

VOLUNTEERING IN PAAPAV (PIKPA)



Description of the institution

PAAPAV (more commonly known as PIKPA) is a state institution that hosts around 75 children and youngsters with disabilities, aged 3 to 35 years old. The compound of the institution is quite big: the children and youngsters live in 5 different houses, there are multiple buildings for physio- and ergotherapy, a school, kitchens, a place to do laundry and our activity center. The children and youngsters living in the institution have moderate to heavy physical and mental disabilities or come from traumatic family backgrounds. Most have little or no contact with their family. Nurses take care of their physical needs (like washing, feeding, medication) but there remains a need for psychological, social and educational support of the children and youngsters. Even today, most children still receive very little stimulation and spend a lot of time in their beds, living with a lack of personal space and contact. The volunteers offer extra care and attention to the children and act as a bridge between the institution and the outside world.

The area around PAAPAV (PIKPA)

PAAPAV is located in Voula, an area in the south of Athens, next to the sea. It is surrounded by beautiful nature with the sea on one side and the mountains on the other. Voula is full of cafes, bars, gyms, cinemas and shops. If, however, this is not your idea of fun, don't worry: frequent buses go to the center of Athens (45 - 60 minutes ride), where you can find whatever you are looking for, from archaeological sites to alternative bars. The bus service stops between midnight and 5 am but there are some night buses going to Glyfada, which is a 20 minutes' walk from PAAPAV. You can also take a taxi to move around, which is not very expensive in Greece. Athens itself is a big (and sometimes chaotic) city with 5 million inhabitants. The climate is very warm in the summer (up to 45 degrees) but it can be also cold and rainy in winter (although it can also be quite warm... Greece is full of surprises!).



Tasks of the volunteers

Every volunteer has a different program, depending on the children s/he is working with and the personal strengths and interests of the volunteer. However, all volunteers share the following tasks:

- In the mornings: activities with the children with heavy disabilities, who do not attend school (going for walks, playing or listening to music, giving them a massage, playing simple games, basic stimulation)
- In the afternoons: carrying out different group activities in our activity center inside the institution (cooking, handcrafts, drawing, sports, sewing, English lessons...), going for excursions outside of the institution (cinema, bowling, playground, swimming pool)
- Sometimes: brushing the teeth of the children, cleaning and organizing the activity center
- In the summer: going to the beach of PAAPAV and swimming with the children

Besides that, we organize and carry out the following activities:

- Individual learning projects for specific children (practicing self-help skills, learning the alphabet, learning how to use money, cooking lessons, computer lessons, english lessons...)
- Social integration (visiting a supermarket, a bank, a museum, or a post office)
- Raising awareness in the local community about disabilities and the life inside and institution and trying to involve Greek people to volunteer in the institution
- Fund-raising to sponsor activities with the children
- Any other activity depending on the abilities, interests, needs or desires of the children

In short, we are responsible for helping the children spend their time in a creative and enjoyable way.

Working Schedule

Volunteers work around seven hours per day, five days a week (a total of 35 hours per week). Greek lessons and weekly meetings are included in the working hours. All volunteers have different schedules depending on the needs of the children and their personal preferences. However, the hours of the activities (10-13 and 17-20) are not flexible because of the regulations of the institution and the schedule of the children.

Exemplary timetable

(which changes according to the interests of the volunteers and the needs of the children, this shall just give you a first impression on what your week as a volunteer could look like)

| <i>Time</i> | <i>Monday</i> | <i>Tuesday</i> | <i>Wednesday</i> | <i>Thursday</i> | <i>Friday</i> | <i>Weekend</i> |
|--------------|---|---|----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------|
| <i>10-13</i> | Meeting to organize the week (all the ESC volunteers and the coordinator) | basic stimulation (games, walks, massages...) | cooking lunch with the children | basic stimulation (games, walks, massage...) | basic stimulation (games, walks, massages...) | <i>Weekends are free</i> |
| <i>13-17</i> | break and free time | break and free time | break and free time | 13-14 Greek lesson for the volunteers 14-17 break and free time | break and free time | |
| <i>17-20</i> | handcrafts | sports (bicycle, basketball, dance...) | sewing class and English lessons | playing with the younger children (teaching them how to walk, going to the playground) | movie night or birthday parties | |

Way of working

Volunteers in this project are motivated and encouraged to organize themselves based on their interests and strengths under the supervision and the guidance of the coordinator, who is present in the project on an almost daily basis. The coordinator supports the volunteers and mediates between them and the institution. The coordinator also takes care of paperwork, pocket money and other practical issues and will help the volunteers with problems they might face living in a foreign country, such as booking a doctors' appointment.

