

Tallinn Children's House: Shelter for Mothers and Children (Tallinna Lastekodu Ema ja lapse turvakodu)

Background and Experience

Tallinn Children's Home opened its doors on 1 January 2001 being a mixed-care social welfare institution in Tallinn and Estonia's largest children's home, offering various services to about 500 children in the course of a year. Tallinn Children's Home consists of 13 different units/centres.

Its main objective is to ensure a safe and secure growing environment for children and young people without parental care and to support families with disabled children and difficulties in coping.

The institution provides a number of different social services, with the biggest and most substantial of the provided services being the substitute home service.

Tallinn Children's Home is divided in 13 parts: one of them is **Shelter for Children** and another is **Shelter for Mothers and Children**, both of which have hosted EVS volunteers already since year 2005.

1. Since 2002 **Shelter for Children** exists as a centre for children at risk. In this institution 9 specialists work in 24 h shifts and there are 14 places for children at risk who have no support from their parents, normally in the age of 4 to 18 years. The main objective of the institution is to provide psychological and practical support and generally take care of children. It involves different tasks from assisting children in doing school and homework, teaching children practical skills they need in everyday life and to arrange free time activities for them: play with them different games, make handicrafts with them, draw or just have interesting conversations, plan different activities on holidays or just encourage them to study better and motivate them to believe in a better future. For these activities the shelter is welcoming a motivated and active person as a volunteer, who likes children and is ready to work with them.

2. The **Shelter for Mothers and Children** began its activity on 1 July 2003. The Shelter provides assistance and protection for mothers with their children whose life or health is at risk in their place of residence. This shelter can host maximum 18 persons. The average time spent in the shelter has been 3.5 months whereas the longest period has been 11 months. Reasons for seeking assistance is mainly due to problems with housing, family relations and domestic violence. The main objective for the Shelter is to protect mothers and children but also to help mothers to get back their self-confidence and independency. In the Shelter for Mothers and Children there is only one social worker, who is helping mothers to manage and organise their lives, find job or register for food bank. She is also there just to listen to their problems and to give advice in case it's needed to seek help from other specialists. This Shelter is welcoming a volunteer who will work together with the social worker.

In both, Shelter for Children and Shelter for Mothers and Children, there is a professional social worker who is coordinating and tutoring volunteer's activity. The social workers have besides a respective education, a long-term experience in helping and advising people, understanding the influence of social and cultural background on people's lives, and of course profound experience working with children.

Project context

Tallinn is the capital of Estonia, located in the north of the country and has a population of about 400 000 inhabitants. It is one of the most developed areas in Estonia with a lot of enterprises, businesses, organisations, etc. Governmental institutions and representatives of international organisations are situated here as well. For detailed information please visit www.tallinn.ee

Both, Shelter for Children and Shelter for Mothers and Children, are situated in Tallinn, in the district of Nõmme. Nõmme is about 20 minutes away by bus from the historical centre of Tallinn. Both shelters share the same yard but function separately in different buildings. This area is surrounded of big park and forest, which is a beautiful sight every time of year.

Shelter for Children is placed in one store building, which is been made very comfortable for children. In this building there are combined sleeping rooms, big living room for the latter it is possible to use big hall with piano, library and table games. Shelter has its own big garden and play yard, which can be used for different outside activities. For organising any outdoor activities it is important to keep in mind that children are allowed to go out only under the supervision of an adult.

The main objective of the institution is to provide psychological and practical support and generally take care of children. It involves different tasks from assisting children in doing school and homework, teaching children practical skills they need in everyday life and to arrange free time activities.

The **Shelter for Mothers and Children** provides assistance and protection for mothers with their children whose life or health is at risk in their place of residence. There are 4 sleeping rooms, where mothers with their children are sleeping. Some of them are shared rooms and some mothers have their own rooms. There is one big living room, where volunteer can find a lot of interesting stuff for activities: different games, toys and papers for drawing or painting, TV with DVD player etc. So everything is depends on volunteer, what she/he wants to do, how active she/he is and how she/he can involve children in her/his activities. We are welcoming one volunteer, who will use all her/his motivation and skills to make children's life more interesting and mothers daily life easier.

