

Final Report of My EVS (European Voluntary Service) in Giacche Verdi Bronte

By Menekşe İris Canbaz from Turkey

My time in Bronte was everything I needed as a break from my everyday life. As a medical student I was overwhelmed with my studies and wanted to try something completely different from medicine. I wanted to get into contact with nature, to garden and to experience how to sustain myself individually. I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and experience more about life. That is when my mother showed me an opportunity to go abroad and take a part in European Voluntary Service (EVS) at Sicily. So I prepared a CV and a Statement of Purpose and got in touch with Giacche Verdi Bronte. They were very helpful through the process, answered most of my questions and helped me to reach out to previous volunteers for more specific questions regarding the volunteering experience.



View of Etna from Cladua Schiliro's, fellow collaborator, farm at Maletto.

On my first day in Bronte I was already welcomed as a member of the Giacche Verdi Bronte family. We had an Italian lesson under the supervision of Cristiano Saitta, a fellow collaborator, and there and then I learnt my first Italian words: "Ciao, mi chiamo Iris!" in English "Hello, my name is Iris!". Italian was a completely new language to me however thanks to the support of fellow volunteers I started learning the basics quickly. We mostly communicated using English, which was a chance for me to improve my listening and speaking skills, and sometimes in Italian but with English translations. Although I needed to communicate in Italian with children, since most of them didn't feel comfortable speaking English or simply they didn't know, they were very helpful and tried their best for me to understand them and to understand me. We talked very slowly word by word and used our body languages when needed.



Me, posing with my work clothes.



From left to right: Emir Can Kaya, me and Cristiano Saitta. Photo was taken at Bosco Brignolo.

My three months went very smoothly as I learnt how to speak Italian (I would like to thank Cristiano Saitta for his patience and suggest Duolingo to new comers who don't have any Italian knowledge), how to garden; which plants go better together or why onions have to be planted on an outer layer (since onions drive harmful insects away), how to cook and how to make online research (not that I didn't have any idea but I wasn't trusting myself much and now I am more confident in myself). However most importantly, I learnt how to be more flexible and adjust myself through the needs of circumstances. There were times within our projects that we needed to act quickly and decide on what to do next instantly. I am grateful for those times since they taught me how to be more patient and how not to panic when something unexpected happens.



**Emir Can Kaya and me, posing in front of the signs at Bosco Brignolo.
Photo was taken after an interactive Italian lesson.**

During my time in Giacche Verdi Bronte I had a chance to participate in several projects which came with many responsibilities.

My very first project was "Frutti per la Biosfera" which means "Fruits for the Biosphere" in English. For this project I was mainly responsible from documenting (for instance taking photos and videos) and writing reports of the field trips. I had a chance to participate in all three phases of the project: first off making presentations at schools, secondly having outdoor activities with three stations and last phase "Mercatino per la Biosfera" which means "Market for the Biosphere".

To further explain the first step, we made presentations regarding ourselves and our countries: crops cultivated, cultural expressions, basic and information regarding our hometowns and in between our presentations fellow collaborators presented Sicily: crops cultivated within, organic farming and advantages of shopping from local stores (less realisation of CO₂, purchasing local organic products).

To talk more about second step, we had three stations: soil, animal and evaluation. At soil station we prepared the soil for students to plant several seedlings; from carrots to spinach, lettuce, eggplants etc. and with that being done now they have school gardens, we also talked about how to take care of the gardens, importance of humus and seedlings' needs. At animal station we talked about microorganisms living within the soil, importance of several insects and animals for the environment. At the evaluation station we wanted to determine students' knowledge upon organic products (what organic means) and Sicily's cultivated products, we handed out oranges at the end of each evaluation to show our appreciation of their participation.

For the third step we organised a market place where local producers sold their products and there for they were promoted. There were also several activities to entertain the students stopping by (from Carrom game to painting pine cones). Overall, it was a great success and we repeated it several times.



**Selina Goldenstein talking with kids at the soil station.
Photo was taken at Bio Parco.**

Another event I participated in was “Fiera Mediterranea del Cavallo”, “Mediterranean Horse Fair” in English. The fair took up to three days and I was on duty for two days. Just as “Frutti per la Biosfera” I was responsible of documenting the event, helping staff out by opening and closing gates and being at wherever I was needed. The fair was well organised and hosted multiple on horse shows, exhibition areas to exhibit species that are specific to Sicily (as an example The Cirneco dell'Etna, a Sicilian dog breed) and exhibition areas for local Sicilian associations which are specialised in horses and agriculture.



**Me and Oskar, a participant's dog.
Photo was taken at Fiera Mediterranea del Cavallo.**

As much as we worked we also had free time to share with fellow volunteers and friends. We mostly worked from 9 am to 1.30 pm and from 3.30 pm to 6.30 pm. During lunch breaks and after work we spent time together cooking, eating, playing card games (such as UNO and Cockroach Salad), watching movies (we turned movie nights in to a tradition, we gathered together every Tuesday night to watch movies, from classics like God Father to cheeky romance movies like Bridget Jones's Diary) and simply chilling enjoying one another's company. This made me realise although the time is passing and never coming back everything will be alright at the end when you are surrounded by loving and caring people.



Photos from one of the many movie nights and dinners at our house.

For the first picture from left to right: Natalia Alberska, Cristiano Saitta, me, Selina Goldenstein, Fabiane Lira, Natalie Exner, Selver Gök and Emir Can Kaya.

For the second picture from left to right: Emir Can Kaya, Selina Goldenstein, Betül Doğan, Fabiane Lira, me and Selver Gök.

Everything must come to an end so to finish my final report of my EVS journey I would like to thank once again to dear friends and acquaintances who took a part in making this journey very enjoyable, special and the way it was (then again my vocabulary is lacking to describe how special this journey is to me) for me.



From left to right: Viktoria Grötzinger, Fabiane Lira, Selina Goldenstein and me sitting on a wheelbarrow.

Thank you all from bottom of my heart, I wish the very best for all of you.