



Volunteers in Eco-Communities

Best practices to start and manage volunteering projects

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It is the product of the collaboration of four communities exchanging good practices about working with volunteers and represents the digital copy of the [project webpage](#).

The partner organisations are all eco-communities and members of the Global Ecovillage Network. We are Sieben Linden Ecovillage in Germany, Ängsbacka in Sweden, Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Ireland and Ananda Gaorii in Denmark. Each of us are hosting between 8 to 35 volunteers at any given time (some ESC, some from other programs) and each of us are working in the field of education for sustainable development and helping to develop the resilience of our local communities.

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1. HOW TO SET UP A PROGRAMME

Getting started

To get started with your own Volunteering Project, we have different materials and tools to support you:

Guide Publications:

- The ESC programme itself produces quite a substantial [ESC formal guide](#) to the various programme types, with much useful information.

Other tips on how to get involved:

- Join the annual [GEN Europe](#) conference to get in touch with other international organisations and/or
- Enquire within your **National Ecovillage Network** to ask if they have contacts to organisations within the ESC field of expertise, so as to help create **Partnerships** for future collaborations
- Observe the structure of your community and try to describe how it integrates Volunteers into its work
- Get in contact with the Team from “[Yes to Sustainability](#)” to be included in a Project Call for Partners *or alternatively* to act as Host for some of the Project events.
- **If you are keen to be a Project Participant**, check the above Project Call to see if your Country is mentioned as a possible Partner.
- Check out the [Selected Best Practices](#) that we have identified within the second half of this document and check if those can be implemented in your community as well.



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i. Supervision and Reporting

The longer you run volunteering projects, the more routine the particular requirements, reporting and feedback become. However, it can initially feel a bit intimidating so these are some guidelines for seeing through to the core needs and achieving success:

- If you are planning bigger changes to the initially agreed upon activities for your programme, the *National Agency* should be included:
 - email them your proposed changes and invite their feedback as the National Agencies have a lot of experience in dealing with diverse groups and countries' regulations and expectations.

ii. Feedback and Evaluation

After each group of Volunteers, it is a good idea to receive feedback on how Volunteer Coordination worked - via the different stages and phases as described in [How to Run a Programme](#).

- It is important to invite feedback from all the different groups of people involved.
- At the same time, also keep in mind that not everyone is familiar with eco-communities and with our sustainable ways of doing things, so be clear and precise with your communications.

iii. Creating Partnerships with local Organisations and Projects

By approaching local organisations and projects, the opportunities for the Volunteers increase with regard to their personal projects.

The benefits:

- A broader experience and more diverse and fun activities for Volunteers
- Volunteers' integration into the local area (*benefiting their learning and personal development*)
- Higher awareness about European citizenship and International interconnection.

There need to be clear agreements with the organisations and projects to avoid miscommunication i.e. it's up to each Volunteer to decide if they want to take on a given extra opportunity as a personal project.

Useful Templates

The following templates should help you fulfil most of your National Agency obligations:

- **Receiving Volunteers from non-EU-countries:** [Letter of invitation for visa application](#)
- **Contract with the Volunteer and its Sending Organisation:** [The Activity Agreement](#) (by German National Agency)
- **Checking the finances:** [Budget Templates](#) (read more in detail in [Finances](#))
- **Improving the quality of volunteering:** [Best practice template](#)



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Staff and roles involved with Volunteers

Different organisations divide up these roles in different ways. In some cases several of these roles are held by one individual. In other cases a role may be shared by a team of people. This explanation is designed to give an overview of the different work areas that someone within the organisation may need to take responsibility for.

Work leaders/supervisors

These are the people who work with the Volunteers on a day to day basis, checking in with them each morning, assigning tasks, demonstrating how to do tasks where necessary, and being available to answer questions throughout the day.

A talk with the Supervisors/Work Leaders is recommended to check the flow of communication and identify who is responsible for which specific activities.

If there is more than one team of Volunteers, e.g. a kitchen team, a garden team, etc. then there should be separate Team Leaders supervising each of those teams.

Volunteer Coordinators

The Volunteer Coordinators have an oversight over the whole volunteering programme, but don't necessarily work directly with the Volunteers on a day to day basis.

The Coordinator role is sometimes divided up into two roles: Project Administration and practical hands-on Management of the Project (*in some organisations, these dual roles are held by the same person*).

Practical, Hands-on Management involves:

- **Volunteer recruitment**
 - Advertising for Volunteers
 - Designing and sending out application forms, processing applications and selecting and interviewing applicants.

This can be time consuming, but it's worth investing the time and energy to select Volunteers who are a good fit for the project and will be likely to stay for the duration (*See Best Practices in second half for more details*)

- **Establishing relationships with Sending Organisation** (the Partner Organisation in the country where the participant comes from, who help to ensure that ESC protocols are followed and who share responsibility for:
 - the participant's well-being
 - exchanging of contracts
- **Pre-arrival communications with Volunteers:** providing details about travel arrangements, what to bring, etc.
Some organisations host online events for new Volunteers to meet each other before the project starts.



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- **Organising accommodation for Volunteers.**

This varies depending on the accommodation available.

In *Cloughjordan* this involves securing rental accommodation locally and liaising with Landlords (*in this case accommodation consumes a significant part of their project budget*).

Other communities have their own accommodation on site - in this case the role may involve deciding how the accommodation is allocated (*or liaising with whoever is responsible for accommodation in the community*).

Consideration should be given to the comfort and privacy needs of Volunteers, and potential interpersonal issues that may arise (*expecting Volunteers to share a room for an extended period of time, e.g. for a project that lasts for a whole year, may be a recipe for more potential conflicts than if Volunteers have their own space*).

- **Organising food for the Volunteers.**

In some cases the community already shares food and eats together and the Volunteers need to be factored into the existing scheme.

In *Cloughjordan*, Volunteers live together in shared houses and take turns to cook for each other. In this case the Volunteers have free access to vegetables from the Community Farm and bread from the local baker, and are also provided with a monthly budget for their remaining food needs.

- **Welcoming New Volunteers.** This includes tasks like preparing a [Welcome Pack/Handbook for Volunteers Pack](#), planning and implementing an [Induction Week/Induction programme](#), and supporting integration with the community.

- **Coordinating the Activity Plan.** This involves overseeing the content of the Programme, managing the Volunteer work hours and ensuring there is a balance between work, education and free time within the Volunteer activities.

In most cases this means liaising with Team Leaders and other relevant individuals, and in some cases organising activities and/or training sessions for Volunteers. Coordinators also need to keep track of things like the amount of holiday days taken by Volunteers.

- **Regular meetings with Volunteers.** Assessing their progress, supporting their learning, and getting feedback on the project.

- **Practical information and support.** This varies according to what is required. Examples include providing *travel information*, assisting Volunteers with availing of *medical support*, organising someone to fix a broken washing machine, etc.

- **Managing issues and grievances.** In some cases this involves practical intervention to change something that isn't working - this could be anything from changing the timing of working hours to creating cleaning rotas. In other cases it may involve organising for mediation or conflict support, or may mean following a more formal grievance procedure.



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Project Administration involves:

- **Project Applications.** Before running an ESC programme you need to complete a successful *Quality Label* application - these are long and complex, but only need to be completed once every few years.
Once a Quality Label has been approved, organisations only need to fill in a much shorter budget request for each project they wish to run.
There are usually two annual deadlines for these (*currently February and October*).
- **Legal compliance.**
 - This involves managing the Beneficiary Tool (*an online EU platform*) and ensuring all information supplied about the Project is accurate
 - preparing contracts and ensuring they are signed by all parties, and
 - liaising with the National Agency (*each country has its own National Agency which approves and oversees ESC projects*).
- **Writing reports.** Detailed midterm and final reports need to be written and submitted to the NA and the EU Portal for each project
- **Financial management.** This involves creating and managing a budget for each project and tracking payments and cash flows.

