

INTRODUCTION

Education in Poland is subject to special attention and care.

The education system representatives are committed to ensure that the system is effective and functional, and teachers (who are responsible for introducing children and youngsters to adulthood) are competent and open to new solutions for improving work with children.

FECDiE

- ▶ **FECDiE** educates young people aged from 6/7 to 24 from all over Poland.
- ▶ The education covers elementary and secondary levels and is carried out in free public special schools:
- ▶ **Special Primary School** (age 6/7-15)
- ▶ **1st degree Trade School** (fine bookbinding, tailoring, room service assistance, age 16-19).
- ▶ **Public Special High School of Economics** (economics profile, age 16-20).
- ▶ **Public Special High School** (general profile, age 16-19). Higher needs students.
- ▶ **Public Integrative High School** (general profile, age 16-19).
- ▶ **Special Vocational Competence School**. A “life skills” preparation school for special needs students.

FEDCiE

- ▶ Several hundred students attend the FEDCiE schools, and about 50% of them are people outside of Wrocław who have the opportunity to live in a free boarding house (**The Nonpublic School and Educational Centre**).
- ▶ There are about 200 students of both sexes, mixed backgrounds, denominations and abilities. Approximately half of them boarders coming not only from Lower Silesia, which is our county, but also from all over Poland.

FECDiE

- ▶ The programs which are carried out in our facilities are primarily meant to help students to develop and gain self-esteem taking into account their individual level of maturity and faith.
- ▶ All schools curricula are based on the National Educational Programs as set forth by the Minister of Education in Poland. The offer of schooling, education, courses and training is characterised by quality goals which are formulated in didactic terms.

FECDiE

- ▶ The pedagogical team includes about 75 teachers.
- ▶ Most of the students have physical disabilities.
- ▶ There are some with high functioning autism and some with more pronounced learning disabilities.
- ▶ Almost half of our students come from families with socio-economic difficulties and they are subject to potential social exclusion.

FECDiE

- ▶ Apart from special education units FECDiE provides :
 - kindergarten,
 - private Polish-German Primary School for children ages 6/7-15
 - nursing home for elderly people and a children's home.

The material basis

- ▶ In order to achieve our educational aims and provide the needs of our students FECDiE has been gradually transforming into well equipped, ultra modern, thriving center, fully comparable to its corresponding ones in Europe.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Besides regular activities the schools offer the possibility to develop talents and expand interests with extra-curricular activities which have become an integral part of our educational program.
- ▶ Numerous extra curricula taking place include : project corners, interest circles, art workshops, music and drama, communication and career planning courses, seminars, field trips, excursions and special events.
- ▶ Students have opportunities to develop their knowledge of modern foreign languages, develop their social, working and artistic skills, utilize on-line and digital technologies and convey greater life perspectives.
- ▶ We have an outstanding contribution, locally and regionally, in the area of sport. Main activities being table tennis, javelin, basketball and weightlifting.
- ▶ Weightlifting is particularly successful with local and international achievements. Our list includes champions of the Olympics and Paralympics in athletics and weightlifting.

ESC VOLUNTEERING PROJECT

- ▶ Young people who are willing to learn and broaden their life experience and yet are open to share and give themselves to those who need help are very welcome in our schools.
- ▶ **The ECDiE Foundation has the status of the Host Organization of the European Voluntary Service.**
- ▶ We have been offering volunteering to young people **since 1999** as part of **the Ecumenical Diaconal Year Network**

ESC VOLUNTEERING PROJECT

- ▶ For almost 20 years, we have been hosting volunteers from various European countries in our educational institutions.
- ▶ Originally, as part of the **Erasmus +** action we took part in the **EVS program (European Voluntary Service)** entitled **Youth in Action**.
- ▶ Currently under the **European Solidarity Corps Volunteering project**, entitled **Learning by doing - Diaconal Year in Poland**, coordinated by the **Diaconia of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in the Republic of Poland (Polish Diaconia)**.
- ▶ For many years, we also welcomed volunteers from Germany, as part of cooperation with the **Polish Ecumenical Council**, and more specifically with the **Foundation Signs of Hope** from Frankfurt am Main.
- ▶ We hosted volunteers from such countries as: **Germany, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and the Czech Republic**.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- ▶ We care for the quality of the project and its efficient implementation from the moment of its preparation.
- ▶ An important element of the volunteer's preparation and its proper recruitment is the best information about the program of activities.
- ▶ Prior to the commencement of activities, contracts containing a description of the obligations of each of the partners involved in the project and a possibly detailed description of the tasks provided for the participants are signed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- ▶ Also during the implementation of activities, the detailed program of classes is determined together with the volunteer, which has an impact on its final shape, taking into account the needs of the host organization and volunteer's preferences.
- ▶ Improving the quality of the implemented project is also supported by a regularly conducted evaluation (on a monthly basis in our organization and at diaconal or ESC mid-term and final seminars) and monitoring of activities carried out through permanent contact with volunteers and coordinators of activities.

