

My EVS story **by Paul Clearly from Ireland**

I am a bit older than some EVS volunteers out there, so I finished my B.A. in 2006 and my M.A. in 2008. The main focus of my studies was always History. I loved learning about other cultures, languages, and traditions – where they came from, how they were all connected, how they interacted in important times in history. I suppose it was inevitable that I would travel. After working in England for a few years in catering and logistics management, I took the plunge, got a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) from Cambridge, and travelled to Prague to teach English. After a year and a half, I ended up managing the education and service roles of a school for about 14 months. Then, I volunteered in Georgia for 6 weeks, also teaching English, before moving to Sarajevo to begin my EVS project.



My EVS project was all about teaching English. I provided English language classes to kids, teens, and adults from all sections of society in Sarajevo, especially disadvantaged or vulnerable people. This included placement testing, organising classes, setting timetables, leading classes, and supporting the students' development. It was great!

During my stay in Sarajevo I learned that krompirusa beats zeljanica EVERY time! Seriously though, I learned a lot about teaching people who are coming from a vulnerable place. Some of my students had behavioural or learning difficulties, some were coming from a history of bad experiences with education, and some were coming from backgrounds of trauma. With the help of the fantastic staff at Wings of Hope, I learned how to make these people feel safe in the classroom, feel comfortable getting involved, and ultimately enjoy the learning experience. I also learned a lot about the great work the organisation does in helping people with a range of issues in Sarajevo, be it with education, support in finding employment, or psychosocial therapy support.

I learned some Bosnian too! Honestly, I wasn't the best student, so I'm glad we had such a good teacher, but the classes really helped me in day to day life in Sarajevo. I rarely went the wrong way on the bus and only occasionally felt silly when trying to find something in the market. There was also lots of really interesting chats in the office about the history of Bosnia and the region, Yugoslavia, the war and impact all of this had on peoples' lives. It gave a great insight into the minds and motivations of local people. Finally, I learned a lot about the Erasmus+ programme. It is a fantastic opportunity for young people to travel and learn about other cultures while gaining real skills and interesting experiences.

It has given me a motivation to continue working with vulnerable communities at home, and an interest in promoting Erasmus+. I will continue to work with my coordinating organisation

in any way I can, and hope that this can help me in finding career opportunities in the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland. I have seen the importance of education and life-long learning, and the benefits these can bring to people and communities. I hope I can continue to do this with some of the great organisations in Ireland.