

**ALODIA TORREA &  
MÁTÉ KARL**

**ESC  
DURING  
CORONA**

**CHERRY INTERNATIONAL  
FOUNDATION**

# Volunteering in the Netherlands

It is the 25th of February, 2021, a sunny afternoon, that we spend in the tibetan art museum we work at on Thursdays, located in a beautiful park in the center of Emmen, a city that lies on the eastern, rural part of the Netherlands. As always, the smell of insence and the gentle tibetan music serves as a great source of inspiration to do some creative work. Wow! If you tell me that a year ago I would have not believed my ears! So how did we end up here?

We are Alodia (20, Spain) and Máté (26, Hungary), two European youngsters who wanted to go abroad for a year to see how it is to live outside of our countries, to get to know another culture and to gain some brand new friendships and experiences. At least this is the rational explanation we give to other people when we are asked why we decided to plunge into this adventure. In reality, we simply had a call to go out there, and do something we have never done before.



With this call in our minds - and hearts - we discovered a program by the EU called ESC (European Solidarity Corps), created to give an opportunity for people like we are to do volunteer work somewhere in Europe for a year. On the ESC website we both came across an organisation from Dalen called Cherry International Foundation, that was looking for two volunteers, we both applied, and guess what, we got selected for their LIRA project. YAAY!

And then COVID-19 came. Actually it was already there when we applied, so we knew that things might not go as smoothly as we first imagined. So how is it for us to do our volunteer year during corona? Well, in a nutshell, we are limited in some ways, but an adventure is still an adventure, no matter what.

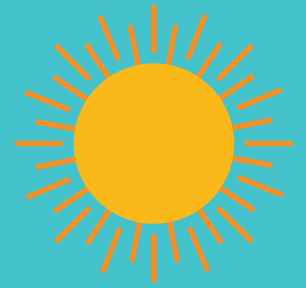
## The effects of the virus on our Voluntering



For us the biggest negative effect of the virus is that due to the restrictions we can't have as much social life as we wanted to. I guess that's not a big surprise for anyone. We obviously wanted to make as many friendships in the Netherlands as possible, but since we can't go to cafés, pubs, parties, gyms and basically to any social gathering, we don't really have a chance to engage with locals. At the same time, we are quite lucky compared to some other volunteers in the Netherlands, as some of them can't even go to work, for example volunteers at schools. Fortunately that's not the case for us, and we can go to work every day.

For us the other main issue with the restrictions is that it doesn't make too much sense to visit other Dutch cities as nearly everything is closed. We can't visit museums or go to a restaurant, so we can only walk around and see some sights - which is actually quite nice, but it could be better.

Overall these limitations made us feeling a bit down at times, especially during the cold and dark winter. But it seems that spring's arrival might be a game changer in this. Just having a bit more sunshine and a more pleasant weather this week, we already feel much more energized and motivated to engage in whatever we need to do.



While it's important to acknowledge the things in which corona is limiting us to experience our ESC the way we would like to, it is important to acknowledge the things that the virus is "giving us". Well, we are not saying that we are happy to have all the restrictions, but there are some positive outcomes. First of all, - it might sound funny - by not going out and not visiting a lot of places, we are not running short on our money. Needless to say, we would be more than glad to spend our pocket money on going to a party, but it's likely, that we would face some money-issues if we would do that on a regular basis. With all that time spent at home, we are also able to spend a bit more time alone, which is something we often lack when we are living our normal lives. This time can help us doing more self-reflection and maybe more space for some inner transformation.

As we already mentioned, we don't meet as many people as we wanted to. On the other hand, we feel like we are building deeper and stronger connections with the people that we DO meet. Both of us work at three different working places, and we really enjoy our time at each of these. Since the people we work with are the biggest part of the people we know here, we are naturally building deeper connections with them. This obviously stands for our flatmates as well that we live with. We live together with 3 other people in our age, and only one of them is Dutch, so we have a quite international team. Cooking, playing board games, or making small trips with them is always a nice way to spend our time with.

So was with worth it for us to come to the Netherlands and to do our ESC during corona? Yes. The virus effects all the European countries more or less the same, at least in terms of the restrictions, so spending this time in our home countries would not be easier. Living together with the virus is not something we like, but we are still gaining truly valuable and meaningful experiences by being here. There's no such thing as right time - or maybe it's always the right time. If you have the call, just go for it.