Proposed Activities

At the **Shelter for Children** all children attend school in the town during day time. Participation of motivated EVS volunteer is seen as an exciting innovative element refreshing the daily routine and bringing additional educational value to the pedagogical process. The main idea involving a long term EVS volunteer is on one hand to provide assistance and support local personnel in daily work, particularly in running various educational and free time activities for the children; on the other hand to provide international experience by practicing foreign languages and intercultural learning, both for children and local personnel. At the same time it gives valuable experience to the volunteer in the field of social and youth work in Estonian context.

After on-arrival orientation meeting aimed at the integration of the volunteer to local realities and explanation of aims and activities of the receiving organisation, the EVS volunteer will be carrying out the following tasks:

- Looking after the children and helping staff in teaching them different useful skills (20%);
- Running additional educational activities in the house using its own facilities (20%);
- Teaching children foreign languages through joined games; songs, sport, any other activities indoor and outdoor, which the EVS volunteer will be running (20%);
- Presenting his/ her home country and its culture as a part of intercultural learning (10%);
- Arranging children's outings, e.g. culture visits, excursions, hikes, picnics, etc. (10%)
- Playing with children (10%);
- Assisting local staff with all other required activities in the Shelter and other departments of the Children's Home if needed (10%).

Another task of the volunteer can be to establish contacts with similar institutions in his/her home country in order to have mutually beneficial co-operation between institutions in the future.

Typical week day in the Shelter for Children looks like follows:

06:45 - children wake up

07:15 - breakfast

07:30 - children go to school

15:00 - children return from the school - time for games, sport, etc.

17:00 - classes, homework, preparation for the next day at school

18:30 - dinner

19:30 - different activities or free time

22:00 - children go to bed

The period children spend at the shelter should not exceed 2 months, though in special cases, a longer stay is justified.

The **Shelter for Mothers and Children** hopes to find an energetic young volunteer who wishes to help these mothers and their children. The volunteer will be a good example to the mothers living in their problem-situation, helping them to get back optimism and self-confidence; volunteer could be a bridge between mother and her child motivating them to spend more valuable time together and to appreciate their mother-child relationship. Volunteer is expected to organise activities for them to spend more time together (playing, organising events, visiting places outside the shelter etc).

The most important objective of hosting an EVS volunteer is to restore a good and healthy relationship between a mother and her child/-ren who have arrived to the Shelter, which works as a safe place for the families.

Main activities proposed to EVS volunteer:

- running different workshops for the mothers and children in the Shelter (e.g. drawing, handicraft, singing, sewing) 25%;
- helping to organise and search different possibilities to expose the works or the achievements made by the mothers and their children in the Shelter (e.g. exhibitions) 10%;
- introducing her/his culture and running cultural evenings as a part of intercultural learning 10%;
- organising events in the Shelter: (e.g. movie evenings, reading books, teaching his/her mother tongue, cooking with the mothers and their children etc.) 20%;
- helping to organise Estonian National holidays and birthdays of mothers and their children 15%;
- organising outdoor activities (using recourses of beautiful Nõmme nature - a perfect place for skiing in winter, picnics or cycling in summer) 20%.

Volunteer will be encouraged to propose his/her personal projects/initiatives related to the theme of this EVS project which can be supported by the receiving and coordinating organisation.

Volunteer can take part in local as well as in international training activities related to his/her service. According to volunteer's skills and project's needs priority tasks and detailed working schedule (including holidays, breaks, etc.) will be worked out together with the tutor and office staff.

The working hours will be around 7 hours a day from 10:00 or 11:00 a.m., it depends on agreement between volunteer and his/her tutor.