Mentors

The Mentor's role is to support the emotional wellbeing of the Volunteers.

They should be someone that the Volunteer is familiar with and feels comfortable turning to if they have any problems that they can't talk to the other team members about.

For this reason, the Mentor should not be someone who works with the Volunteers on a day to day basis.

In some organisations, one Mentor is assigned to all the Volunteers; in other organisations each Volunteer has a different Mentor (e.g. using a 'Godparent' or 'Buddy' system as described in the [Section D: Workflow and Social Cohesion](#)).

Ideally the Mentor should have skills and experience in a field related to interpersonal care, human resources and/or mediating conflict - for example: in counselling, psychotherapy, non-violent communication.

Accountant/bookkeeper

Someone also needs to manage payments - such as the payment of pocket money to the Volunteers, reimbursement of travel costs, and other expenses of the project - as well as filing invoices and receipts, and keeping the accounts.



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Finances

Budget Distribution

*As practised at Community Farm Cloughjordan, Ökodorf Sieben Linden, Ananda Gaorii
Inspired by Sieben Linden and Cloughjordan*

The related [Budget Template](#) provides a budget overview and what parts are covered or need to be covered by it.

Overview:

The ESC programme works with lump sums based on the number of days a Volunteer is staying. From that budget, the Volunteers need to be provided with *accommodation and food*. They also receive *pocket money and travel reimbursement*.

Furthermore there are overhead expenses like *Project Management and Mentors*.

Pluses:

- Keeps clear what needs to be done and paid for by the funding.
- By having an overview of the Budget, it is easier to check the monthly finances and to spot left over money that could be re-distributed or put into improvement of the Volunteering Programme.

Minuses:

- Danger of getting too saving about the money through fear of overspend.
- It can be difficult at the outset to try to find your own way to structure the finances and not to get lost in the numbers.

Required for implementation:

A person, preferably with book keeping and/or accountancy skills, who knows how to structure a budget and handle finances.
Knowledge of calculation sheets is highly recommended.

[ESC budget template](#) (1), provided by Sieben Linden

Contract with NA and obligations/ breach

The National Agency provides each project with a Contract which includes appendices containing a lot of information.

Some of them mostly repeat information contained in the [European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide](#) but others are very specific on the obligations you need to fulfil.

Guidelines:

- Read carefully through the *finance agreement*.
- *Make a copy for yourself* to highlight useful information and extract what is relevant to your



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project.

- *Stay in contact with your National Agency* and ask about things which are unclear before running off in the wrong direction.
- Get the most important information given by the National Agency *in writing* as you can go back to that later if the National Agency later doesn't agree with your way of doing it and forget they agreed to it

Pluses:

This avoids inadvertent contract breaches through being ill informed.

Minuses:

You might get lost in the bureaucratic language and feel nervous at every step.
Or become scared of changing things in case you misstep.

What is Needed:

Time, care, attention and the patience to familiarise yourself with the requirements



2. HOW TO RUN A PROGRAMME

Section A: Recruitment and Preparation

1. Handbook for Volunteers

This practice was inspired by the community of Suderbyn.

All four eco-communities in this project have now created a Handbook for Volunteers (*in both printed and digital form, including photos*) with important information about each place, including:

- the rules
- food
- accommodation
- daily and weekly routines
- supervisors and how to contact them
- emergency contact numbers
- the financial system
- local information
- public transport.

The Handbook gives Volunteers clarity and structure. Giving them both digital and printed versions empowers them to find some information for themselves, without taking time from others.

Guidelines:

It is important that the Handbook's information is well-structured, concise and well laid out so that the amount of information isn't overwhelming. Organising the information by topic and using well-balanced graphic design can help with this. It is also vital to clearly yet neutrally present organisational and/or work rules, as an over-emphasis might give newcomers the sense of an inability to freely contribute as individuals.

What is Needed:

- Clear knowledge about your place,
- Word processing software,
- Photographs and
- Time.

Example: [Cloughjordan](#)



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2. Application Form with Intentional Questions

This was inspired by the Ångsbacka community and by Cloughjordan Community Farm, and is now also practised by Sieben Linden Ecovillage.

These communities have designed an **Application Form** with specific questions which generate higher-value information than that typically contained within a CV or application letter.

Guidelines:

The clearer the information gathered from Application Forms, the easier it is to focus on applicants who are genuinely interested in the specific type of work for which they are applying. This saves time for everyone, and facilitates quicker connection during the next stage of live interviews.

It's therefore important that questions are very specifically tailored to the organisation- and to the type of work - where the applicant will be volunteering.

Pluses and minuses of this practice

Pluses:

- Well-written questions make it easier for applicants to reflect on their own motivations, structure their thoughts and examine their own level of commitment, before writing about them.
- It also gives the organisations the chance to gauge the level of commitment of potential Volunteers, and to check if there is an appropriate fit with the organisation.

Minuses:

Ensure the Questions are not so long that applicants find the application tiresome to complete. (*Incomplete or generic answers will, however, make it easier to weed out less committed or interested candidates!*)

What is Needed:

- An **online tool** for the Questionnaire, for example *Google Forms* or *LimeSurvey*

Example: [Ökodorf Sieben Linden](#), [Cloughjordan](#)

3. Online Interviews

This practice has been implemented by Ångsbacka, Cloughjordan, and Ananda Gaorii, and is now also practised by Sieben Linden. All conduct Online Interviews with potential candidates to get to know each Volunteer and clarify expectations.



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In addition to questionnaires, Ananda Gaorii conducts a whole group Skype/online meeting with the new Volunteers before arrival.

Guidelines:

- If possible, a current or former Volunteer can be included in the interview so that the candidate can get impressions of what to expect.
- After a candidate has been selected, it is also useful to set up an online meeting with current and additional future Volunteers so as to begin to establish a group connection.
- A Volunteer Coordinator or programme supervisor can join the beginning of this conversation to get it started, and then leave the Volunteers to get to know each other in their own space.
- It is helpful for at least two people to conduct each Interview, as they can exchange impressions afterwards,
- Two interviewers can also play the roles of “good cop, bad cop” (*i.e. offering the positives and the negatives of the Volunteering work involved*) while asking direct questions and sharing information about the Volunteer’s role and work life during the project.

Pluses and minuses of this practice

Pluses:

- This Online Interview is a useful tool for determining if a Volunteer is really as motivated as his or her application implies.
- It is an effective way to share information and to be transparent about expectations, from both sides, and to learn whether or not a candidate is also considering other opportunities.
- This also gives the candidate a chance to ask questions and to get to know their potential Coordinators and Supervisors a little in advance.
- It helps strengthen the connection between the Volunteer and the Project, before it begins.

It is also possible that this Online Interview may cause some candidates to withdraw their applications which, in the long run, is a positive thing- if through this initial meeting, the fit is recognised by either side not to be a good one.

Minuses:

People not showing up for interviews can be a frustrating aspect of this practice.

It’s essential to be clear about time zones, as these can differ and cause confusion about timing.

What is Needed:

- A tool for online meetings such as [Zoom](#), [Jitsi](#) or [Vfair](#)
- A shareable document with interview questions
- Information about your organisation and the project.



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4. Facebook Group/WhatsApp Group for New Volunteers

This practice has been implemented by the community at Ananda Gaorii.

Facebook or WhatsApp groups give Volunteers who will arrive together a head start in connecting. Each Volunteer can write something about him or herself and get an idea who their coworkers will be.

