout his/her placement. Tips for the mentor to support the learning of the volunteer through Youthpass;

- Encourage accurate and honest reflection of the performance and the learning achieved.
- Build Youthpass 'prompting' questions into the regular meetings with the EVS volunteer. For example 'What do you feel you have learnt this week?' 'What do you hope to improve on?'
- Promote the idea of reflective recording of experience in a variety of formats (journal, blog, photos, website, etc) and on an ongoing basis.
- Encourage the volunteer to keep a folder containing records of all of his/her activities within the project during the placement. This forms a type of Youthpass rough work document as the volunteer's feelings and attitudes towards events over the project are recorded here.
- Use positive reinforcement about Youthpass throughout the project.
- Keep in mind that Youthpass is optional and that the volunteer decides whether they want to participate in it or not.

### **Is there any support available for mentors in EVS projects?**

Léargas offers training support for all EVS organisations on a regular basis. One aspect of this training plan involves mentors being invited to attend various types of training events (ranging from one-day events in Ireland to longer events in different parts of Europe). These events are aimed at providing the information and skills necessary to support EVS volunteers during their projects.

### **Brief description of Léargas:**

Léargas is the National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme. Volunteers are not hosted or sent by Léargas; rather we are the implementing agency; assessing applications received from hosting and sending organisations. We, like all national agencies across participating countries, organise on-arrival training for incoming volunteers and are a point of support for organisations and volunteers.

## **HANDS ON GUIDE**

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