

“For a young person it is very important to live this kind of experience. It made me more open, more tolerant and more ambitious to accomplish important things in my life.”
(Costica, 26)

Project granted by the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency in Brussels

Hosting organisation:
VIEWS
www.views.be

Sending organisation:
Pontes Association
www.pontes.ro

Activity dates:
01/10/2009 - 15/02/2010
(4,5 months)

 ROMANIA: Costica, 26 years

 BELGIUM



« SHARING THE LIFE OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN LIÈGE, BELGIUM

Costica (26 years), from Romania, who is blind, spent four months (2009/2010) as a volunteer helping in a school for visually impaired children in Liège, Belgium.

The hosting organisation VIEWS, is a European organisation, created in 2001, which groups 15 associations in various European countries cooperating on a number of projects concerned with visual impairment. VIEWS' members are parents, professionals and academics directly affected or experts in the field. There are also an increasing number of young people, visually impaired and sighted, who promote solidarity and are involved in the activities.

Costica's voluntary service took place in the Institut Royal des Sourds-muets et des Aveugles (IRHOV) in Liège, a primary and secondary school for deaf and visually impaired children and young people aged 3 -21years. It also provides support to students who attend classes in regular schools, and carries out experimental programmes for children with impaired sensory disorders.

At a meeting with the parents, Costica proposed a number of free-time activities for the young people which included IT sessions, sporting events and cultural workshops. Other initiatives centred on Halloween, Santa Claus, Christmas and Chandeleur, a Belgian festival. The aim of running this programme was to show the young people and their parents that visual impairment does not stop a young person from being autonomous. By organising joint meetings Costica put a lot of emphasis on encouraging contacts between the families and the schools so that what was tried at school was fully supported by parents. He also taught Braille to some of the young people.

Costica learned to communicate with more confidence and to work in a team with people from different cultures. He became more independent, at the same time developing his social skills in spite of his shyness. Sharing his days with other visually impaired people taught him new perspectives on disability from the point of view of parents, teachers and the young people themselves. He also discovered the country and living in a neighbourhood with a number of immigrants he gained insights into issues concerning integration. The European Voluntary Service experience motivated him to get involved in youth work after returning to Romania.

The fact that a blind person was running activities in the school had an impact on the young visually impaired and their families. It helped to motivate the young people to undertake more ambitious activities and for the parents to become more involved in the school.