The total working time will be around 30-35 hours a week. The volunteer will have 2 sequence days off per week. Volunteers will be working under supervision and with support of local pedagogical staff.

Profile of Volunteer and Recruitment Process

Shelter for Children and Shelter for Mothers and Children:

1. Motivation working with children, experience working with children and adults.
2. Competence drawing, painting , making handicrafts with children.
3. Russian language intermediate level. (this is very important to work here, because social workers know just Estonian and Russian Language and at the same time most of mothers and children are Russian, so to communicate with them it's important Russian Language at list minimum level.)

First of all, volunteer candidate has to be interested in making social service in Estonia and be ready to face sometimes difficult social adaptation in the country of big cultural differences. The volunteer should be active, open-minded, flexible, tolerant, friendly and ready to take own initiative. The most important is that volunteer is willing to work with the target group of the project they are applying for.

Shelter for Children expects a volunteers with motivation working with children and some experience with children between the age of 4 to 18 years old. It will be an asset if volunteer is good in drawing, handicrafts, playing instruments, sports.

All the volunteers who contacts with International Youth Association EstYES or their sending organisations who have received according information will be informed about the vacant EVS projects for certain deadline. Open projects for each deadline are published also at EstYES website and spread among our partners. After volunteer has chosen the project that meets their interest the most, they get special application form to fill in, which is the basis for the pre-selection. Then host organisation receives applications approved by EstYES to make their final decision. Staff of the host project chooses the volunteer, whose profile and interests match the best the proposed activities of the project.

Tallinn Children's Home can host up to 2 volunteers at the same time.

Support

Volunteers will be placed in flats that correspond to normal Estonian living standards. All volunteers have either single or double room and common rooms: equipped kitchen, WC, shower/bathroom and living room. Normally in Tallinn volunteers share a flat with other international volunteers. They will use local city transport to go to work. Volunteers will be provided with monthly pocket and food money and they will buy and prepare their own meals.

The volunteers will receive orientation information before their arrival about volunteering in Estonia, practical information about the country and cultural advice. It will be given by EstYES project coordinator Diana Paade. After arrival to their projects volunteers will be introduced their work and tasks by their tutors who will be providing task related support throughout the project. Volunteers will have weekly evaluation sessions with their tutors, on later stage during the EVS the evaluation sessions can take place once in 2 or 3 weeks. Coordinating organisation EstYES is asking volunteers to fill in a monthly questionnaire to monitor the course of their voluntary service and get involved in any case necessary. To accomplish their ideas, volunteers will get support they need from the receiving and also from coordinating organisation.

Personal support is also arranged by coordinating organisation EstYES through regular meetings with EVS responsible Diana Paade and the mentor. Each volunteer will be provided a mentor - support person who is not in any direct way connected to volunteer's projects; mentor is a person to who volunteer

can turn to in case of any personal questions or problems. Personal support will be partly provided by the tutors as well.

The coordinating organisation EstYES in cooperation with the receiving organisation is responsible for administrative support.

Risk Prevention, Protection and Safety

The host organisation will ensure:

- 1) that the volunteer work is safe and been assessed for risk;
- 2) that every effort is made that project meets high health and safety standards;
- 3) that the volunteer is trained and familiar with the volunteering work and have access to adequate safety equipment if needed;
- 4) that the volunteer will get all the practical and psychological support from the staff.

Both of volunteers will work with social workers, they will not be alone in the shelters, so if there is some conflict between children during activities volunteer can call for help to the social worker any time. These places are safe for living, because the main idea of these centres is to make safe environment for children and mothers. At the same time social workers will give volunteers some advise how to behave with children or mothers who have difficult character.

The receiving organisation as well the coordinating organisation EstYES will support the volunteers in any conflict situation and look for the best possible solution.

Coordinating organisation offers also extra training seminars and gatherings where volunteers can take part and share their impressions and experiences with other volunteers and local community.