Guidelines:

- These digital groups are facilitated by the Volunteer Coordinator.
- One or two weeks before arrival, there can be an additional online meeting with the Volunteer Coordinator, to deepen this connection and to answer remaining questions as Volunteers prepare to travel.

It's important to ask all of the Volunteers how they feel about having this group, agree on which one they prefer, and follow the consensus of the group.

Pluses:

- This makes arrival much smoother and jump starts the connection between Volunteers.

Minuses:

- Weak internet connections and/or no desire to use social media are potential difficulties with this practice.
- Some Volunteers may not want to share things before an actual physical meeting.

What is Needed:

- Good internet connection
- Consensus on social media use and forms
- Willingness to actively engage



Section B: Arrival

1. Induction Week

Ananda Gaorii inspired Ängsbacka, Sieben Linden Ecovillage and Cloughjordan Community Farm to adopt this practice.

They all now follow a week-long Induction process for newly-arrived Volunteers.

What is it/ How do you do it?

During the first week, Volunteers are introduced to the basic structure of the community in a *pre-arranged, week-long, timetabled Induction Programme*

Volunteers are given a print-out of that timetable, making it clear where they ought to be at any given time.

They can also be paired up with a “Buddy” who has been in the organisation long enough to show them around and answer questions.

Outline:

- Over the course of the week: Introductions are given to each Volunteer's working area, although Volunteers are generally not expected to work very much (*if at all*) during this first week.
However they can still be introduced to those individuals with whom they will be working in different capacities, including: Supervisors, Mentors and other people with specific roles related to their work.
- They also get to meet as many community members as possible or appropriate (*depending on the size of the community*).
The Volunteers receive introductions as to how everything works in the community and what they need to know for everyday life, as well as about the daily and weekly rhythms.
- There is time reserved for any necessary bureaucracy to be completed (*such as going to town and registering as a resident, for example*).
- Some communities such as *Cloughjordan* also provide team-building sessions, and introductory workshops in topics such as [Non-Violent Communication](#) and [Consent and Boundaries](#):
- At *Cloughjordan Community Farm*, these activities are structured in a way to facilitate the Volunteers getting to know each other, and to slowly begin to open up to each other. For example, when they are encouraged to talk about themselves, at first they are not asked any personal questions; then as the week progresses and the Volunteers become more comfortable with each other, they are encouraged to express more vulnerability (*if they are comfortable with this*).
- At the same time, practices such as [Reflective Listening](#) are introduced, which promote empathy. As are exercises in which they may be split into pairs, to support them to form connections with each other.



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- Volunteers may also be introduced to **decision making practices** (*in Cloughjordan, the Volunteers are guided through a decision-making process on the first day, to decide who will be taking which bedroom in their shared houses*).

Guidelines:

If all the previous Volunteers have already left and there is no overlap between the groups, it's wise to prepare during this time for the sudden shortage of people to help out in key areas where Volunteers usually work (*kitchen, garden, etc.*).

When planning this Induction Week, it's good to remember to keep a balance of different types of activities. For example, regularly switching between sitting and movement related activities is helpful. It's also helpful to include fun, social activities.

Pluses:

- Volunteers feel less overwhelmed and confused about being in a new place if the introduction process is clearly structured.
- They feel welcomed to the community, and get a clearer understanding of where they are and what they will be doing.
- They are also introduced to the social culture and practices of the community, and begin to practise skills that will support them to live in community themselves, and to avoid conflict.
- They build up strong connections with other Volunteers, and begin to form relationships with other community members.

Minuses:

- Be aware that Volunteers may not retain everything, especially if there is a lot of new info in a short space of time. *Important information is best repeated and should also be readily available elsewhere.*

Example: [Sieben Linden](#)



Section C. Community Living - Integration - Inclusion

1. Life Story Evening

This is practised at both Ängsbacka and Sieben Linden.

What is it/ How do you do it?

Each volunteer is given a space of 1-2 hours in the community programme to tell his or her life story, in whatever format they choose (*Powerpoint presentation with photos, a poem, song or dance, etc.*)

Pluses:

This gives the community a chance to get to know each person more intimately. When people get to hear a person's lived experience, it usually creates more compassion, especially regarding future conflict situations, and it fosters deeper mutual connection.

For the Volunteers, this is an opportunity to reflect on their lives and to introduce themselves to the community in the way they like best.

Minuses:

For a Volunteer who may have a fear of public speaking and/or for someone with a traumatic upbringing, this approach can be challenging as it can trigger emotional turmoil.

It's important to be sensitive to this and understand that it may not be the best way for the community to get to know every volunteer.

What is Needed:

- A designated slot in the Community programme
- Availability of the community members for 1-2 hours
- Time for the Volunteer to prepare a presentation.

2. A Weekly Programme

Ananda Gaorii, Ängsbacka, and Sieben Linden all have a programme of activities that take place at the same time every week.

What is it/ How do you do it?

Some of these are [Collective Practices](#), some are [Community Events](#) and some are workshops that support learning (*Language or NonViolent Communication*) and personal development (*Yoga or Inquiry*).

Pluses:

A Weekly Programme creates a sense of consistency amongst the community and allows Volunteers to find routine and structure within their daily lives.



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Minuses:

Organising this requires time and energy for those holding the weekly activities, including time given to find replacements for substitute facilitators, when regulars are unavailable.

What is Needed:

- a dedicated space
- a Coordinator
- time to organise, update, and make the schedule available.

3. Collective Practices

Community members at Ängsbacka and Ananda Gaorii participate in specific activities together on a daily/weekly/monthly basis that facilitate information sharing, develop positive group processes and/or share group spiritual practice.

These activities are mandatory in the above communities; every community member commits to participation when he or she signs the agreement to join the community, including Volunteers.

Examples include:

- morning meetings on working days
- [a weekly sharing](#)
- [a time slot allocated daily for meditation](#)
- a monthly forum or community circle.

These practices help to shape the essence of a community, and pave the way for the type of environment that is desired. They contribute to creating the community culture, which is a pre-existing framework within which the Volunteers insert themselves and from which they learn.

Guidelines:

- A strong culture of attendance by existing community members helps reinforce attendance by Volunteers, as well as making them part of working hours.
- If these are an extra commitment outside the normal working hours, this must be communicated clearly beforehand- at the time of recruitment.

What is Needed:

- A space for the practices
- Skilled facilitators, *especially in the case of forums and community circles.*



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4. Community Events/Celebrations

These are activities of a social/celebratory nature that take place on a regular basis (weekly or monthly).

Examples include:

- A café night every Saturday
- Special Meals together e.g. pizza nights
- Movie Nights
- Weekly Sauna
- ‘Open Mic’ nights
- Group Outings
- Dance Parties
- Collective Community Meals- in addition, some families host individual casual meals for the Volunteers in their houses
- Cultural events (Family Day, Christmas, Hallowe’en, Solstices, Santa Lucia)
- Attending local Markets with organisation’s produce

Pluses:

- This encourages the whole community to hang out and bond together, with activities that create a sense of togetherness, connection and celebration.
- Actively inviting the Volunteers to attend these activities supports them in connecting with those community members whom they don’t work with on a regular basis, and so enables them to feel more integrated within the wider community.
- Such interaction helps the Volunteers to recognise the broader context
For example: The Volunteers at Cloughjordan have unique access to a model for sustainable living that extends beyond the Community Farm, as the farm is set within Ireland's *only* Ecovillage: this setting allows them to place what they are doing on the farm, i.e. growing sustainably, within the human, ecological and environmental context- and within the global context of transition to lower carbon living and combating climate change. This makes for a richer, more layered learning experience.
- Attending community cultural and social events allows the Volunteers to connect with the culture of the country they are temporarily living in (*for example: the Midsummer Festival in Sweden*).

