

EUROPEAN  
VOLUNTARY  
SERVICE

20  
YEARS!



Erasmus+

# THE VOLUNTEERS THERE AND BACK AGAIN BY E.V.S. SKUNK

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**skärgårdsungdomarnas intresseorganisation**



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## I - Project summary

SKUNK's Craft of Project has been a EVS project within the Erasmus+ program. SKUNK received two volunteers, Mykola Turku sent by Union Forum from Ukraine and Laurie Racineux sent by Fédération régionale Familles Rurales des Pays de la Loire from France. The goal of the project SKUNK's Craft of Project were to train the volunteers to make high quality youth project and working with developing leisure time activities for teenagers in six small municipality's , Vårdö, Brändö, Sottunga, Kökar, Föglö and Kumlinge. On this geographical wide spread area, there only lives 150 youths and due the geographical obstacles it is very difficult meeting other people and doing different leisure time activities. This project has trained two volunteers which has traveled around the archipelago engaging youths in afterschool activities for the youths age 6-15 depending on the activity.

The project was divided in different blocks. During "Understanding & learning" the volunteers studied and explored SKUNKs work and learnt of the different kinds of methods SKUNK use foremost the project-model, we discussed the important of gender and norm perspective and learnt more about Åland. They visited all the municipalities to get to know those who lives there and the volunteers led workshop in their home culture, French and Ukrainian. The next block was "Afterschoolactivities" and here the volunteers practiced the methods they learnt making small project which resulted in afterschool activities in the five school. The different activities were leading workshops such as "thinking outside the box", handicraft, sports and sleepover.

During the "Campweeks" the volunteers were involved in SKUNK camps learning how to do great camps and in the middle of the EVS-year the volunteers planned and organized an own camp together with the youthcoach. This Multiculturalcamp was a part of the block "Own project". There were no direct beginning and ending of the blocks rather a growth of the volunteers' knowledge and confident to become more independent and take more responsibility in the organization.

The project was well documented in reports, in the beginning in a blog and monthly reports on SKUNK board meeting. There were also films and podcast made during the year. Another big part of the project was nature life and in the summertime youths and volunteers went sailing with a boat Cajsä, built for youth work.

Living in the archipelago it is ever so important to understand the possibilities of being a European citizen and internationalization. The traditional working places are disappearing and there is a need to develop and train the entrepreneurial and creative thinking to ensure the future of the rural areas, this is important for the young as well as the grown-ups and the politicians to see. This is one of the greatest impact the EVS project SKUNK's Craft of Project had on our society as well as learning more of other culture and practice language and social skills.



## II – Documentation of the project

### Understanding and learning

*The part 'Understanding and learning' has been important for the foundation of the project year. SKUNK organization aimed to give the opportunity to the volunteers to understand its values and its way to work, but also to contribute to the integration on the island. Moreover, the volunteers saw the possibility of improving their own knowledge, by discovering the culture and the local system.*



*The first objective was the understanding of the SKUNK organization and its action, because being part of a social action requires knowing why it exist and why it is necessary. This step allowed the volunteers to get to know and agree with the values, and, thanks to that, they may have worked with the same aims and understood the necessity of their activities. In addition, beyond the principles, they had to be trained in the youth work and the concrete job, which was in a way new for both.*

To reach those goals, many methods and process was established in the beginning of the period. The mentorship helped the volunteers through leading activities, showing the main methods, sharing experiences and ideas, discussing about the organization and the youth work. The Youth Coach was, as a mentor, the connection between local events and volunteers, also the connection with the stakeholders (mainly schools) during the first steps in the volunteers' activities. So that the volunteers understand the youngsters issue and the importance of their action, they travelled many times through the archipelago by boats, buses and taxis, as a local inhabitant. Due to that, they could discover the specialty of the place, like when they came to the island of Kökar only for introduce themselves, and spent eight hours on the transport for one hour there. They also created relations with the youth from the archipelago, and because of this geographical particularity, the used social network (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram) which kept them in contact even without physical visit. But to learn more about the youth work, many books, documentation, discussion and lecture relayed by the SKUNK board helped and informed them. Then, through the principle of the project "learning by doing", they applied those techniques, they were actively participants and leded workshops and lessons. They were participating to the local school sports or cultural events of the school, and of course to the board meeting of the organization where they were presenting their work and arranging and cooking food. Every week some form of meeting or training were held by SKUNK with the volunteers to evaluate the process and to discuss issues that had accrued during the week.