There might be some fixed activities but mostly the activities depend on the volunteers' own initiatives. In weekly meetings we discuss all issues regarding work, community life, activities etc. The volunteers contribute with their own ideas and opinions and all have equal right to decide and to disagree. Our aim is to help the personal development of the volunteer in order for him/her to feel comfortable in the project.

What does all of this mean? In short, it means that each of our volunteers is encouraged to take initiative and to contribute with own ideas, suggestions, and personal strengths to the success of the project.

The volunteers have 2 days of holidays per month (12 months = 24 holidays), which can be taken flexible and in according to agreements with the coordinator.



Living Conditions

The volunteers live in a separate building **inside** the institution. They have two big rooms, each with a private bathroom and shower, one of the rooms has a balcony as well. Both rooms host two volunteers each (Unless the volunteers specifically ask not to, they sleep divided by gender). The rooms are on the second floor of an office building, with a beautiful view overlooking the sea. The NGO has an activity center inside the institution, 100m away from the rooms of the volunteers. In this activity center most of the work of the volunteers will take place. The activity center also has the kitchen and washing machine that the volunteers will use. Since the volunteers live, cook, eat, and work together you should be prepared for a very intense experience in community living!

All volunteers receive a monthly pocket money of 150€, plus 160€ for food money, in total 310€ per month.

Important notice: Since the volunteers work and live inside a public institution, they have to follow certain rules of the institution. This means that volunteers should behave in a way as not to offend other people. Also, we must let you know that **being drunk or using illegal drugs (in Greece all drugs are illegal) is not tolerated inside PIKPA**. If you are found drunk or using other drugs inside the institution, especially during your working hours, we will have to ask you to leave the project.

What we expect from our volunteers and the sending organizations:

From our volunteers: Motivation, enthusiasm, responsibility and commitment are ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY!

It is important to keep in mind that most of the children lack contact to their family and do not have any other contacts outside the institution, therefore they depend on the sensitivity, love and attention of the volunteers.

Creativity, patience, initiative, maturity, and a good sense of humor are needed, as the work can be hard. Please be aware that the conditions inside the institution can be psychologically difficult on anybody working there. Furthermore, you should enjoy living and working with a group of people. An intermediate level of English is useful, as it is the language of communication between the volunteers and the coordinator. However, even though the children and youngsters speak only Greek, we do not expect volunteers to speak Greek when they arrive. Though you should be determined to study and to learn Greek, as it is essential for the communicating with the staff and the children. In addition, we would like you to inform us about any physical, social or emotional difficulty you may have, that may affect your integration into project and to tell us what we can do to assist you. Volunteers with physical disabilities are very welcome, but they have to keep in mind that although PAAPAV is more or less accessible for people with disabilities, the rest of Athens is another story!

We also expect that you commit to stay for the whole duration of the project (if you like the project of course). Finally, neither technical skills nor previous experience are needed but if you have studied something relevant and you want to put your skills in practice, we will be happy to try to help you!



Languages

Greek: Greek is necessary for daily communication because neither the children nor most of the staff working in PAAPAV speak English. Of course, nobody will force you to learn perfect Greek, if you don't want to, but a minimum level is required to participate actively in the project. During your stay you can attend Greek classes to support your learning. **English:** We use English in all our meetings and also for communicating with each other.

Training and Support

During the first weeks, the volunteers are introduced to the children and can slowly get to know them better. The coordinator and the volunteers that arrived before you will support and assist you and show you the "basics" like pushing a wheelchair, feeding or changing a diaper. However, we don't provide any special training about how to work professionally with disabled children. If you want to practice skills that you have learnt at school or university, it is possible and we will be happy to help you.

