

**name:** Gehrs, Paula

**work:** two primary schools and a youth centre

**Hosting Organisation:** Fekete Sereg Ifjúsági Egyesület

If I had to choose a motto to describe my exact 142 days here in Hungary, I would choose “Where is the stop button?”. Not only because it is hard to find stop buttons in Hungarian buses but also because I am quite surprised how the time passes so quickly. To be honest, it is hard to remember my first weeks here and that’s why I am glad to have a blog where I can look at my experiences once again. Have also a look under [paulasblog.de](http://paulasblog.de)



### My arrival

On my arrival, my first impression was, “I don’t understand a word!”. Although I started to learn the first words of Hungarian in summer before my departure, it is always a big difference between the book language and the language which actually is spoken in real life. And usually, languages consist of more than “Hello” and “Thank you”. Due to this, I was glad that I was picked up at my arrival at the Eastern railway station in Budapest by another volunteer. Together with an Italian and an English volunteer, who arrived on the same day, we made our way together towards Nagyvázsony.

### My accommodation

In the village of 1800 inhabitants, which is located in the west of the Lake Balaton, I live together with other volunteers. In total, we have five beds that are divided into two rooms. Even though the furniture looks like it was taken out of GDR-museum, it is working and this is the main thing. Since I only lived at my parents before, the life in a shared flat was new for me and I enjoy it a lot. I particularly like the chance to get to know a lot of people because I am one of two the long-term volunteers, who stays for one year, whereas the other volunteers stay mostly two months. That gives me the opportunity to live together with various people of different cultures for example from the UK, Austria, Italy, India and Uruguay. As it is very common in Germany to go abroad directly after finishing the high school, the German volunteers are often the youngest. So am I. While my flatmates are between 25 and 31 years old, I am with 18 years the youngest but for me it doesn’t make a big difference.

We usually cook and eat together which I like. I am the only volunteer working in two primary schools whereas the other volunteers mostly work in the kindergarten. On Mondays and Tuesdays, I work in the school until approximately 3pm which is why I eat every Tuesday in the school canteen. This lunch I pay by myself.

In addition, we not only cook and eat together but of course we clean together, travel together and share the cost for the WIFI (5475HUF/17€ per month).

### My first weeks

Naturally, the first weeks were all about arriving and getting acquainted with the new people and new surroundings. It feels very different when you know that you will stay for one year here instead of just two weeks or two months. The fact that the Austrian volunteer had been in Nagyvázsony three weeks before us and could show us everything, was very useful. Besides, my kind mentor helps me a lot because she is really interested in my wellbeing, invites me



to events and I even spent Christmas among her family. More support I get from my hosting organisation *Fekete Sereg* and its staff. They are all very open and always ready to help. Especially in the beginning, I had sometimes the feeling that they forgot that I was just since a few weeks in Hungary but they patiently answered all my questions. I learned that it is worth it to just ask and not to be afraid of the answer. One just has to have the courage to ask because nothing worse than a “No.” could happen. In fact, that sounds easy but I became more aware of it and after I ask, the answers were all the time positive.

Most of all I am surprised by the village Nagyváz-

sony. Since I grew up in an equal village (regarding to the numbers of inhabitants) without any shopping possibilities, I expected the same in Hungary. But I was wrong. Here in Nagyvázsony are three little supermarkets, a restaurant, a pub, a post office, a school, a kindergarten, the youth centre and overall a very active village life which I like very much.



me, Gabriella from Uruguay and Ajeeja from India

## My work

I work in two primary schools and in a youth centre. One school is located in Balatonfüred, a town next to the Balaton Lake, and the other school is in Nagyvázsony. While I work in Balatonfüred on Mondays and Tuesdays, I am in Nagyvázsony on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. In the afternoons, I often go to the youth centre. For the school in Balatonfüred I take the bus and the travel costs are reimbursed.

In Hungary, the primary schools include the first up to the eights class. Because of this, I am at least on time in every class and I like this variation of working with children of different ages. My task is, to help in the German classes, and in Balatonfüred also one day in the English

classes. How exactly, is very different from teacher to teacher. Often, I speak face-to-face with students outside of the classroom, practice with them poems for poem competitions or I help the 8th-grader with their preparation for the entrance exams for the high school.

Sometimes, my tasks weren't challenging me enough or were boring but here again, it was worth it to just ask for more tasks. On my proposal whether I could do more, every teacher reacted very delightedly and positively. In this way I can contribute my strengths for example I wrote a theatre play inclusive the music or do presentations about my village, my school, German traditions etc.