Minuses:

- Some aspects of some celebrations in the local culture may conflict with the values and beliefs of a Volunteer and cultural interpretation/bridging might be needed
- Social events may not be the best setting for *introverts* to actually connect with other people, as they may feel intimidated by the energy of the group.
A possible solution is to organise smaller group or one-on-one social opportunities such as: “Speed Dating” nights where community members meet each other one-on-one at a table with preset topics or Quiz Nights, in which each Volunteer is integrated into a team.
- Preparing these events can take time and energy that distracts from work.



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What is Needed:

- space within the community life
- facilitators
- communication channels for invitations
- transportation (if attending local markets)



Section D: Workflow and Social Cohesion

Becoming a cohesive team and preventing conflict:

A whole year of volunteering, often far from home and within a different culture, language and setting, and living and working in close proximity to others of diverse backgrounds and languages is an intense experience, regardless of age or life story.

Although young people who volunteer for this type of adventure are generally highly adaptable and eager for new experiences, problems can arise within any group if attention is not paid to the fundamentals of living and working together.

Fostering positive group dynamics from the beginning is crucial to individual and group success. Establishing clear boundaries and guidelines from the beginning creates a container in which this once-in-a-lifetime experience generates meaningful learning and enjoyment.

1. Communication Tools

As practised at Ängsbacka; Cloughjordan.

i. Temperature check: when making a proposal for an action/decision to be adopted, ask the group - ideally during a group meeting - to show with their thumb how they feel about it (from *thumb down* = strong no, to *thumb up* = enthusiastic yes)

ii. Non Violent Communication (NVC): [Non Violent Communication](#)

An elaborate communication method developed by *Marshall Rosenberg*, which focuses (*among other concepts*) on 4 main steps:

1. the speaker describe with facts (*not judgements, assumptions or interpretations*) what the issue is for them
2. they then describe the feelings that it causes (*always with "I", not "you"*)
3. proceed with what the unmet needs behind those feelings are
4. conclude with a request (*not a demand*) to their interlocutor.

The goal is to maintain the connection between the 2 persons, above all, and to find "win-win" solutions - where the needs of both persons are met.

iii. Empathic listening: listening to a person while they are sharing what is going on for them

- without interrupting, giving advice or judging
- focusing on a posture of loving presence (as a safe container for the other person, allowing them to unfold).

iv. Reflective listening/Mirroring: listening to a person's sharing and then repeating as precisely & faithfully as possible what you heard them saying (*without responding or interpreting*). [Reflective listening](#)

v. Emotional Backpack: [Emotional Backpack](#) (*in German*)

Guidelines:

These approaches need to be practised and implemented well, with adequate time devoted to reaching understanding, so these in depth processes should be guided by an experienced practitioner or they can fail to have the expected impact.



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Pluses:

These communications tools help:

- foster authentic, open-hearted and quality communication
- develop caring relationships and
- help to prevent conflict and find resolution
- Ultimately make for a more harmonious community.

Teaching the Volunteers these tools enables them to navigate community living in the most collaborative way, and to develop skills that will be useful in any human interaction.

Minuses:

Some tools, such as NVC, can be quite complex in their nuances and require a trained teacher (*otherwise the risk is to misapply them in a way that then doesn't foster quality communication*).

These tools are not learned in one workshop- they require dedicated & repeated practice, which means some of the working hours of Volunteers might need to be allocated to that regular practice.

Implementation requires:

- Trained teachers for applying some tools.
- Dedicated space and time to practice regularly.

2. Mentoring

Implementation of a Mentorship system to support the Volunteers is essential to support their healthy long term engagement with the organisation and there are many different models out there. The most effective and straightforward model appropriate to the number of Volunteers, and taking into consideration the specific demands of their work, should be adopted.

Providing structured Mentorship to the young Volunteers is essential good practice in helping foster harmonious working relationships, providing internal and external help and advice to newly arrived Volunteers and in providing a safety net that will enhance their confidence in new working and living territory.

i. Volunteer Coordinators as Mentors:

As practised by Cloughjordan; also partially by Ängsbacka: current Volunteer Coordinators are trained Counsellors

The Volunteer Coordinators are the first port of call for the Volunteers.

They resolve practical and daily living issues as well as ensuring smooth running of the programme, encouraging and facilitating extra learning, training and personal projects - but they can also act as Volunteer Mentors.

Our Volunteer Coordinators conduct additional one on one meetings that are less about work progress and more about additional social/personal issues or challenges.



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They can also help sort out minor disagreements or disputes that are work or home based.

Minuses:

- The Volunteer Coordinators are already handling a very heavy workload in managing the ESC Volunteer programme and in conducting all related workshops and feedback sessions, reporting back to the various organisations involved- the Community farm Board, the National Agency, the Sending organisation and to the ESC programme itself. Taking on a Mentorship role in addition to all the above can really increase the burden of work and there is enhanced risk of Coordinator burnout.
- It may also be difficult to maintain clear boundaries between the managing of the Volunteer programme, which involves conducting Volunteer evaluations, and being Mentors to individual Volunteers.
- Also they must be aware of and try to maintain the boundaries between being the ESC Volunteer Programme Coordinators and Evaluators, and acting as Personal Mentors: i.e. the Volunteer Coordinators have to be mindful about **conflict of interest**.
- If a problem is arising due to their handling of a Volunteer situation- or in fact if they somehow are seen as a cause or partial cause of a problem- they must be ready to call on external/neutral help and assistance for the Volunteer.
- They must also be mindful of their personal capacity in terms of energy and time, to be effective Mentors to the Volunteers as well as successfully running the ESC Programme as Coordinators.

ii. Peer Mentoring

As practised at Ananda Gaorii

Outline

Each ESC volunteer receives two Mentors upon arrival.

- One is external i.e. from outside of the Organisation, which the Organisation chooses for them.
- The second is an ESC Volunteer from the previous generation of Volunteers.

A ritual is held with [‘speed-dating’ sessions](#) to enable the Volunteers to choose their ESC-Mentor from that previous group.

During their volunteering term, each new ESC Volunteer has Check-ins, Reflection and Reviewing sessions with their Mentor once every 1-2 months, depending upon need.

Guidelines

Be aware that the main purpose of this approach is the creation of more trusting relationships *between the previous and new Volunteers*, as well as between Volunteers and the community.

Pluses:

- Helps Volunteers overcome any difficulties arising during the adaptation period directly after arrival.



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- Helps the new group of Volunteers to get into the flow of the community faster and to better connect with their new community through previous Volunteers.
- As an organisation, it meant that the **previous ESC generations who were already directly experienced** in many problems that could arise for new recruits started to do a big part of this welcoming and induction job - and so it has become more like peer sharing and learning, which is more effective than the organisation imparting abstract information.
- This form of Mentorship practice helps Volunteers to receive support and suggestions from people who had similar experiences to them in the past and to understand the fact that many of the things that they are going through are not unusual- **that other young people before them also went through similar things.**
- It is also easier to collect and act upon direct feedback, as this **less formal peer led process** allows for more honest sharing.

Minuses:

- People who weren't involved with the ESC programme, but who wanted to become a Mentor to the ESC Volunteers felt excluded.
We overcame this issue via sharing sessions and providing info and explanations as to the importance of this practice remaining between ESC programme Volunteers.

iii. Additional Mentoring Supports:

Trained Counsellor: To support the Coordinators we also have at least one trained counsellor who meets with the Volunteers on a regular basis and who can increase these meetings to address any emerging issues with any particular individuals.

