



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

MENTOR



1. What is mentorship in European Voluntary Service?

Mentorship can be defined as the set of relations and processes that appear between an EVS volunteer and the person who facilitates the learning process during the project. This person is chosen by the hosting organization and is called MENTOR.

This figure is very important in the whole process because he assists the volunteer to integrate, to develop himself and to overcome possible difficulties. The mentor can help the volunteer to identify the strong and weak points regarding his skills and personality.

The mentorship can be described as:



- Facilitating the learning process;
- Introducing the volunteer to the local community;
- Advising or counseling the volunteer in difficult situations;
- Helping the volunteer to realize his achievements gained through the activities.

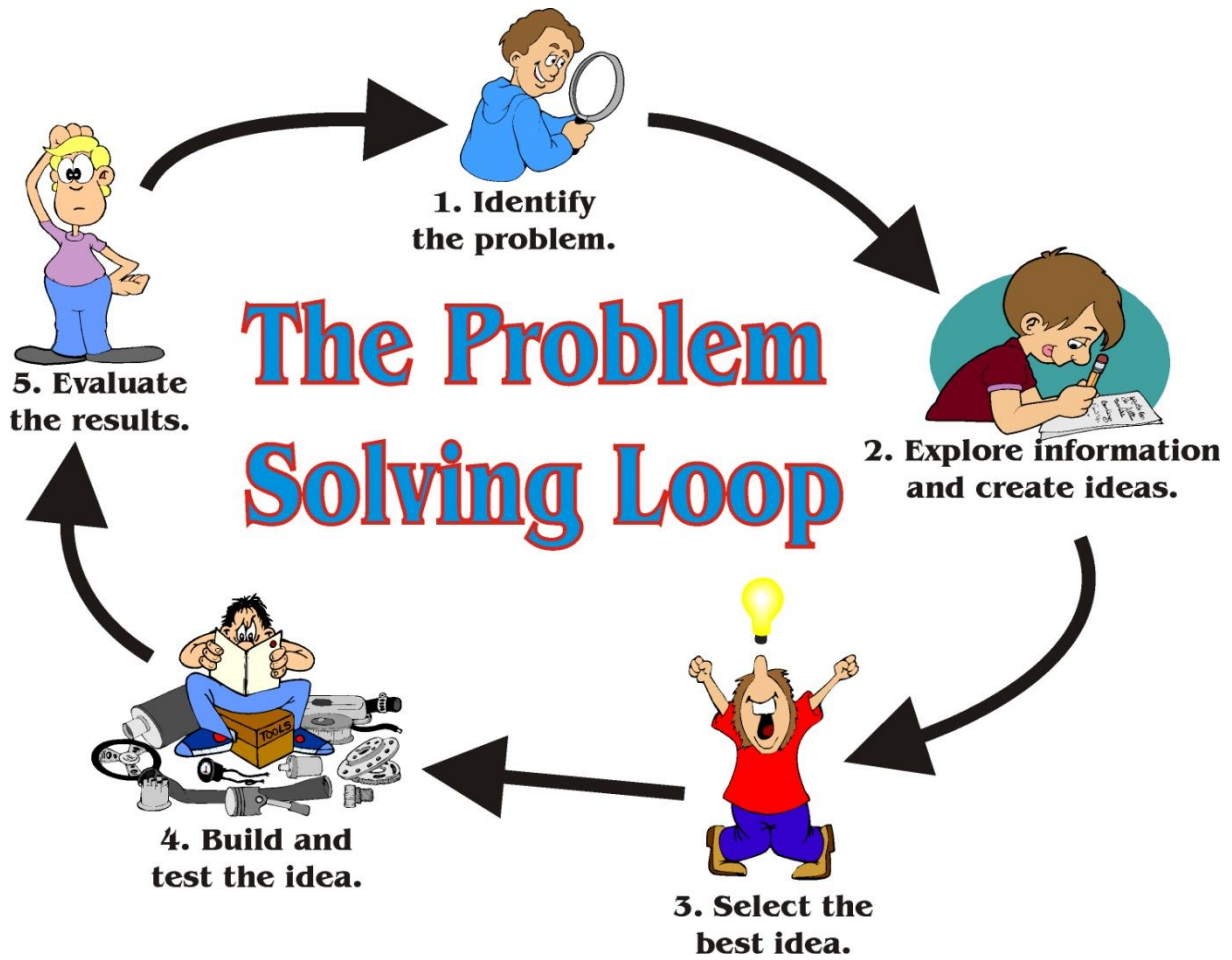
2. Conflict & situation management

Throughout the project period there may appear various problems because of the complexity and length of the whole process. The role of mentor is very relevant in this case. Some of the most typical problems that could occur are conflict situations between volunteer and his coordinator, volunteer and other volunteers or with local community. A significant type of conflict that we should consider is the inner conflict that usually appears during the EVS experience.

In case of conflict, the role of mentor is to mediate and help in finding solutions but not give ready answers. Actually, that is a process in which the mentor assists the volunteer to come up with the solutions that will face the issues he is confronting with. Mentor should give the volunteer a path and a structure for solving the problem and encourage him to think out of the box.



Useful steps in problem solving are:



Methods and instruments of the mentor.

The mentor has to face all kind of situations, which involve the volunteer.