*The second objective was the integration of volunteers to the Åland society, especially to the archipelago. This period of adaptation gave them the possibility to learn the rules and norms. To be part of this society during one year, they needed to respect and know those rules, different from their home countries.*

Thanks to the first voluntary training in Kokkola, to the APV (pre-visit on Åland before the project started) and through the experience to live within the local families, the volunteers discovered the culture and habits of this country and the area. They learnt, for example, how to separate waste, where it's allowed to bike, how to act in the

administrative and official situation and many other fact that they didn't knew. The communication was also a main point of the integration process, because it brought them to a social life, essential for their well-being. They developed their English, both had a good level when they came, but they improved their languish skills and had a better expression and discussion level by using it in daily life, in different context, practicing with different person, and watching movies, they get a good level after few months. Both wanted to learn Swedish language, and it gave them the possibility to know the culture and understand the local people better, made their practical life easier (be independent on the market, read simple think for the orientation during trips, follow the news and the board meeting), and to communicated with youngster. To obtain that, SKUNK bought a Swedish course (study cirkel) once a week during four months. With practice with colleagues and youngsters and a daily language bath, they reached the A2 level by knowing the social rules and being able to communicate normally with someone, they could create their social network and have friends in their project place, get to know with workers (colleagues, teachers and youths) and benefit of a good mentorship. SKUNK also arranged that the volunteers could enjoy some event from others organization (Opera, Culture live painting, sport event and youth café, Story sharing café, Emmaus summer camp, Handicampen openhouse, lecture about gender equality, etc), and met different persons and organizations for example Rädna Barnen, Nordens Institut på Åland, De Utvecklingstördas Vål, Emmaus, stobåtsföreningein Cajs, Scouterna och Kulturföreningen Katrina.

*The third objective was the development of the personal knowledge, in part for improve their professional skills. Indeed, the volunteers could learn by doing, but as much as by observing. To be confronted to a new environment, culture, rules and way to live enable the volunteers to have a critical look toward their experiences from the own countries and its system. They discovered concretely the Finnish school system and how small schools works that gave theme experience for the future professional lives. They learnt about the political structure and differences between their home countries and Finland (Aland, Finland and EU in general).*

Through the volunteers' integration in the social and daily life of the local people of the archipelago, the volunteers discovered about the daily life. They cooked traditional food and meet different family situations. They have been eager to visit different places in Finland and the other Nordic country's during their leisure time. They have visited other volunteer's places, youth and board member's homes, they have been ice skated in the frozen sea, fished, hiked in the archipelago, came to the sport room to play badminton with inhabitant of the island, helped with farm stuff... The volunteers also had the possibility to participate in the traditional event (Lilla Jul, Santa Lucia, Aland farm festival, Midsummer, Aland pride) which gave them greater understanding of the Aland culture. To get to know the Finnish educational system, they participated to the lessons with pupils during the school day, discussed with teachers and headmaster about their studies, working method and so on. They also visited the Åland government to see the base of the working world (administration, office life). The block 'Understanding and learning' has been essential in the project because it gave the volunteers the foundation to be able to manage the different tasks assigned to them and to become independent.

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### After school activities

*The objectives of after-school activities are to give the youth living at the islands a possibility to be part of activities which they cannot regularly do due to their geographical obstacles. It is a way for the youth to get new friends and develop their social skills but also to have fun and increase the sense of a responsibility. EVS gave them opportunities of meeting new people from other culture background, build trustful relationship with other people and train English and communication skills. For the volunteers it is the same learning in many ways, but also to practice activities methods, approaches and other things they have learnt.*

Example of methods used by the volunteers, gathering with pupils and democratically discuss the program. Involving youths in the process of project. Going abroad(Stockholm) for study visits. Playing different games together like treasure hunter, hide and seek etc. Staying for few days up to one school week in the school, talking and playing games during the breaks or lessons. Presentation about the volunteers, culture and country. Playing card, powerpoint (presentation, workshop). Oversleep night, cooking food together, movies and much more.



