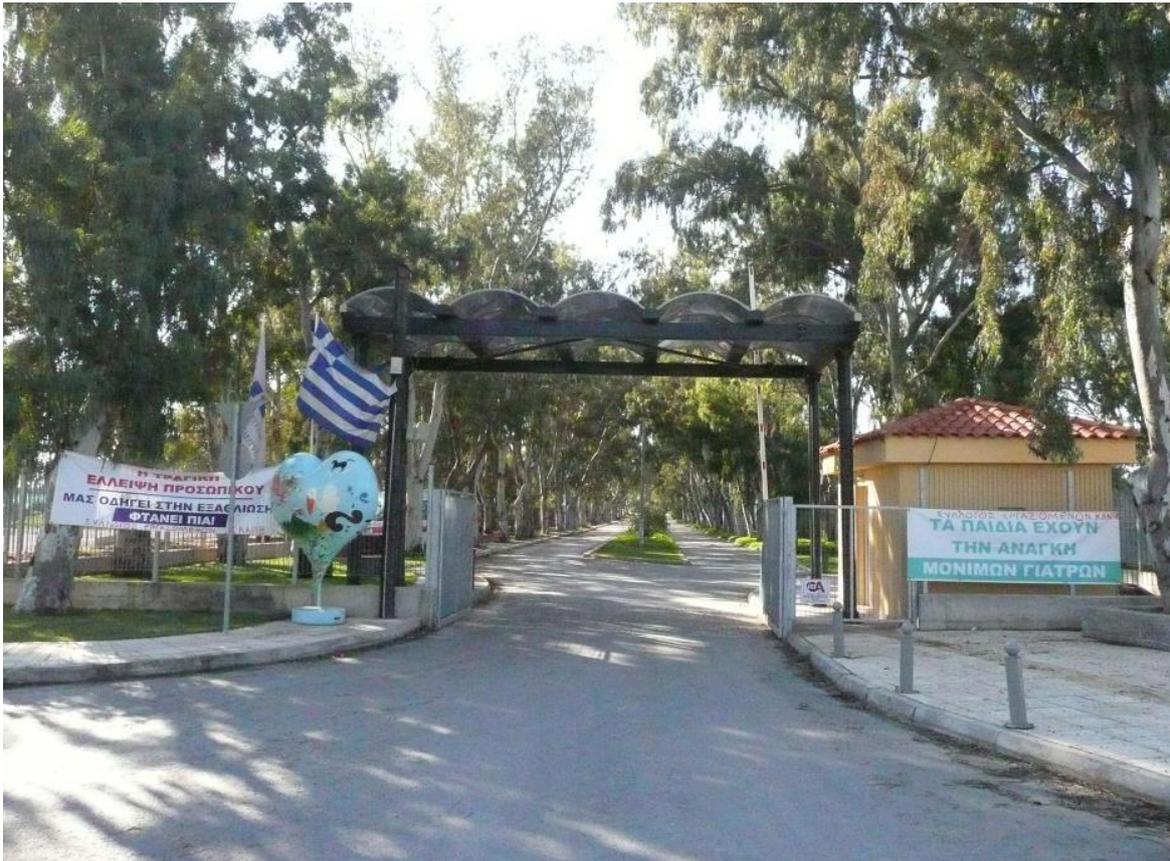


VOLUNTEERING IN PAAPAV (PIKPA)



Description of the institution

PAAPAV (more commonly known as ΠΙΚΡΑ) is a state institution that hosts about 100 handicapped children and youngsters from 1 to 30 years old. They have moderate to heavy physical and mental disabilities. Most are abandoned by their parents and have little contact with their family. Nurses take care of their physical needs (washing, feeding, medication) but there is a lot to be done for the psychological, social and educational needs of the children and youngsters. Despite financial difficulties, PAAPAV is trying to become more modern, to improve services and to integrate the children into society. However, changing mentality and way of working is a slow and difficult process and a lot remains to be done. Even today, most children still receive very little stimulation and are heavily institutionalised. 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 in Glyfada, an expensive area of Athens near the sea... Glyfada is full of cafes, bars, gyms, cinemas, shops etc and there are a lot of disco's and nightclubs on the beach. If however this is not your idea of fun, don't worry: frequent buses run to the centre of Athens (45 - 60 minute ride) and there you can find whatever you are looking for, from archaeological sights to alternative bars. The bus service stops between 12pm-5am but the tram runs 24 hours on weekends and there are some night buses as well until a point close to Glyfada and then to take a taxi in Greece is not very expensive so transportation is not a problem. Athens itself is quite a big and chaotic city (about 5 million inhabitants). The climate is very warm in the summer (up to 45 C) but can be rather cold and rainy from October to May (although it can also be quite warm... Greece is full of surprises!).