For that reason, he uses different methods and instruments which permit to create a good relationship between himself and his volunteer and to facilitate the integration of the second one in the local community.

The available methods are of different types, the choice of using one of these rather than another depends on the situation the mentor has to face on. It also depends on the people involved in that situation.

Network contact: The mentor should keep in contact with the volunteers before their arrival in the hosting country, in order to get to know each other, improving their mutual knowledge, to understand better the skills of the volunteer and prepare in the better way the programme of his EVS. He can communicate through e-mail, skype or other social network.

Meeting: The mentor can organize periodically meeting with the work group to do a brain storming on what they have done until that moment, so the volunteers can share their experiences, feelings, problems to try to solve them, helping each other. During this session they can plan other activities, they can evaluate the previous period work and develop new aims to achieve.

The mentor can also prewiev individually meetings with each volunteers to discuss several personal points in a private atmosphere.

e. i. Each Friday the mentor and the volunteers can meet and talk about three topics: one concerns the work (what they liked, what disliked, what do they want to change), the other one concerns logistical stuffs, the last one concerns the social life.



Documentation: The mentor has to provide the volunteer specific information about the country, the local community and also about the hosting organization. Furthermore he has to discuss with the volunteer the main aims of the project, as well as the application form and the schedule of the activities (Info-Pack).

Social Life: The mentor should participate in the social life of the volunteers and not only in the work part of the project, in order to contribute to the integration of the volunteers in the local community and in the culture of the country. We mean that the mentor has the responsibility to provide informal learning moments for the volunteers, for instance to invite them to social events, like music or dance festivals, museums, restaurants, local community events.



Support: The mentor has to be the supporter of his volunteers, facilitate their activities, as well as to guide them to find a solution for their problems, in each step of their EVS life. He should have an open communication and relationship with the volunteers, in order that each part (mentor and volunteer) can feel comfortable to discuss and talk about private and social issues/problems.

There needs to be clear and precise communication between the mentor and the volunteer in order to prevent confusion and miscommunication. Barriers in communications include language difficulties, cultural differences, personal attitudes/behavior, disabilities, and knowledge level.

The mentor should not see themselves as the EVS volunteer's best friend and side with them on every issue. There is a need for the relationship to be supportive but also professional at all times.

The mentor and the volunteer will need to have trust in one another in order for the volunteer to share his feelings, problems, needs, wishes and interests. The mentor will need to organize some workshops/activities to increase the level of trust between the mentor and the volunteer. One such example is a game of football where the teams are split in pairs and one person is blindfolded and the other is the leader. After the first half the roles are switched. In the end there should be an evaluation about how it felt to be the leader and how it felt to be the one who is blindfolded.

The mentor is the middle man between the volunteer and the organization, and his role is to make sure there is no misunderstanding between the parties. If the mentor sees that there is a problem that he cannot solve he should contact the sending organization and the hosting organization to work together to solve the issue.



How does a mentor assist with the Youthpass process ?

Youthpass is a record of the learning gained by the volunteer throughout his/her placement. Tips for the mentor to support the learning of the volunteer through Youthpass :

- Encourage accurate and honest reflection of the performance and the learning achieved.
- Build Youthpass „prompting” questions into the regular meetings with the EVS volunteer. For example „ What do you feel you have learnt this week ? What do you hope to improve on ?”
- Promote the idea of reflective recording of experience in a variety of formats (journal, blog, photos, website, etc) and on an ongoing basis.
- Encourage the volunteer to keep a folder containing records of all of his/her activities within the project during the placement

- Use positive reinforcement about Youthpass throughout the project.
- Keep in mind that Youthpass is optional and that the volunteer decides whether they want to participate in it or not.

Case studies

Description :

1. This case study highlights the potential problems that may appear in an EVS community. Specifically, the group consisted of 16 volunteers who shared the same area. They are accommodated in a dormitory, two people in the room, six showers, six toilets, 2 balconies and kitchen. Location: in a medium size city in Romania. Although, at the beginning the situation was generally good, it seems that it has gotten worse over time. Problems have been reported from both sides: the volunteers and the local team. The volunteers came from different countries and there were people among them who have never lived with anyone outside the family.

Problems encountered:

After some weeks, were the first problems, that affected the volunteers relationship and the relationship between the volunteers and the local team.

Problems raised by the local team were:

- Lack growing interest for the activities
- Lack of cleanliness at home
- The volunteers have not been able to solve problems in a positiv way, which has led to many conflicts between them.
- The volunteers have come to take advantage of the local goodwill.

Methods of solving:

Through communication the mentor tried to solve all problems. He talked to each one and in some moments all together.

The conclusion of this case study is summarized in a few lines. The mentor must establish a relationship based on trust and respect and should not be too permissive. And if it does, when it decides it is too much, to try to change their strategy in a slow, not sudden way, because of the risk of misinterpretation. However, communication remains strong point in any relationship.

2. **The volunteer refused the mentor.** The volunteer sad he does not need a mentor and his support. In this situation, the mentor was a diplomat and he tried to spend time together accompanying him to the activities without the special mentoring session.

This was a good experience and perhaps in the future it will be a good solution for this situations.



Useful Links

- EACEA
- Salto

- Youth Networks.eu
- Tin Act.ro

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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