During this block, the volunteers became a real part of the community together with schools, youngsters, SKUNK and with locals from archipelago. The after-school activities were one of the main goals of the project. The goal for SKUNK was to bring different kind of activities to youths which they cannot get as for their isolated living condition. During the activities all participants, volunteers as youths, shared responsibilities and developed theirish. The communication process allowed youngsters to speak and express their thought and feeling in foreign language. During the afterschool activities, the volunteers shared their culture and traditions which inspired young people to be more open minded to other culture and to travel in the future by themselves. The pupils got a possibility to learn more deeply about the volunteers and practice with them some skills which they have learned during their school and daily lives.

All planning was done based on communication with schools and youth. First period of the block basically depended on the Youth Coach cooperation with schools. After the first visits to the schools the volunteers started to communicate with schools independently and planning by them self with the help of the Youth Coach. The main task was to have good communication with the headmasters, teachers but the most important was the communication between the youngsters and the volunteers. This contact process was needed as the volunteers could have possibility to prepare themselves to meet the school's needs and pupils as the main object of working process because as deeply the volunteers could understand the main target of interests from both sides (school and pupils).

The volunteers took place in a lot of different activities; afterschool activities n During all those activities, the volunteers organized a lot of events, such as treasure hunters, movie evenings, cooking together, overnight sleeps and so on. The volunteers used their time in schools to participate to the lessons and learning process also during this the have the conversation and built relationship with pupils. The volunteers presented their culture and traditions to the schools, participated in an international day and helped with learning their own language. All those activities took place during all school year and in 5 different schools (Brändö, Föglö, Kumlinge, Kökar and Vårdö).

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### The camp weeks

*Camp is one of SKUNKs best method of getting youngsters together, meet new friends and learning new skills such as theatre, making movies, democracy and so on. It is a good method to build more deeper relationships with youngsters and share responsibilities. The objectives of the block camp weeks where to give the volunteers an area where they could train and applying their learning of modern youth work, participating to SKUNK life and work with other staff members. The volunteers participated to the camps as an extra of staff member. What they have concretely done: cooking food, leading workshops and games, helping with practical arrangements and building relationship with youths.*

The block camp week allowed the volunteers to more deeply understand SKUNK's role in the lives of youngsters from the archipelago. The volunteers participated to six camps and one longer study visit to Stockholm and Värmdö municipality to learn about youth clubs and having workshop about democracy, during the year where one of the camp was organized by the volunteers them self, read more in the block of the *volunteers' project*. While SKUNK staff was organizing the camps the volunteers took part in that process and learn a lot



about how to plan and create their own camp. The process included preparation about a schedule and logistic matters, communication with other leaders and making thematic workshops, discussing different methods and games. A big part where the volunteers played a vital role where the promotion of the camp. It is not easy to get participants for camps and that process needs special actions built on relationship. As the volunteers spend much time at the schools building deep relationships with youths they had a good foundation to inspire youths to try new things and engaging youths in SKUNK which has not participated before. Important in the communication with youths is to be clear with the aim and what you can get if you visit such as SKUNK camp.

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### The volunteers' project

*These moments of the EVS year appeared as a result of the of the volunteers learning. It was a completely blank page that the volunteers could create anything. For them, it was an opportunity to express their ideas, desires and creativity. Thanks to the methods and base given by different actors of the project (SKUNK board, lectures, mentors...), they were able to produce a good quality of youth work. The objectives of the block of volunteers own project were to help the volunteers to become more independent. The block had no specific beginning and end, it was more a learning process and a way to find the volunteers strengths and to figure out how to use it in youth work.*

All activities made by the volunteers was a part of the own project block but two specific actions were The EVS office and the Multicultural camp. The objective of EVS Office were to share the EU opportunities and to share the adventures of being an EVS volunteer. The themselves talked about the experience, about the different possibilities of volunteering, about the technical process for the application and giving many advices. They did an awareness presentation by introducing the European Voluntary Service in Ålands Gymnasium and in different organization such as Save the children. The volunteers wrote a blog and participated to the local radio of Åland, Steel FM.