Professional Services: The above team also have access to nearby Professional Services for more serious issues including physical and mental health services.

Friends of Volunteers:

Cloughjordan have created a less formal network- a Whatsapp group *called Friends of Volunteers:* They are members of the wider Cloughjordan Community who can be called upon to help with practical issues i.e. offer lifts to town, provide clothing/equipment/food ingredients etc. Sometimes the Friends may even suggest outings and activities: cookery lessons, trips to the lake, etc.

In *Sieben Linden* this informal Support Group are known as **Buddies or Godparents** and they are assigned to individuals:

'Buddy' system:



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Inspired by Sieben Linden; as practised at Sieben Linden, and practised in group form at Cloughjordan

What is it/How do you do it?

The community is informed about the arrival of new Volunteers and it is explained how they can become a *Buddy* or ‘*Godparent*’ to one of them.

At Sieben Linden the pairs mostly find each other organically after the Volunteer has his/her Life Storytelling evening with the community- which is how community members get to know the Volunteers better.

The community member then approaches the Volunteer and offers to be a Buddy.

Guidelines:

Regular check-ins with the Volunteer are essential, both if they already have a *Buddy/ Godparent* and if they do not, how they feel about that, and how best to support them otherwise.

Pluses:

- As the Volunteer Coordinator is assigned as “one mentor for all” i.e. not chosen by the Volunteers, not every Volunteer may be able to get along with that person and to share their emotions or problems with them, a deeper connection might develop with a *Buddy/ Godparent* - and that person is intended to be available for personal support and to answer questions about the community.
- The Buddy system is a support for the Volunteer Coordinator as s/he is able to check in with another person about a Volunteer if something occurs.
- Being informal, if the match doesn’t work out, the Volunteer and the Godparent are able to let the relationship go.

Minuses:

- If Community members aren’t naturally approaching the Volunteers, the matching process can take longer, leaving some Volunteers anxious.
- Some Volunteers are fine with just having the Volunteer Coordinator as “one mentor for all” and find the Buddy system unnecessary/intrusive.

What is Needed:

- Willing community members to step into the *Buddy/Godparent* role
- A process for enabling the matching of Volunteer with the Buddy (*e.g. Life Story evening as above, or other interactive info-sharing event.*)

Work Coordinator for Volunteers:

As practised by Cloughjordan Community Farm and Sieben Linden



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CCF has a dedicated *Farm Work Coordinator* who helps the Volunteers manage the task rota and guides the Volunteers' fieldwork, showing them how to perform the practical tasks. At Sieben Linden each working area has a specific supervisor fulfilling that role.

Pluses:

- This specific role is highly useful for supporting the Volunteers' confidence and learning on the ground. The Work Coordinator can also be useful in encouraging team building and forging work solidarity.
- S/he can also be instrumental in initiating farm team social outings and activity days, to add another layer of richness to the Volunteers' experience.
- It helps ensure that work problems and issues arising get dealt with promptly and efficiently and creates *better Health and Safety standards* for all those involved, including the organisation itself.

Minuses:

- The Work Coordinator must maintain work boundaries and not try to take the place of personal mentors
- S/he must also have the communication skills and experience to translate the Work Leader's e.g. Farmer's needs to the Volunteers

3. Conflict Prevention

Volunteer Manifesto

Cloughjordan Community Farm has found that a positive way of developing good co-working practices is for Volunteers to:

- Co-create their own Manifesto or Charter to self-govern expected behaviour, (*rather than simply imposing an external set of rules created by the organisation*).
- This co-creation is in itself a bonding exercise for the group and establishes from the group's onset the best practices of active listening and incorporating the needs of others.

Ideally, this collaboratively produced Manifesto is a set of guidelines for individual behaviour, responsibility and accountability, and it encourages Volunteers towards working styles that reflect the core values of the organisation/community as well as their own. The values in the Manifesto can also cover shared living spaces and interactions during personal time.

During the co-creation, Volunteers necessarily consider what positive interactions look like to them and reflect on potential issues that might arise, which also means thinking about how to resolve minor conflicts within the group, before they become more significant and need outside mediation.

Areas that can be addressed in the Manifesto include:



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- Etiquette for meetings, including an individual check-in before starting
- Clear communication and the importance of active listening
- A clear and accessible process for resolution of issues
- A safe space for discussing issues/problems
- Accountability for agreed-on tasks and quality of work
- Ways to support each other, including appreciation of skills and strengths
- Guidelines for interactions between Volunteers and Supervisors/ Coordinators, including:
 - mutual respect
 - fair distribution of tasks
 - clarity about working roles and boundaries

Addressing the above areas forges solidarity, and helps develop a culture of positively and promptly meeting difficult issues - before they become entrenched.

Guidelines:

- *This process is best guided by a Mentor with experience in group facilitation, counselling, and/or conflict resolution, who encourages authentic team-building and collaboration: An experienced mentor guiding the process creates a safe and confidential space in which all team members can expose their vulnerabilities or concerns.*
- The quality of the document—how much people feel heard within it, and trust in it—depends upon whole-hearted participation by everyone and the authenticity of the process.
- The approach to framing the Manifesto and creating its content should also reflect the foundational values of the organisation, such as: inclusion, equality and fairness.
- The focus on collaboration and accurately reflecting the group's wishes and values is far more important than hitting pre-determined guidelines or having ideal content.

The Manifesto is far more effective when actively integrated into the Volunteers' daily lives, and implemented as part of the rituals within their working week.

For example, relevant Manifesto contents can be referred to at the start of meetings and work check-ins, and can be reinforced via regular meetings with the Volunteers' Mentors, Work Leaders and Coordinators.

Additional tools such as [Life Stories](#), [Sharing Circles](#), and [Non-Violent Communication](#) (all presented elsewhere in this document) can also strengthen the group solidarity formed by co-creating this Manifesto.

Implementation requires:

- an experienced Mentor
- a private space for the co-creation
- pens/paper/drawing materials
- a digital space in which to share the final agreed-upon document



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4. Serious Conflict Resolution

Grievance Procedure

This more formal process is initiated when there is a serious grievance to be addressed, when the next step could be legal action.

The process must also be of a standard befitting the organisation's legal obligations under its agreement with the ESC programme, so it must bear scrutiny and demonstrate fairness both to the Volunteer(s) involved and to the host organisation.

Points to note:

Grievance procedures involving *employees* inside an organisation differ from those involving Volunteers in an NGO or a Social Enterprise.

The type we are looking at below is the latter, *and is an informal Grievance Procedure without legal consequences. It is designed for conflict resolution within NGOs and in non-corporate settings in which Volunteers are involved.*

There are many online training courses and guidelines for those wishing to implement a grievance procedure within their organisational setting.

Guidelines:

It usually involves:

- neutral representatives from the Board of the organisation
- the parties involved in the conflict themselves
- advocates or support people for both sides, and
- neutral observer(s) to ensure a fair process.

Ideally, the neutral observer(s) have counselling, human resources or grievance hearing experience.

It is vital that a fair and transparent grievance process allows:

- the facts of the case to be discovered and assessed by parties not involved directly in the dispute
- preserves confidentiality around sensitive issues
- assesses the facts
- decides and implements appropriate consequences and measures to avoid the issue in future.

