

GUY (Great Britain), EVS in Białystok 05/2010-01/2011

I was working in the Białystok Esperanto Association. My primary task was teaching lessons of Esperanto to groups of around five to 10 people, both adults and children, ranging in level from beginners to upper intermediate. I had previously learnt Esperanto to a high level around three years before travelling to Poland.

My other tasks included helping in the Esperanto-language library which exists in Białystok, organising Esperanto-related events and meetings which occur in Białystok and general administrative tasks of the association. I also organised the monthly Language Café in the town, which is a meeting in a local café which allows people to practise foreign languages in an informal setting, usually including native speakers of the respective languages.

Before I decided to travel to Poland, I didn't have any knowledge of Polish and I started learning the language on my own around six months before starting the project, so I already had a basic level of the language to begin with. Throughout the project I constantly and quickly improved my level of Polish due to the private lessons, studying it on my own and by using the language extensively every day. By the end I had reached a proficient level (around B2 according to the CEFRL).

When I arrived in Białystok I was coming to a new town in an unfamiliar country with a language I had little knowledge of. This gave me more experience of being independent and of making new friends in a situation which could be daunting in many ways. This helped me to be more outgoing and sociable. I gained experience in teaching. Whilst I don't plan to work as a teacher in the future, this is a useful skill for work in general as it's helpful for explaining concepts and methods to people who aren't familiar with them and to communicate more clearly and unambiguously.

I didn't know very much about Polish culture before I started the project, but now I've become significantly acquainted with it through making many different friends in Poland and experiencing their traditions and customs firsthand, as well as Polish popular culture and cuisine. A particularly interesting aspect of this was spending the Christmas period with the families of various people I met. Before starting the project I already knew what my plans were for after finishing the EVS and they haven't changed since then, so it hasn't had any effect on them.

Whilst living in Białystok I spent quite a lot of time with other volunteers from various different countries who were working in different projects in the town. This allowed me to meet new people from a variety of different countries and to learn more about their countries and cultures. This will also give me a reason to visit those countries in the future and learn more about them first-hand.

During the EVS I made a lot of friends and met a large amount of different people in Białystok, so I had plenty of contact with the local community.

I would certainly recommend EVS to others as it's an excellent way to experience a new culture firsthand.

It also allows the volunteers to carry out useful work and to gain new life experiences.