Once per week there is a group meeting with all of the ESC volunteers and the coordinator. We speak about practical matters and possible issues and plan our activities. Once in a while we have extra meetings to discuss the situation of specific children, take part in solution findings for relevant community or work related issues or to plan special events. Every six months, we have a big activity meeting where we evaluate our activities and plan the new program for the upcoming months. All volunteers are expected to participate actively in these meetings and to contribute with own ideas and suggestions.

Once you have settled in, there is also a meeting between you and the coordinator where you can speak about your first experiences, as well as about expectations and wishes for the rest of your project. Before you leave you will have an evaluation meeting with your coordinator.

Finally and most importantly, our group members are expected to help one another. All European volunteers live together, eat together, work together and often spend their free time together; it is only by caring for each other and by trying to form close relations with all members of the group (Local volunteers, ESC, Tandem members) that we can enjoy this experience to the fullest. For volunteers in need of extra support, we can arrange for it in collaboration with the sending organization.

What to bring with you

Personal items, a few warm clothes for the winter (yes, it can even snow sometimes!), a swimming suit and lots of summer clothes, games, a good preparation (see below), your motivation and good mood.

Preparation for the project:

PAAPAV preparation: the coordinator carries out an online preparation with the new volunteers, explaining more about the project and sending Greek vocabulary. Please take active part in this process and eventually get in touch with old volunteers, that will be happy to share their experience with you.

Language: it is useful if you learn some Greek before arriving. Knowing the alphabet and some basic expressions will help you communicate more easily with the kids and the personnel. Also, **if your English is not good, please try to improve it before coming here, this is very important!** Ask your sending organisation to help you arrange English lessons or, if it is not possible, try to study by yourself.

Knowledge and experience: If you have never worked with people disabilities before you can try to gain some knowledge by visiting an organization in your home country that works with people with disabilities or by talking to friends that might have experience in this field. Also reading about working with children and youngsters (with and without disabilities) can be helpful to get an impression and ideas for what kind of activities you will do with them. You can also read about the various types of disabilities that you will come in contact with while working in PAAPAV (cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, spina bifida, autism...). Don't worry, you don't need to be an expert on these disabilities! Most importantly the children and youngsters are individuals with individual personalities, interests and needs like any other child and youngster without a disability.

To find out more about disability and institutionalization, we can recommend to check out the following websites:

- **Lumos:** <https://www.wearelumos.org/> (An Ngo working all over the world for the transition of institutional life to the community, many free publications and reports)
- **Independent Living movement:** <https://www.independentliving.org/docs7/grunewald2003.html> (Advocates of rights of disabled people)
- **European disability forum:** <https://www.edf-fehp.org/independent-living-and-de-institutionalisation-policy/> (Discussions, policy making, actions)

Living in a community: Keep in mind that you will live together with a group of volunteers; this means that you must be prepared to respect the needs and wishes of others as much as your own. It also means being ready to participate actively in all household tasks such as cleaning, tidying up and, of course, cooking!



COVID-19: It is very important to keep in mind that in PAAPAV you will be working with children that belong in the high-risk group for COVID-19. Due to lung problems, physical disabilities, weak immune systems and the living conditions inside the institution, the children are extra vulnerable to an infection. This means that the volunteers need to act very responsibly and follow the health regulations at all times (wearing a mask in public transportation, closed spaces, ALWAYS wearing a mask when in contact with the children). Acting responsibly means also following the lockdown rules of the Greek government and not meeting large groups of people, especially people that you do not know since they might be possible COVID carriers. Even though luckily, we can continue our activities even amid the pandemic, the situation might change and is unpredictable.

The rules of the institution are strict: **only vaccinated people are allowed to enter the compound.** This means that all volunteers need to be fully vaccinated and willing to take a third dose once their certificate expires.

General health: It is important to inform us beforehand about any health issues. In any case we recommend to have the Hepatitis B vaccination and to be aware to keep basic hygiene precautions while working with the children and youngsters.

Culture: There are many books and websites about Athens, Greece, Greek culture and history. They can give you a lot of interesting information about your new country and may help you adjust more easily but also remember, not all Greeks drink ouzo and dance the syrtaki! Anyway, prepare yourself for a country where logic and organization are not the first priority and where chaos, passion, absurdity and spontaneity reign. If you are flexible and have a good sense of humor, you'll just love it!



Interested???

Then send your CV and motivation letter as soon as possible to Ronja to tandemngo@gmail.com

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