In the youth centre I help where help is needed e.g. to create a newsletter or posters. In addition, *Fekete Sereg* often participates in different events for example celebrations in the village or workshops. Moreover, the volunteers are encouraged and supported to realise own projects which I recognise especially right now during my work on a small EVS video.

All in all, the teachers of both schools as well as the staff of *Fekete Sereg* are markedly kind and help me if I have a problem. In particular, I am really glad and appreciate the flexibility and spontaneity within my work.

## My everyday life

After the settling in, normality took over quickly. I'm putting a big effort into learning Hungarian and although I'm sometimes frustrated, my motivation stayed at the same level as it was in the beginning. Maybe it is even a little higher because I can directly use Hungarian in the daily life. Since not a lot Hungarian people speak foreign languages, one is forced to try at least a little Hungarian. Unfortunately, the Italian volunteer and I only have eight Hungarian lessons à 90min altogether which is enough for the basics but not for more. However, I learn a lot Hungarian together with a colleague of *Fekete Sereg* which I really appreciate. But I find it a pity that nobody of the other volunteers share my incentive to learn more Hungarian, so that I am on my own in this point.

Nevertheless, I get a lot of opportunities to practice Hungarian because I sing in a choir, play in an orchestra and join a ukulele club once in a months. For the cost caused by the buses to the city and back I pay for myself from my pocket money (38.483HUF/121€ per month). All the time, the youngsters are very open-minded and want to talk with me a lot. In this way I also learn about the opinions and thoughts of young Hungarian people and not only about the opinions of the other volunteers.

## My highlights and obstacles

The first highlight for me was the conference in September organised by *Fekete Sereg*. The topic of this conference was to plan the next volunteer projects and the participants were from France, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Estonia, Latvia etc. I never experienced this kind of internationality before and it was a great experience. This internationality endured because of two volunteers from India and Uruguay who stayed for two months with us. We got along very well and travelled together a lot.

Another highlight was the Advent-time with its lot events in the village and concerts with the choir and the orchestra. Moreover, in December seven short term volunteers stayed for three weeks with us. They were from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Latvia and Estonia. Their task was to do music and art workshops in different schools where I often joined them. I enjoyed it a lot and it brought an interesting change into my everyday work at school. With the short term volunteers we spent a lot of time together e.g. we cooked and had dinner together.

In the beginning of December I got the opportunity to lead a workshop about voluntary work within the German-Hungarian youth panel 2019 located in



the Andrassy University Budapest. In my opinion, this was a great experience to report other young people of my work. Shortly before Christmas, a German speaking radio show from Budapest discovered my blog and invited me for a radio interview. There I talked about my life as a volunteer in Hungary and I liked it to promote the EVS. Besides, the people there were really nice and said that I can come back again in the end of my EVS.

Since I didn't go back to Germany for Christmas but stayed in Hungary, I could experience the full range of Hungarian hospitality. For the Christmas days my mentor invited me, for what I am very grateful. On the following evenings I was invited by a girl from Nagyvázsony and also by one teacher. In my opinion, the Hungarians are very warm-hearted and I never left a house without been presented with food. For New Year's Eve I stayed together with volunteers that I knew from my on-arrival training in Budapest and we celebrated together the New Year.



Nevertheless, it is still sometimes difficult in a country whose national language I cannot speak. It's annoying that in situations, in that it is important to understand each other, I'm always dependent on help by others. In addition, my motivation has reached a low point at the moment and I am not as enthusiastic within my work as I was in the beginning. But I expected this and know that it cannot be all the time totally exciting. Moreover, my pre-departure training prepared me very well for this situation.

Because there are no other volunteers in the moment we are two in the flat. After one month I start to feel a little bit solitary so that I am looking forward to the new volunteers who will hopefully come soon.

### My upcoming months

Two big events are already settled for me and I am really looking forward to them. Firstly, I was invited for the kick off meeting of the "European Solidarity Corps Peers" in Brussels that take place in the end of March. Secondly, my orchestra will participate in a European music festival in Bulgaria and I will also join them. Besides there are several events in the schools for example carnival in February, an English and German poem competition and some trips.

When the winter is over I look forward to the "awake" of the region from its "winter sleep". Because in summer when the tourists are here, there are a lot of events but in winter, there is not much going on.

In addition, I hope I will come closer to answering the question what I should do after my EVS. In fact, it is not directly connected with my work but still a question which I think about every day. The insight into the work of a NGO gave me new impulses and helps me in it.

### All in all

To sum up, I can say that I am happy and pleased with my situation. I chose the right project and I am thankful for the flexibility of my hosting organisation *Fekete Sereg*. Not to forget my sending organisation *Internationale Freiwilligen-dienste* which really cares on me.

I am looking forward to the upcoming 220 days.