Duration of the project

Long-term project (1 year duration):

Usually we accept volunteers to start in September or October and January.

Short-term project:

The short-term project lasts from two weeks to six months and can accept volunteers with disabilities or who have social or health problems.

Tasks of the volunteers

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

- ✓ 1 hour per day helping the nurses (bathing, feeding, brushing teeth, changing diapers)
- ✓ 3 hours per day (in the mornings mostly) keeping company to children with heavy disabilities who do not attend school (walks, music, massage, simple games)
- ✓ 3 hours per day (in the afternoons) participate actively in the group activities of the Activity Center inside the institution and / or accompanying the children or the youngsters of the institution to their outside activities (sports, extra lessons or therapies)
- ✓ 4-5 times per week swimming in the sea (only in the summer) and 1-2 afternoons taking some children outside to the playground
- ✓ 2-3 times per week Cooking for the group of volunteers and 1-2 times/week cleaning the premises of the volunteers

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

- ✓ Stimulation for babies and severely disabled children (play room, music, walks inside the institution or just physical contact)
- ✓ Individual learning project for specific children (e.g. practicing self-help skills, learning the alphabet, learning how to use money, Cooking lessons, Computer lesson, English language workshop etc)
- ✓ Other leisure activities (Physical education or sports, Beauty group, Artistic expression: ex. painting, handicraft, singing, dance, etc)
- ✓ Social integration (visit to a supermarket, to a bank, a museum or a post office etc)
- ✓ Entertainment (organising parties, Outings in Glyfada or Athens, going to the movies or to a

festival, Excursions etc).

- ✓ Informing the local community about disabilities 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 and the 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 7 hours per day, 5 days a week (a total of 35 hours per week). Language lessons and meetings (1-2 hours per week) are included in the working hours. All volunteers have different time and day schedules depending on the needs of the children and their personal wishes. There are two days free per week (usually but not always weekends) and two more days free per month.

Way of working

Volunteers in this project are motivated and encouraged to organise themselves under the supervision and the guidance of the coordinator who are present in the project on an almost daily basis. There is one coordinator who support the volunteers and mediate between the volunteers and the institution.. The coordinator also takes care of paper work, pocket money and other practical issues and will help you with residence permits, hospitals and whatever you need until you manage to do things by yourself. There are some fixed activities (as the ones mentioned before, ex. helping the nurses with the showers) but most other activities depend on the volunteers' own initiative. In meetings (which are weekly) we discuss all issues regarding work, community life, free time activities etc. Volunteers contribute with ideas and opinions in the meetings and all have equal right to decide and to disagree. Our aim is to held the personal development of the volunteer in order for him/her to feel comfortable in the project. Additionally we provide extra help with the system of the "reference persons". The volunteers who have arrived before will show you around, explain how we work and live in PIKPA, introduce you to Athens and answer your questions. In case you need more personal guidance, you or your sending organisation should notify us of this in advance so that we can arrange for an accompanier or a visiting youth worker for you.

What does all this mean? In short, it means that each of our volunteers is encouraged to take initiative, to contribute with ideas and suggestions and to realise that he/she is personally responsible for the happiness of the children and the success of the project.



Living Conditions

Volunteers used to live in a building inside the institution, Though now temporarily, they leave in an ex-ward of the institution (which is not used for the residents) and it is similar to a house. For sure you are going to live with other volunteers that are part of the EVS project and you are going to share a kitchen - living room and the bathrooms. All volunteers receive a monthly pocket money of 100 euros. There will be around 4-6 long-term volunteers living together. Volunteers all live, cook, eat and work together all the time so be prepared for a very intense experience in community living! Also, we have to support each other quite a lot as some of us may have difficulties to adjust at the beginning or may have some physical disability.

Important notice: As volunteers do their service inside a public institution, they have to respect certain rules of the place. 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) will not be tolerated inside PIKPA.** If you are found drunk or stoned inside the institution especially during your working hours, we will have to ask you to leave the project.

What we expect from volunteers and sending organisations:

For volunteers: **Motivation, Enthusiasm, Responsibility and Commitment are ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY**- please remember that these children are abandoned both by their parents and by Greek society and they depend on you for love and attention. Creativity, patience, initiative, maturity and a good sense of humour are needed as the work can be hard and Greeks are rather chaotic and hot-tempered! Intermediate level of English is useful.

Furthermore, you should enjoy living and working with a big group of people. Also, you should be determined to study hard to learn Greek as it is essential for 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 in the project and to tell us what we can do about it.

Volunteers with physical disabilities are very welcome but they have to keep in mind that although PIKPA is more or less accessible for people with disabilities, the rest of Athens is another story! They must clearly explain to us what they can and cannot do, and be prepared to openly talk about their disability and their needs.

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!

