

Monthly Report – Pylaia Shelter

September 2019

Reflecting on the role of the volunteer

What is the purpose of the volunteer in such an environment? This question might be simple to answer for some, but it actually needs more reflection than it seems. The volunteer is not a psychologist or a teacher and thus sometimes it feels difficult to find the right place in the shelter.

In the end, it doesn't matter what kind of activities one does with the minor, the most important is just one's recurring presence in the shelter. Indeed, the status of the volunteer places him or her in a position which can be called "in between". The volunteer is not part of the paid staff, which is here the "controlling part" in the shelter and thus can come in collision with the boys. The Volunteer is also not part of the minor's group and can thus have a healthy connection with the staff. Therefore, being not part of any team, one can create a bond of trust with the minors faster than the workers while still be connected to the staff.



Lesson with mixed nationalities

It puts the volunteer in the position of a mediator between the two entities (which are in reality several and most of the time separated by nationalities on the side of the minors). The difficulty is then to keep a neutral and objective point of view in order to address the fears, discontent and angst of the minors. Some will look

for the guidance or just the ear of the "teacher". Intimate and confidential stories are told,

critics against the staff are formulated. It is then important to listen and respond accordingly while not taking a strong position against any of the two entities.

If the volunteer understands this position and learns how to interact accordingly, he or she can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the shelter. Easing tensions both between the minors and the staff. However, because this work is one that is not palpable, people might not even acknowledge the positive impact of the volunteer. But it should not bother whatsoever the volunteer because one has to always keep in mind that everything that is done in the shelter must serve the ultimate purpose of increasing the wellbeing of the minors. Once this purpose is correctly assimilated and guides the volunteer in every situation, then he or she knows that good work is being done.