Clough Jordan has designed a Grievance Procedure which contains the following elements:

- Establishment of a Grievance Panel, made up of:
 - 2 members of the Board to represent the Organisation
 - A Volunteer Coordinator as an advocate for the Volunteers
 - A trained Counsellor as neutral observer
 - Mentors/advocates/supportive friends for each Volunteer



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- Mentors/advocates/supportive friends for each party involved directly in the complaint
- Language support for those participants not fluent in the language used for the process

Step One

A Hearing: The Grievance Panel conducts individual interviews with all relevant parties to establish the facts of the case: the interview process should be designed more as a safe space for discovering relevant information than as an interrogation! The questions should be framed to be open-ended, to allow for open answers, and should not be directed, intrusive or aggressive.

Hearing Interview Questions and Procedure:

- Standardise interview questions for all interviewees, to ensure fairness and to enable honest, constructive answers (*the questions are best prepared with the aid of a trained HR person/counsellor/mediator*)
- Add a few more detailed and relevant questions, if necessary, for both parties directly linked to the complaint
- Schedule interview times to suit each of the interviewees
- Arrange for a support person of each interviewee's choice to be present
- Ensure that a representative of the organisation and of each of the parties takes notes to ensure objectivity, balance and accuracy in recording the facts of the issue, plus the suggestions for improvement

Before each interview, a spokesperson for the Grievance Panel states:

1. The hearing's intent:
 - to find the facts and take positive action to help the situation
 - that all relevant parties will be heard
 - that this process is a fact-finding mission and not a legal tribunal

2. The hearing's objectivity and safety:
 - Each of the people in the room and is introduced and his or her role is explained
 - The interviewee is assured that the complaint is being taken seriously and acted upon for his or her welfare and for the good of the team
 - The spokesperson emphasises that this is a confidential, safe space in which to express anything

3. Encouragement for all interviewees to:
 - honestly share any and all relevant experiences with regard to the complaint/issue
 - take their own notes during the process
 - ask questions for information or clarification
 - make suggestions for positive improvements which might prevent the situation from arising again



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Step Two- Post Hearing

Immediate Actions:

- The Grievance Panel reviews and agrees upon the facts and the necessary steps to resolve the situation
- The panel then implements these steps as soon as possible, with urgency if necessary

Examples of possible immediate actions/consequences (*may be more than one*):

- a written warning with a clear outline of consequences for failing to adapt behaviour accordingly
- reparation of some sort to the aggrieved party
- participation in further training
- temporary suspension
- a report to the sending organisation
- removal from the workplace
- removal from the shared living space
- sending Volunteer home/ending a Volunteer's internship

Follow-up actions may also be recommended by the grievance panel, such as:

- Mediation with a trained counsellor and/or individual mentorship
- Team building sessions
- Increased work supervision
- Better supervision, support, communication, reporting and feedback structures
- Better Human Resources management
- Training for all Volunteers in interpersonal boundaries/consent (*covering sexual harassment/bullying/racism, etc*)
- Seeking legal advice
- Taking legal action

Step Three: Evaluation

Some time after the Hearing, perhaps about a month later, the Grievance Panel should reassess the situation to determine:

- how well this issue has been resolved,
- what specific actions have been taken to prevent a recurrence of the same issue.

Pluses:

Any ethically-run organisation with strong social justice values at its core needs to invest resources in a good process for:

- resolving serious conflict
- responding to issues promptly to prevent the same things from happening again.

With this process in place, issues can be resolved before they escalate to legal action.

Minuses:



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- Any Grievance Process must be carefully designed and run to ensure objectivity and fairness. If it is not, then the situation can escalate further and have long term consequences, not just for the parties involved, but for the organisation and its place in the ESC programme: in more serious cases the ESC/Erasmus commission may take steps to shut down a Volunteer programme and prevent an organisation from running any Volunteer programmes in the future.
- Failure of the Grievance Process may mean legal action taken by a Volunteer against the organisation.

What is Needed:

- Organisational involvement at all levels: Board, Work Supervisors, Volunteer Coordinators , Mentors, Advocates, Language Support, Counsellors.
- Private dedicated interview space for 3-5 days.
- A confidentiality agreement.
- A transparent and fair process - with balance and objectivity built into the process.



Section E: Learning and Personal Development

1. Community ‘Apprenticeship’

As practised in Cloughjordan

Mentors and Friends can help facilitate wider social and community connection for Volunteers but developing ties with individual community members *so they can offer training in some of their own specific skills* is a real bonus to the Volunteer experience.

Community member skills and jobs can include:

Craftspeople, chefs, natural bread bakers; musicians, artists and dancers; videographers, storytellers and dramatists; actors, directors and writers; cooks, herbalists, horticulturalists; masseurs, acupuncturists and psychotherapists; civil and water engineers, green builders and town planners; graphic designers, IT specialists and web designers; ceramicists, sculptors and fine artists; beekeepers, sustainable growing researchers and climate activists.

All of these are members of the local Cloughjordan community, from whom the Volunteers can learn so much on a less formal basis. Many sustainable communities contain people with interesting and useful skill sets.

2. Reflection on Learning

Group Sessions:

More is shared in the “[Departure](#)” Category in relation to this topic.

What is it/ How do you do it?

The Volunteer Coordinator meets with the Volunteers on a weekly or fortnightly basis to reflect on learning goals and outcomes. *Other Reflective Practices may be introduced (see below).*

Pluses:

- The Volunteers get regular opportunities to reflect on where they are at and what they want to accomplish. This helps them to get problems off their chest, to focus a bit more on what they really want to achieve and to move towards solving some issues.
- As the session includes a combination of writing down and sharing these reflections, it helps the group stay in touch with and to understand each other, as well as get in touch with themselves.

Minuses:

- Takes up the Volunteer Coordinator’s time.
- Requires creativity regarding the activities to avoid mundane, didactic activities which could create a sense of ‘being at school’ for those partaking and so lose their interest.

What is Needed:

- Time and willingness to participate and engage



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3. Guided Reflection Activities

i. Reflection Questionnaire

As inspired by Ananda Gaorii, and practised at Ananda Gaorii, Ängsbacka and Cloughjordan

To encourage Volunteers to notice their learnings, self observe their growth and to give them a sense of purpose and added motivation to stay on to complete the programme.

What is it/ How do you do it?

The Volunteer Coordinator creates a *Reflection Questionnaire* to be filled out by Volunteers. This can include questions regarding:

- learning goals
- frustrations
- accomplishments
- unmet needs
- realisations
- personal projects

Pluses:

- It supports more focus and clarity on individual learning goals and therefore promotes a greater sense of achievement.

Minuses:

- The implementation itself can be time consuming for the Volunteer Coordinator
- Requires creativity regarding the activities to avoid mundane, didactic activities which could create a sense of 'being at school' for those partaking and so lose their interest.

What is Needed:

Time and space.

*Other forms are actual **Reflection Sessions, Sharing Circles** and related content within the [Volunteer Handbook](#) - which can contain various **Reflection Activities and other supportive tools.***

ii. Sharing Circles:

Inspired by Ängsbacka: As practised at Ängsbacka, Ananda Gaorii and Sieben Linden

This is a conscious reflection practice that gives each individual the space to look inwards to gain insight and understanding of their current position.

What is it/ How do you do it?

The Volunteering Community is divided into small 'sharing groups' of 4-6 people, usually within their own working teams, and they attend the sharing practice twice a week.

