

Ah! The joys of Varna!

Finally – we made it! Sara has gone to spend a month in Varna, on the shores of the Black Sea. There may have been a few tears shed on the first day, but when I left her at the For You association's offices, she was grinning from ear to ear. Let me fill you in.

After having said the magic word, "International Project" in a youth information bureau in Mons, we met Sara. All she wanted to do was go abroad to gain the experience necessary to become a mentor/youth leader. Following several weeks of research and having been presented with several options, Sara decided to go for a month's European Voluntary Service where she would be helping to run workshops for young people with disabilities.

On 15 October the big day arrived, with this first experience and the challenges that go with it: a flight with a stopover! It's not so easy to weave your way around suitcases and souvenir shops whilst keeping an eye on the screens and on your watch. "It's just as well Varna airport is tiny!" she whispered once we had arrived. It didn't take long before we saw the first changes to the initial plan: the volunteers' apartment was out of service and we end up in a youth hostel. This is where things looked like they were going downhill but Elina and I were there to take care of things. After a short city tour, we met in a café for the first English lesson. As luck would have it, Sara would get out of the traditional custom of putting 5 leva on the table if we spoke her language. Alina was not so lucky, thinking that nobody would notice her swearing under her breath! After a well-deserved siesta we met up with Jean-Hugues, another volunteer supported by Dynamo International. He immediately offered to give Sara a hand during her stay and reminded her that she would not be alone. I could already see her starting to relax – a smooth landing!

Over the course of the second day, the host association organised a trip to the north of Varna so that volunteers from the two associations could get to know each other. I became a walking dictionary for the day in order to bridge the communication gap between Sara and the other volunteers, but that wouldn't last for long, as actions speak louder than words.

Today, once we had signed all the final papers, I said goodbye to the volunteers and Sara gave me a huge smile and said, "Don't worry; everything is going to be fine – thank you for everything!" So I came back to Brussels with a weight lifted off my shoulders and a reason to enjoy a beer in the rain.

A photo of our two volunteers

