



## **Partnership building seminar- in Sofia, Bulgaria from 9 to 12 March 2006**

### **“Inclusion - Breaking the barriers of social and physical disadvantages through voluntary service”**

#### **Summary:**

The overall aim of this seminar was to set up partnerships between organisations active at local, regional or national level by direct, personal and targeted contact in order to facilitate future voluntary service exchanges within the targeted groups. This is based on the belief that stronger partnerships bring about more and better-adapted voluntary service projects, thus facilitating the inclusion of marginalized young people.

The event provided an opportunity for existing and potential hosting and sending organisations to meet and exchange ideas and information about youth work and inclusion through voluntary service possibilities in their countries and organisations. It also acted as a forum to endorse the role of voluntary action in involving young citizens in their societies, in recognition of its economic, social and intercultural value. As a thematic seminar on “inclusion”, the event offered subject-related activities touching on the factors of social exclusion, the inclusion of socially disadvantaged young people, as well as the inclusion of young people with physical disabilities.

The seminar was a continuation of AVSO’s efforts to extend partnerships to pre-accession countries, by raising awareness about volunteering, civil society, inclusive approaches and the concrete needs of prospective partners.

#### **Description of activities**

The theme of the seminar was Inclusion, how voluntary service can be a tool in breaking down the barriers of any type of discrimination, based on disability, ethnic background, religion..etc. Some participants have long standing tradition hosting and/or sending volunteers, but would have liked to complement their experience with best practices in incorporating Inclusion too their projects, other participants are working with young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, or having disabilities, and would have liked to explore EVS as a tool to use in their organisations.

**Day 1:** The first day of the programme started with the introduction of the participants. Participants introduced themselves and their organisations briefly, and everybody put a pin on a map with their names to show which city they were from. The morning of the first day was filled out by the plenary session. During the plenary session, we heard presentations from Mr. Ivan Karakashki, the Deputy Regional Governor welcoming the participants to the region, and giving a brief introduction to Kyustendil economic, geographic and cultural situation.

Then we had a short presentation of the organisation CSV Bulgaria, telling participants about the voluntary service sector in Bulgaria, the different projects they are running, the different stakeholders involved in the sector.

The Bulgarian Youth National Agency was represented by Manuela Radeva, the director of the International Youth Programmes Directorate at the Bulgarian State agency for Youth and Sports. She gave an overview of the rules and procedures of the EVS programme – we thought this necessary and very useful, since even though some participants have been managing EVS projects for years, there were

participants who have heard of this possibility for the first time, so for them this presentation was very valuable in the beginning of the seminar. Ms. Radeva also spoke a bit about the next programme phase 2007-2013, which contained useful information for everybody.

Finally Tony Geudens, trainer at the Salto Inclusion Resource centre gave an introduction to the work of the resource centre, explaining its place in the institutional setup, its tasks and how participants can use the Salto Inclusion website.

In the afternoon of the first day, Tony Geudens conducted an extremely informative and useful workshop entitled International Mixed Ability Projects, which is also the same title of the latest Salto Inclusion booklet, therefore he used this workshop group as a test-bed in validating the booklet before it was finalised.

The purpose of this workshop was, firstly to show how people understand disability and how they treat disabled people, very often with a lot of stereotypes and discriminations, and secondly how to organize and prepare projects for young people with and without disabilities in which they could participate together.

The last activity on the first day was the EVS partnership fair: Participants prepared presentations of their organisations, which they put on the walls of the conference room, as well as PowerPoint presentations and future project templates. Then by taking turns, participants presented their organisations, their experience with the EVS programme, and examples of voluntary service projects. They also mentioned future project ideas, and what kind of project partners they hope to find at the seminar. The other participants were all very interested, and asked a lot of questions – this activity went on for much longer than anticipated. We also had a presentation from a local Youth organisation, who are hosting an American volunteer, who has been in the region for the past 1,5 years, helping the association running projects for the local children and young people, fundraising and overall management.

The first day was concluded with dinner of traditional Bulgarian food and a Bulgarian group playing traditional Bulgarian music, and a group of dancers showing the traditional dances. This has been highly appreciated by the participants.

**Day 2:** With a funny and energizing game we divided the participants into 3 groups. The 3 groups were facilitated by the following trainers:

Group 1: Julia Yordanova (CVS Bulgaria) assisted by Marta Bulik (AVSO)

Group 2: Anna Stoyanova (CVS Bulgaria) assisted by Agnes Uherezky (AVSO)

Group 3: Emese Závodi (EDYN) assisted by Boyka Zagarova (YCC)

The Objective of the first workshop, "Introductory concepts of Long-term Voluntary Service" was to place LTVS into the broader context of volunteering and voluntary service, and to define and summarize the specific aspects of LTVS and EVS projects, from the cultural, psychological, linguistic preparation of the volunteers to the monitoring and mentoring, to the evaluation of the projects, all with special regards to projects aiming to include the widest possible target group of young people.

In the afternoon of the second day, the participants were taken by bus to Sofa, to visit a very interesting project. The Usardie Association is working with young people with disabilities, and places them as volunteers in different organisations. We visited the Margarita Kindergarten, a day care facility for 3-6 year old children, who host the volunteers of the Usardie Association. We met the director of the Association, the Director of the Kindergarten, the young volunteer with disabilities, who comes 3 times a week to the Kindergarten to teach by playing the young children computer skills, and we also met a young German EVS

volunteer, who serves for 12 months at the Usardie Association, and her task included the accompanying and assisting the other volunteers of the Association. Participants were very interested by the project, and were asking a lot of questions to all present. One of the computers was down, so one of the participants of the seminar helped them fix it.

After the project visit, the group went into the centre of Sofia for a 2 hour sightseeing.

Once back in Kyustendil, participants prepared for the Intercultural party. It was amazing how much preparation and effort the participants put into presenting their own countries and regions, with music, song, food and drinks.

**Day 3:** The third day started with the continuation of the workshops, about the volunteer project cycle. Participants were asked to come up with a specific project idea, and to consider all of the important stages of the projects, from start till finish, and needless to say, that it had to be a project involving either young people with disabilities or any other form of exclusion. At the end of the workshops, the members of the groups presented the project idea to the rest of the participants in a plenary session; the other participants could ask questions freely.

After lunch, 2 alternative workshops were proposed to the participants, one on lobbying at EU level and more specifically about EU project management for voluntary service issues facilitated by Agnes Uhreczky (AVSO), and the other one on Intercultural learning by Anna Stoyanova (CVS Bulgaria).

The seminar was closed with a main plenary session where we went around the table, and every participant gave a brief evaluation of the seminar, if yes, how their expectations were met, and what are they taking home with them from this seminar.