

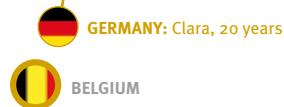
“European Voluntary Service was my best year so far, I learned more than I have ever learned before in just one year. I would definitely recommend European Voluntary Service to anybody who is open-minded and wants to gain new experience!”
(Clara, 20)

Project granted by
the Youth in Action National Agency in:
The French-speaking Community of Belgium

Hosting organisation:
Jozef Swinnen asbl
www.swinnen-asbl.be

Sending organisation:
AKBV e.V.
www.akbv.de

Activity dates:
10/09/2009 - 10/09/2010
(12 months)



HELPING IN A MULTICULTURAL NEIGHBOURHOOD IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Clara (20 years), from Germany, spent a year as a volunteer at the Jozef Swinnen community centre in Brussels, Belgium in 2009/2010. The centre is located in a fairly run-down neighbourhood to the north of the city with a large immigrant population.

The role of the Jozef Swinnen community centre is to assist recently arrived immigrants to settle into their new environment. The neighbourhood is mainly working class and immigrants have taken up residence from Turkey and Morocco and countries in Eastern Europe and Africa. A number of them have large families with a high proportion of children under 12 and some of the parents are poorly educated and unemployed. Their living accommodation is often inadequate, without a telephone, in over-crowded tenement buildings. Services offered by the centre include a medical centre with four doctors and a community health worker; a women's group helping with French language lessons, sewing and cooking classes and other cultural activities for women in the neighbourhood; a children's group, with five youth leaders supporting children at school from 3-12 years, running workshops and organising leisure pursuits and, finally, a nursery for children under three.

Clara was introduced to all aspects of work at the centre and was free to choose where she would like to focus her attentions. She opted to work with the children's group and the nursery. Her tasks involved helping children with their school work and running various creative workshops. She also took children on excursions, helped to run a summer camp and coordinated a group of nursery age children at the Zinneke Parade, an intercultural event which takes place every two years in Brussels.

She applied herself very seriously to her work. Her activities in the centre gave Clara the opportunity to learn more about group management and animation, about conflict resolution and about the administrative procedures to be followed in running an organisation. Her work with children taught her a great deal about the problems they face and how to cope with them. The experience helped her to develop self-confidence and a sense of autonomy. She also made progress in the French language. Her European Voluntary Service motivated her to study psychology.

Her hosts were particularly pleased with the way in which she integrated into an existing team and welcomed the different cultural perspective she brought to their work as well as her own particular way of solving people's problems.