MOTIVATION

- ▶ We want to give our volunteers an opportunity not only to have a comprehensive insight into working with children and young people studying in our Foundation's schools, but also to enable them to get to know their social environment.
- ▶ Volunteers work closely with teachers, school management and staff. This makes it possible to get to know the teaching staff, exchange observations on a student they work with and daily tasks at school.
- ▶ FECDiE schools organize many school events, are present at festivals, Open Doors, meetings with interesting people, workshops, field trips, projects and programs, and take part in charity and integration actions that respond to the needs of the wider local community.
- ▶ Every year, FECDiE organizes a family festival for about 300 people, during which the volunteer is able to integrate with our local community, spend time in a pleasant atmosphere not only with our pupils and their parents, but also with invited guests, donors and friends of the foundation.

VOLUNTEERS SPECIFIC TASKS

- ▶ help dislectic students and children with physical or mental disabilities write or follow the lesson at school
- ▶ conduct individual afternoon 30 min. language conversations in English or their native language
- ▶ help students with their homework
- ▶ assist teachers in their work (preparing simple language games, copying materials, etc.)
- ▶ help in the school office (copying documents)
- ▶ actively participate in extracurricular activities (including on-line activities), school contests, events, circles of interest and projects
- ▶ help students with physical disabilities to move around the school or on the way to school (especially during difficult weather conditions)
- ▶ escort students in wheelchairs (school trips)
- ▶ escort children to a swimming pool, school canteen or other places for afternoon classes

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

- ▶ **Accommodation:**
- ▶ Volunteers live on their own in a separate apartment situated close to their workplace with a good public transportation connection.
- ▶ **Shopping:**
- ▶ There are several local shops, supermarkets and a big shopping center nearby.
- ▶ **Transportation:**
- ▶ The public transportation in Wroclaw is well developed and enables to travel till late at night. In order to travel volunteers can easily issue, get and use an Urban Card.
- ▶ **Medical care:**
- ▶ There are several health centers close to the school and home.
- ▶ **Bank:**
- ▶ Volunteers are helped to open their own bank account in the nearest bank location
- ▶ **Language course:**
- ▶ Volunteers take up a language course at a Language School and learn Polish on regular basis twice a week.

Support and monitoring

- ▶ In order to guarantee a safe living and working environment for the volunteers we assign them mentors from whom they get all personal and emotional support as well as from the Center's worker who is responsible for volunteers in the project. The mentors are open, emphatic and responsible tutors who also know Center's life. As the voluntary work is developing in our town and we have more and more ESC volunteers here we find it easier to introduce our guests into the local community and make them feel comfortable among us. We understand it is very important to surround the volunteers with adequate support.
- ▶ In order to support the volunteers during their volunteering experience communication and attainability seem to be very important. To assure that we provide:

Support and monitoring

- ▶ contact database (key telephone numbers and email addresses)
- ▶ printed ESC work schedule (accessible for volunteers, school staff and students)
- ▶ school events calendar with ESC activities marked
- ▶ ESC activity register
- ▶ monthly ESC reports
- ▶ evaluation meetings
- ▶ ongoing meetings
- ▶ seminars
- ▶ Youthpass certificates

CONCLUSION

- ▶ The benefits of European Voluntary Service are mutual. We break language barriers, overcome stereotypes, we learn new cultures, get to know differences and similarities, establish relationships, help each other, and improve various skills.
- ▶ Our twenty years of experience show that we are an important part of our volunteers' lives. They can acquire some new skills as well as make reflection about their own life and decide what they want to do in the future, what they want to study and who they want to be at all. Those past and present experiences make us proud and encourage to continue the work within ESC.