The second project was the Multicultural camp in cooperation with an Loimaa Youth organisation. Their goals for this project were to enable an international meeting for the young living in Åland and Loimaa. The foundation of the cooperation was mad during the EVS-training hosted by the National agency where the volunteers built relationships with volunteers from Loimaa. The idea was to create a camp thanks to both Loimaa and SKUNK volunteers' own abilities and skills. It was a real application of the principle "learn by doing".



### III- Learning outcomes & impact

The learnings of the project and its impact on the different actors is important to understand and evaluate. Here are four different perspective given, from the school of archipelago, from SKUNK, from the volunteers and the youths of the archipelago. This part has been done thanks to interview with those project actors.

### Expectation from this project

As it was the first EVS project for SKUNK and the archipelago, the expectation of the project was different according to the actors because most of them didn't know what to expect.

The school in general "didn't know so much about what possibilities it could be with the volunteers" as Kaj Törnroos, Head of School and Culture Department of Kumlinge Municipality, said. They couldn't have any expectations from them, only questions or beginning of idea. "But quite soon I realized that it could be a lot of stuff that we could use two volunteers for".

From SKUNK perspective Director Mia Hanström wished for "having people that wanted to learn about Youth work and could give energy into the organisation" The organisation wanted to teach how they work and spread the different methods and ideas of modern youth work as well receive new ideas from the volunteers. Rebecca Mattsson Youth Coach of SKUNK tells that having this project was an opportunity for Åland, "for the youths of the archipelago to meet new people, train languages, learn of new cultures but most important were share the possibility and inspire other to go on their own European adventure in the future, hopefully as an EVS volunteer." To summarize, SKUNK wanted to give and to get, as the director said: "Volunteer take time, but it gives back much more."

The volunteers' expectation fit well with SKUNKs. They wanted to learn, "to discover something new, something that could enriching my own education for my future work.". And were also ready to do their best to make the project good.

Finally, the youngsters of the archipelago were mostly excited to meet new people especially from other countries.

### Action of the volunteers (after school activities, camp, blog, EVS office, workshops, etc.)

From the schools perspective, the school visit has been very good, as the children and the teachers know each other so well it gives much to meet new people. And as the working language has been in English they could practice language. "I was impressed about them, how they have been speaking in English because they are not use to use that in another situation than the classroom" told Törnroos headmaster at Kumlinge.

SKUNK tells of the actions of the volunteers was a pilot as everything were new. SKUNK vision was to have two volunteers doing activities together with the youths in the different islands and I think we succeeded greatly on this. The volunteers learnt during the first year of how to do SKUNKs modern youth work, it is important when they go out in the archipelago the volunteers have the same approach as SKUNK has. During the second half of the project the volunteers used the methods they learnt by them self and did small and big own project with success. The method of working together with the school has great possibilities and next time both SKUNK and the schools will be more prepared and will get more out of it. The director of SKUNK tells "For the organization it has been really an opportunity to show about what SKUNK can do for the young people in the schools"

Laurie Racineux tells of her experience of the action she and Mykola made: "The after school activities were for me a random work. Sometimes it was really interested, and even if we faced to some difficulties (talking in front of a group, being enough audacious to propose a game to a group of young who don't know us, being understandable and integrate in this new world) we were often reward to our effort and get a good relationship with them. But sometimes else, the communication with student

and teachers was difficult, or non-existing. That was hard for my motivation on the project because, in my opinion, the support is essential in this kind of project. But this case wasn't a main situation, and in general I think we did good things on the school, and created good relationships."

"As there is not much activities for young people in the archipelago SKUNK is really important as they come out and do fun stuff with us and with the volunteers they have had the possibility to come more and do more and this has been important to me" Oskar Strand a youth from Kökar archipelago tells.

### Action and impact on the Åland community (awareness of EU opportunity)

The greatest win for the community has been that the volunteers were important ambassadors of the European identity. The volunteers showed that going on an EVS is possible and doable for all young people. A youth also told of his prejudices has been crushed and he now knows more of other culture.