For sending organisations: First of all we would like you to meet the volunteers personally and try to determine together with them if they are suitable for this project. We expect that you read the project description together with the volunteer and help to clarify any questions. We would also like you to send us detailed information about any physical or emotional characteristics of the volunteer that may require special attention from our part and tell us what we can do to help or, even better, encourage the volunteer to have direct communication with us. Most importantly we would like you to support the volunteer in the preparation procedure and certainly to arrange for English lessons in case the volunteer does not speak sufficient English!

Language

Greek: Greek is necessary for communication because neither the children nor the majority of workers in PIKPA speak English. Of course, nobody here 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 a Greek course by a private teacher (about 3 hours per week) until two months before your departure. Of course it is possible to change this schedule if volunteers and the teacher agree.

English: We use English in all our meetings and also for communicating with each other, especially at the beginning. **If your English is not very good, please attend English lessons before arriving.**

Training and Support

Training: During the first weeks, volunteers are introduced to the children and shown how to handle them (lifting, pushing a wheelchair, feeding, bathing, etc.). They also learn some basic information about the types of disabilities the children have. They have as a reference person one old volunteer who helps them to integrate smoothly in the project. However, we don't provide any special training about how to work professionally with disabled children. If you want to practice the skills you have learnt at school, it is possible and we will be happy to help you, but the most important function of volunteers is not to do therapy or "scientific work" with the children but to offer them some of the attention and stimulation they need.



Support: once per week there is a group meeting on practical matters and information, once per two months there is a meeting about the community where we discuss issues that concern us as a community, two times per month we have a kid's meeting where we discuss about a specific child and every 6 months we have a big activity meeting where we make the evaluation of the activities and we plan the new programme for the next 6 months. All volunteers are expected to participate actively in all of the meetings and to contribute ideas and suggestions. You will have bi-monthly evaluations with the coordinator where all the issues you wish will be discussed. Finally and most importantly, group members are expected to help one another. We all live together, eat together, work together and often spend our free time together; it is only by caring for each other and by trying to form close relations with all members of the group that we can actually enjoy this experience to the fullest. For volunteers in need of extra support, we can arrange for it in collaboration with the sending organisation.

What to bring with you

For yourself: Your sheets and towels, a few warm clothes for the winter (yes, it can even snow sometimes!), a swimming suit, an anti-mosquito product if you will be with us during summer time (citronella oil is very good), a good preparation (see below), your motivation and good mood.

Preparation for the project:

PIKPA 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 get to learn from before the other volunteers, with whom you will spend a big part of your staying in the project!

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 with moderate to severe disabilities before, please visit regularly a centre for these people in your country, after being accepted for the project. This way you will become more familiar with the kids and will also get some ideas about what kind of activities you can do with them. It will also help you to browse through the internet or to find some books on animation for young children (disabled or not) and also to find information about the various types of childhood disabilities. Most children in the centre have cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, spina bifida or mental retardation from unknown causes and a few have blindness, deafness or autistic features in addition to mental retardation. Occupational therapy books as well as books on the Montessori Method are also quite interesting. We would recommend the following books:

- ❖ **Disabled Village Children** by David Werner (difficult to find in bookshops but you can order it in several languages from www.healthwrights.org it is under Publications. You can also read it on line in English or Spanish at <http://www.healthwrights.org/booksonline.htm>) **THIS IS REALLY AN EXCELLENT BOOK, please try to browse through it (I know it is a bit too big to read it)!**
- ❖ **Handling the Young Cerebral Palsied Child at Home** by Nancie Finnie (available in many languages, very good information although sometimes it is very detailed)

Living in community: remember 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! So, if you have lived with your mama and papa until now, maybe you could start experimenting in your own home before you come here, this will also make your parents really happy, no? And don't forget to bring with you a cooking book, especially one with recipes typical of your country! The food here is not always spectacular, but we all try our best.



Health: a few children of the centre are Hepatitis B carriers. This is a disease transmitted by body fluids (in a way similar to how AIDS is transmitted) and if you want to be absolutely safe from it you must a) avoid direct contact with blood or caca, especially if you have an open wound on your hands, b) wear gloves if you shower a child or change diapers and c) **do the Hepatitis B vaccine** before leaving your country or upon your arrival to the project. In the last case your insurance as an EVS volunteer can cover it. However, please ask the doctor for possible side-effects or problems created by the vaccine. People who have a family history of multiple sclerosis should avoid it. If you choose not to have the vaccine, don't worry, Hepatitis B is impossible to be transmitted if you follow some basic hygiene precautions. Also, it is good if you have **vaccination for tetanus** as we are often outdoors, exploring the big and mysterious PIKPA territories...

Culture: there are many books and internet sites about Athens, Greece and Greek culture and history. They may 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 organisation are not the first priorities and where chaos, passion, absurdity and spontaneity reign. If you are flexible and with a good sense of humour, you'll just love it!



Interested???

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