This practice involves:

- finding a quiet private space for your sharing group and standing or sitting in a circle



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- having an introductory 5 minute silent meditation to 'land' in the room. (*Usually there is one person with a timer set on the phone*)
- Once 5 minutes has passed, the group hold hands to join the circle and form the circle of trust: they close their eyes and connect with each other. (*There is no set time for this part. It lasts as long as one of the members of the circle feels ready to start and then*):
- Gently squeezes the hands he/she holds.
- The one who got their hand squeezed repeats this motion until all hands have gently signalled to each other. (*Often this happens so fast that it is hard to tell which member started the process*)
- After the hands let go of each other, each member has 5 minutes of uninterrupted attention. (*Again this is usually set by a timer.*)
- The person whose turn it is to share, shares about what is happening for them in that moment. (*It is not usually about your day, or what happened the day before, but rather what is alive for you at that present moment. The purpose of the sharing is for the one who shares to experience what is alive in them- not for the listeners.*)
- If the person comes to a stop during their 5 minutes, they still get the remaining time of the 5 minutes.
- Whilst the person is sharing, the purpose for the rest of the group is to simply hold space and to witness this person, without reacting or responding.
- As a general rule, you do not comment on someone's sharing either during it, or after it is finished.
- Once everyone has shared for 5 minutes, the group holds hands again to close the circle.

The Sharing Circle Steps condensed:

- **5 Minute silent sitting together** (*timed*)
- **Group holds hands, to form the circle** (*Someone squeezes when they feel they have held hands for long enough*)
- **5 Minute sharing for each member of the group** (*Can be longer in case of less participants.*)
- **Group holds hands to close**

Usually the whole process lasts 30-60 minutes, depending on the group size.

Another version of this practice could be to hold a bigger whole group circle of the Volunteering community, where each member of the circle has a short time to express what is alive in them at the present moment.

Be aware that this approach will be time-consuming. Can be a good choice to set a 1-2 minute on a timer as a maximum time for one person in this context.

Guidelines:

- Even though for many of us an urge arises during the process to express our views or offer helpful advice, **the main purpose of this practice is to just be a listener- and to gift our attention to others.** The beauty of this type of sharing is that safety is created by just being seen and not receiving any reaction- especially not advice.
- Everything shared in this space is confidential and is not to be spoken about to each other or anyone else.



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- If however you feel there is something you would like to speak to a member of your group about, you wait 24 hours and if you still would like to, you then ASK the person 'May I ask you something, or mention something about what you shared yesterday?'. It is then down to that person to answer yes or no.
- It can bring safety to have a fixed sharing group but sharing with new groups can bring valuable new dynamics, too.

Pluses:

- The intention is to create a peaceful environment for the practice and to ensure privacy, by guaranteeing that no one's intimate sharing is interrupted by other community members.
- This practice can therefore create interpersonal trust between community and team members and help act as a coping mechanism, in particular during the busy seasons when there is relentless work pressure
- People often resist sharing at first but then feel liberated afterwards, for having received the space to be seen and heard.
- It also is quite common that being gifted this 5-minute space with the non judgemental attention of the group can create a safe container to allow the release of any emotions that may be underneath the surface.
- Whilst you are talking, a conclusion or a breakthrough can often occur.

Minuses:

- If confidentiality is breached, it can lead to a loss of trust and potential harm.
- If someone doesn't feel particularly safe in their sharing group to engage in the practice or to dig deep, it can have an adverse effect, whereby issues/problems become 'bottled up' and can therefore cause more stress and instability for the person.
- Some people might find their sharing group challenging because of group size, gender balance, and/or lack of trust in personal connection.
- There might be sensitivity and insecurity regarding changing a sharing group after being in the same group for a long time.
- This practice, which is designed to be regular, can eat into work time e.g. if a particular sharing opens someone up into a vulnerable or overwhelmingly emotional state, some members of the group could feel responsible to then console them after the sharing has finished, which can spill over into working time.
(This can happen with short term Volunteers, who may not have yet learned how to balance their volunteering hours in relation to the time devoted to holding space for someone's emotional process).
- Sharing every day in the busy months can become tiresome and can lead to one feeling pressured to share something significant.
In particular, those work leaders who hold a heavy workload can feel that it is a costly and inefficient use of their time.
(Holding the practice less often might be the solution.)



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What is Needed:

Time is needed: 30-60 minutes- *depending on the group size*

Also a Timer.

Resources, links:

[Sharing at Ängsbacka](#)

iii. Silent Sitting / Meditation Spot

Practised by Ananda Gaorii, Ängsbacka, Sieben Linden

- To provide a sense of rest
- To promote well-being
- To act as a tool for managing stress levels

Pluses: Meditation practices act as quality time with oneself, away from the external stimulation involved with living within a community, and offers a quiet few moments of peace.

Minuses:

- Can cause distraction from workflow if the practice is done within volunteering hours and can encourage too great a sense of relaxation around volunteering responsibilities.
- Requires correct seating and/or posture to support people's bodies, to prevent back pain or injury.

What is Needed:

- A silent room/meditation space with no interruptions.
- Comfortable, supportive chairs or cushions.



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4. Workshops held by the Volunteers

As practised at Ängsbacka, Ananda Gaori, Sieben Linden

These are spaces and time slots specifically designated for Volunteers to be able to offer workshops and activities for the rest of the community.

For example: *yoga classes, singing circles, movie nights, astrology lessons, dance classes, open mic and poetry nights.*

Pluses:

- Adds more to the Volunteer's experience outside of their volunteering work hours. This interactive space also provides Volunteers with the opportunity to pilot-run any talents, skills, interests and creative ideas they may have.
- It provides a 'laboratory' platform, offering Volunteers the space to allow their personal confidence to grow as they step into the gifts they may not have realised were significant before.

Minuses:

- For Volunteers who have a lot of creativity and ideas, it is possible they could take on too much which, in addition to their volunteering hours, could lead to them feeling overwhelmed, which could then lead to burnout.
- Having too dense a programme, with multiple workshops, could create exhaustion for Volunteers if they try to implement or attend everything.

What is Needed:

- Available workshop spaces outside of Volunteer working hours
- A Supervisor or Coordinator to help manage the workshops- and manage expectations!

5. Digital tools to Support Volunteers Learning

Pre-arrival it is highly useful for Volunteers to be able to connect with you and/or with former, current or future Volunteers.

Digital tools like: *WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal* or online meetings via *Zoom/Fairmeeting* can be really useful.

During their stay in our community, a shared *Miro Board* might be a great way to receive feedback or to guide the Volunteers on different topics, i.e. [learning and personal development](#).

The Virtual ecovillage of [Bridgedale](#) and the games that are provided there can really support you and the Volunteers in different situations.



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6. Sustainability

Setting the Context

Inspired by Cloughjordan Community Farm and now practised by Sieben Linden, Ängsbacka, Ananda Gaori and Cloughjordan Community Farm

What is it/ How do you do it?

When welcoming ESC Volunteers to the Farm project and the Ecovillage, we include a session on *Context* on their first Induction day.

The Context for this activity is nestled in Sustainability Values:

One of the key values and core advantages of living in an Intentional Community is our focus on developing the resilience needed to face current and future challenges: Climate breakdown is the crisis that we are trying to build a better world in the face of, and everything we do aims to be regenerative for people and the planet so that we can thrive and not just survive.

How we live this out in actuality is demonstrated in all our choices; for instance:

- using green modes of travel
- eating seasonal local food
- supporting the local economy over global supply chains
- using organic products
- minimising waste etc.

All of these are wonderful things to do but individual acts and large-scale change need to go hand in hand.

Although on Cloughjordan Community Farm, the ways we produce food and the ethos of our project all fall within the context of living regeneratively, it is important to link this approach with the *European Youth Goals*, namely *Sustainable Green Europe*, and to explore how sustainability supports the other Goals.

Note: It is also really important to convey the essence of this approach during the initial interview process - so that Volunteers are aligned with the values and Sustainability Mission of the community's activity.

Pluses:

- The benefit of making this context explicitly clear is to ground the Volunteers' experience of living in the community, and all of their related project activities, within a lens of wellbeing - for people and planet - the actions of the present taking care of the future.
- It is this kind of caring worldview that we are trying to nurture in the young people who come to an ESC placement. They are the ones inheriting our world and who will shape societal culture.