It has also been of much value to meet people from another country, with their culture in the background, and communicate in different language. They youths of the archipelago see the same people year after year and when there is someone new coming they usually just stays for an hour and then they disappear and never come back but to have the volunteers for a year and meeting them several times has been of much important for our community.

### Mistakes and improvement

A feeling that all parties shared of the project is that they wanted more. Now when the project has ended it is easy to see that there could have been lots more done during the project. For example, Director of SKUNK tells "We should have use you more with the background from your countries. We should take the opportunity to learn more about the countries where the volunteers come from to the village."

SKUNKs Youth Coach tells "One thing that could have been done better was in the beginning of the project to have more complete activities for the volunteers to execute. But this time around we did the best we could and it is also depending of the persons that comes here as volunteers, some adapt easy and start going quickly and others need time. It is also important that there is a good foundation of understanding and that there is time for everyone to adapt."

Laurie Racineux tells "We could have done much more, but the time used to realize what we could do was too long. I really missed more work on the awareness of EVS and European opportunities. We should have been more rigorous on that EVS Office."

The youths of the archipelago also tell that they wanted more visits and more activities and of course the burnt toast and the injured foot is something that we do not need to do again.

### Strengths of the project

After the first tentative month, the schools saw the strength in having two pair of extra hand to help when needed and the input from a person with another background. For example, when there were need of Ukrainian translation Mykola Turku could help or when the school had European day the volunteers could contribute but also to have an extra resource for example at breaks.

The Youth Coach from SKUNK tell “The volunteers delivered what was expected, culture, languages, sharing the EU-identity and the possibilities but what surprised me was their passion and love that they brought. They worked really hard to make a difference for the youths of the archipelago and I have seen that they touched the hearts of the youths and has made an impact for many and has pulled down walls of stereotypes and the community has become a little more open. The wonderful thing of this kind of project is that it gives the possibility to explore what you like to do and then gives you a chance to do it and practice.

The volunteers tell “The best things we have done with Mykola were for me the non-official moments, when we were enjoying our relation. Sending picture while we were not in their school, being hosted in their families and sharing their personal life, talking about abroad project and their opportunities as a young, joking and teasing each others... The relation we succeed to create was our best thing.” “The rest of the project was for me well done, well supported, well followed, and fun of course!”

“For us young in the archipelago the best thing was to get new friends. To meet Laurie and Mykola has been great and we have had fun moments during the year when there was a SKUNK activity we signed up as we knew we would meet the volunteers and have fun.”

### The future of EVS project

The Director of SKUNK tell of the future “we need one full-time worker for taking care of volunteers. That’s a challenge for the organisation. If the schools and municipalities work together we could help each other. This small municipalities do not have a person that could take the main responsibility for volunteer.” The Youth Coach says “I do hope SKUNK has the possibility to do more of EVS project in the future but as the archipelago community is big and quite difficult to navigate in there need to be a Youth Coach that can coach the volunteers to find their strengths and how they can use them to make a difference in the community without losing the quality of the work.”

The volunteers tell “In my opinion it’s really important to have next volunteers because it gives value to the project, gives continuation and is necessary for the youth people. One employed person following the volunteer is for me important because it gives a better support, but he/she doesn’t need to be here physically all the time.

The youths of the archipelago also express their worry for the future as they want the next generation of youths in the archipelago to have as much fun as they have had. “We are so few living out here so when you have the chance to meet new friends it is very important”

## IV- Conclusion

SKUNK works at the countryside on islands with geographical obstacles, young people need to meet other young people from other countries, get own experiences of international meeting and exchanges. They need to enhance their skills of social competence and see opportunities. They also need to learn more of the possibilities of working in a team and train their languish skills. The goal for the volunteers and participants is that they should develop skills and tools so that they can be active citizens but also that they should get experience and self-development so they benefit

whether they will be working as an employee or self-employed. The three greatest success of the project has been:

- + Young leading young: the young volunteers took in the end of the project full responsibility for making activities for other youths in the archipelago.
- + High quality coaching: the weekly meeting/trainings ensured quality assurance and by coaching the volunteers developed high quality skills in modern youth work.
- + Making a difference: the social of working with other human beings building relations and the feeling of making a difference in the community is a fundamental part of wellbeing.

