

## First hours in Thessaloniki: a warm welcome

My experience in Thessaloniki started with a warm welcome at the airport by my EVS colleagues in Arsis projects, Saadia and Cristina. I was expecting to meet someone new, but the sensations were immediately positive and rewarding. A lot of questions come up, like 'How old are you?' 'Which is your hometown?' 'Why did you choose Thessaloniki?'.

It was not the first time and not the last I had to explain myself. You can choose to answer this kind of questions everyday in an automatic and easy way, but for sure it can help you realize your motivation and make you think about a complex ensemble of factors in your life: welcome to EVS!

Thessaloniki appears as a vibrant and alive city, full of details and places to discover.



## **First contact with the organisation: transparencies**



Arsis is a social association engaged in child protection since a long time. It is easy to understand this when you first come to the office in KYN Ptolemaion - the place I am volunteering since the beginning. Old posters of initiatives held in the 90's and a feel of good organization surround the visitor. What I noticed is the transparency of the office: it communicates with the other spaces of the centre through glass doors and windows. Being open and accepting is extremely relevant for social sector, and this attitude reflects in workers' behaviour: when children enter the office, it is clear to everyone that giving attention, welcome and a smile is much more important than hard-working on the computer screen. This is the thing I appreciate the most in Arsis, and what I am receiving from my supervisor, Magdalini. She is supporting our action with her constant and caring presence.

## **First contact with the children: getting closer consciously**

During this first month I tried my best to integrate myself as a volunteer worker into KYN Youth Support Center activities. It all starts with free playing and valorisation of the moment. Of course, I have plans and workshops that I'd like to implement: but no structured interventions can be done until you don't establish a contact and a positive relationship with all the people. For me, working with small children aged from 8 to 18 is a big challenge: I have to use all my non-verbal communication skills, and differentiate my attitude with every single personality. I am getting closer to what it means assuming the right and conscious attitude towards all diversities.

## **Activities and new discoveries**

Apart from the daily activities inside the centre (non-structured playing, arts and crafts, dancing... and many others!), a direct mean of linking with many children was.. skaki (chess)! I played several games with different kids and this gave me the opportunity to know them better and share experience. Skaki is all about calculation and consequences and is a powerful educative tool. I started also to support ongoing activities outside the centre: a football coach, Dimitris, comes every friday to the centre to bring the children to Aristotelou Square and play street football. What is special in this activity? The possibility to grow through football as a means of communication and be together. I am really grateful to participate into this activity: every friday the group reacts differently.

Another interesting activity is the mobile school. I had the chance to know this better at the end of this first month. During a city festival Alberto, a social worker of Arsis, explained to me and other volunteers the sense of this intervention: mobile school is a way to bring socialization, a sense of community and several cognitive and emotional stimuli to marginalized and socially disadvantaged children. I am in love with non-formal activities and can't wait to support this!

### **Perspectives and projects**

After the first month of adaptation, I can affirm that I feel at ease and happy about my EVS. The last news are that I have created a team, together with a young volunteer to start the theatre workshops at KYN: without the support and concrete action of Arsis, it would be impossible.

So I can say that I am proud and excited for this adventure so far: and the best is yet to come!

*Taléme!*

Dario