Minuses:

- If our ESC projects do not support our local and global ecosystems, then there are serious issues to be addressed and changes to make.
- That the worldview and sense of social responsibility can be overwhelming, and contribute to anxiety.
- It is vital to support the young people with the spaces to connect emotionally to themselves and others, and to be able to share their feelings and opinions in those safe, connecting spaces.



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- It is also important to be aware of the contrast that some may experience between their lifestyle on the project and their lifestyles prior to their ESC experience. e.g. Volunteers can become nervous as to how they will re-integrate socially, after the project ends.

Guidelines:

Be careful not to instil guilt, judgement, blame or personal criticism in the Volunteers or of others who are not appearing to live in the same value system of your approach to sustainability.

This is, after all, a shared challenge that needs a sense of unity in response, not a condition to measure others against, and feel 'better' than them due to our own responses.

There are **useful tools (see below)** that can help with absorbing the wider context but contacting those members of your community with the relevant knowledge and a willingness to inform and introduce the Volunteers to the wider community activity picture, is mostly what is required.

What is Needed:

- The space being made for that for Volunteers during Induction Week.
- The Expertise to inform the Volunteers of the climate and carbon context

Resources:

[Active Hope](#) and [Sharing Circles](#)



Section F: Departure

1. Departure Rituals

(e.g. Tree Dedication, Last Trip, Departure Circle)

As inspired by Sieben Linden and practised at Sieben Linden, Ananda Gaorii and Ängsbacka

What is it/ How do you do it?

Some form of send-off activity around the time of Departure. For example:

- Planting a Tree in the community for each Volunteer who has committed to the programme
- having a joint Group Trip somewhere together for one last time or
- Holding a ritual e.g. a Departure Circle where each Volunteer can share how their experience has been.

Pluses:

- Good way for Volunteers to gain a sense of closure on their experience
- Can serve as a final, connecting activity for the group before they go their separate ways.
- The tree dedication for example also provides some comfort as it gives the message that the Volunteers have a place in the community, are always welcome and will always have a home there.

Minuses:

- Departure time is usually a busy and stressful time for most Volunteers as they begin saying goodbye to the community and planning their next move.
- This final activity could create some feelings of overwhelm as Volunteers perceive it as 'yet another thing' to add to their already limited time

What is Needed:

- Time and planning: Giving the Volunteers a fair warning in advance so that they can plan their departure around this event or ritual.
- Community participation.

2. Supporting the Departure Process (*Anxiety, Foggy plans, Desire Map*)

As practised by Ananda Gaorii, Ängsbacka, Sieben Linden, Cloughjordan

Offering tools and activities to help Volunteers get in connect with their intention for their next steps and enable them to envision and discuss their next steps:

- by for example, creating Desire Maps (what do I want to learn?)
- having One to One Departure Sessions.

Pluses:

- This helps mentor Volunteers throughout the end period of the programme, to support them through any anxiety they may have around their future plans.

Minuses:

- Could have an adverse effect if not executed in a mindful manner



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- Some Volunteers may be more spontaneous with their planning and there is a need to formulate questions in a way that does not plant unnecessary seeds of worry or urgency.

What is Needed:

- Time and planning for a formal ritual or set procedure

3. Time Capsules (*letter to yourself, picture*)

As practised by Ängsbacka, Sieben Linden

What is it/ How do you do it?

Volunteers create a 'capsule' item within the first week (or ideally first day) they arrive. It can be:

- a letter or a painting
- a piece of art or simply
- a detailed version of what they hope to get out of their volunteering programme.

The Volunteers then give this to their Coordinator, who keeps hold of them and returns them to the Volunteers within the last week of the programme

Pluses:

- It supports Volunteers to get in contact with their intentions at the beginning of their programme and helps them to reflect back over their time, and what they have achieved, since, after the piece is returned to them.
- Creates a feeling of connection and nostalgia and also hopefully a sense of achievement, that they have completed their time - by helping them look back at how far they have come since first creating the piece

Minuses:

It could lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment if the goals that were first intended were not met within their time on the programme.

What is Needed:

- Ensuring a safe and private space to keep the capsule items in for the duration of the programme.
- Care and compassion during the return process, and preparedness to counsel anyone disappointed or upset.
- Planning of ritual
- Presence of Volunteer Coordinator and/or Mentor, if separate.

4. Momento

As practised at Sieben Linden and Ananda Gaorii

What is it/ How do you do it?

Presenting Volunteers with an item of some kind to remember the community by and also their experience on the programme whenever they see the item e.g. a small plaque, badge, ornament



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Pluses:

- Provides a solid sign of community appreciation for work done
- Reminds Volunteers of their dedication, commitment and their achievement- in completing the programme and making those valuable connections
- Maintains a tangible connection between the Volunteer and the community

Minuses:

Depending on the item, it could be a little costly for the community

What is Needed:

- Time and Materials to make the Momento
- Funding to pay for its design and production

5. Changeover Celebration

As practised at Sieben Linden

This is an evening celebration that we do every year- at the end of August when one group of Volunteers leaves and a new one starts at the beginning of September- with both arriving and departing groups being part of the celebration.

The whole community is invited and usually a lot of people come.

It is mostly about honouring the group leaving but the community also gets the chance at this ritual to briefly meet the new, incoming Volunteers.

The content of this ritual has been changing and evolving over the years. Here are some of the elements that have usually been part of it:

The setup:

- A room large enough to hold everyone- community and Volunteer groups.
 - Seating/sofas at the top of the room that the departing Volunteers are to sit on, facing the seated audience.
1. *The Angel Walk*: the departing group is made to wait outside the room door. They are then each led- blindfolded!!- into the room by their *Buddy/ Godparent (a community member that has had a supportive role towards them for the duration of their stay)*, where everyone else in the room has lined up in two facing rows.
 - The blindfolded Volunteers then slowly walk down between the two rows of gathered people, who welcome them with gentle touch but also then spin them around so they get disoriented.
 - When they arrive at the end of the row, a floral wreath is placed on their heads and they are seated on the sofas.
 2. *Community members are encouraged to speak, pop-up style, addressing the whole group or just one volunteer, voicing gratitude*: and sharing memories of beautiful moments they shared with the Volunteers:
 - Some contributions may be about their work, others can be more personal.



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3. *The departing Volunteers then get the chance to speak about what their experience has been like and what the year has meant to them.*
4. Towards the end of this Departure ritual, the Newly Arrived Volunteers briefly introduce themselves.

(In the past, departing Volunteers have prepared a little play about their time in the community which can be very funny. At other times, community members offer some clowning or their own comedy performance, or similar.)

Guidelines:

- Choose appropriate activities that all Volunteers involved feel comfortable with.
- Go through the ritual with them beforehand so they know what to expect.

Pluses:

- The purpose is to create connection and to give thanks to the Volunteers who are leaving.
- This fun ritual is an important part of the community giving their appreciation and expressing gratitude to the Volunteers.
- It reminds the community of the value of our volunteering activities and raises awareness around how much the Volunteers contribute to the life and the work of the community.
- It also creates a really warm and welcoming feeling for the newly arrived Volunteers

Minuses:

- Naturally, some of the new Volunteers feel shy to speak in front of so many people they don't know.
- For that reason, we keep the expectations very low and ask them just some basics: tell us your name, where you are from and which work placement you're in.
- For some, that is challenging enough. Others may talk a bit longer, saying more about themselves.

What is Needed:

- To plan the course of the evening
- A facilitator to lead through the different activities.