JOINT
ASSOCIAZIONE DI PROMOZIONE SOCIALE

T4HL3
Team For Healthy Life

Co-funded by the European Union

TEAM FOR HEALTHY LIFE 3 · DELIVERABLE D2.1

Handbook on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in healthy lifestyle ESC Teams









Associazione di Promozione Sociale Joint

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1. Introduction

1.1 About T4HL3

A healthy lifestyle is not only about what we eat or how much we move. It is also about feeling part of a group, being useful and being seen.

T4HL3 is the third edition of a European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Teams project coordinated by Associazione Joint APS. It brought young people from all over Europe to Italian host organisations for one or two months of volunteering on physical activity, nature, food and mental well-being.

Most volunteers had fewer opportunities, and some were highly vulnerable: young people fleeing war, coming out of a difficult period, or living abroad in a group for the first time. This handbook asks one question: **how can an ESC Team on healthy lifestyles be designed so that young people with fewer opportunities take part fully, and leave stronger?** A second handbook focuses on young people fleeing armed conflict.

1.2 Who took part

Six Teams were hosted by five organisations in rural, mountain and urban areas of Italy between March and December 2025. They involved 109 volunteers aged 18 to 31 from 18 countries: 73 of them had fewer opportunities, 18 were fleeing armed conflict and 28 were in-country volunteers living in Italy.

Many faced more than one obstacle at the same time: living in rural areas with few services; low income or unemployment; isolation, discrimination or being NEET; difficult school paths and no experience abroad; chronic health conditions, anxiety or attention difficulties, sometimes known only after arrival; the war in Ukraine or a migrant background. We speak about obstacles and needs, not about labels: no volunteer is named in this handbook.

1.3 How to use this handbook

Chapter 2 describes the path all Teams shared; chapters 3 to 7 tell each Team with the same structure, so they can be compared; chapter 8 brings the lessons together. Use it as a toolbox, not as a recipe: adapt it to your volunteers, your territory and your resources.







2. A shared approach

All Teams followed the same path, built by Joint over three editions of T4HL and adapted by each host to its place and its group.

2.1 One path, four steps

Before departure

A simple application and an informal interview on motivation, not on the CV. A confidential questionnaire on needs. An honest info pack on living conditions. Help with tickets, pick-ups and insurance; a WhatsApp group and a pre-departure call.

On arrival

Two days to five days of training: team building, intercultural activities, the Identity star, fears, expectations and contributions, a letter to your future self, safety guidelines and rules for living together written by the group.

During the Team

A predictable rhythm with two free days a week; mixed, rotating groups for work, cooking and cleaning; a weekly meeting and Italian lesson; individual talks on request; a mid-term evaluation.

At the end

A final evaluation with non-formal methods (Walk and talk, River of life, Circle of appreciation), future opportunities, the Youthpass and a final event with the local community.

2.2 Safety and well-being

Each host presented its safety guidelines during the on-arrival training. Shared principles: never work alone; a daily briefing on tasks, risks and weather; the right to ask for a different task without justifying it; the reason behind every rule explained; gloves, glasses, masks and vests from day one; clear reference people and emergency numbers given on the first day.





03

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Legambiente Lecco – Ostello Parco Monte Barro

Galbiate (Lecco) · 10 March – 10 April 2025 · one-month Team

16 volunteers from 8 countries, aged 19 to 30: 10 with fewer opportunities, 2 young Ukrainian women fleeing the war, 5 in-country volunteers.

Croatia · Denmark · France · Germany · Italy · Poland · Spain · Ukraine

3.1 Context

The Ostello stands inside the Monte Barro Regional Park, 5 km from the nearest village and without public transport. Legambiente Lecco runs it and has long-standing ties with the Park, local farms and the volunteers who protect the toads every spring. The group lived in shared rooms and cooked vegan or vegetarian meals for everyone.

The group mixed many obstacles: volunteers from rural areas with few services, two young women fleeing the war in Ukraine, a volunteer from a town hit by floods in autumn 2024, volunteers facing social isolation and some with declared mental health difficulties.

3.2 Healthy lifestyles in practice

“Small groups, real tasks, the park as our gym.”

The month was built around one concrete activity useful to the territory: the toad campaign. During spring migration toads cross the roads to reach their breeding sites, and many are run over. Two days a week, after a training on toad biology, volunteers set up temporary barriers, checked the buckets and carried the animals safely across, together with the local toad volunteers.

Around it, the group created an ecological area for waste sorting at the Ostello, made furniture and objects from recycled materials, went hiking in the Park, climbed, skated and visited a goat farm. Cooking vegan meals in rotating groups made healthy and sustainable food part of daily life.

A typical week

The group was split into two subgroups that rotated through all activities. Physically demanding days, such as toad barriers in the morning and a packed lunch, alternated with quieter days of creative workshops. Two coffee breaks a day and two consecutive free days a week completed the rhythm.

3. Legambiente Lecco

3.3 Making room for every difference

Smaller groups, less exposure

Two subgroups meant more attention for each person and fewer moments of being “on stage”. At the skateboard lesson, one group tried while the other did a prepared alternative activity, so the most insecure did not have to perform in front of everyone.

Tasks in phases

The ecological area was split into phases: sanding, rust-proofing, impregnating, decorating the doors. Volunteers with less physical strength, or who needed to focus on one thing at a time, chose the lighter or more creative phases.

Language

English was the common language, at very different levels. Staff used simple instructions, visual and non-verbal activities; volunteers translated for each other and the Italian volunteers bridged with staff and partners. Volunteers called the instructions “so easy to understand”.

Group composition

Rooms, work groups and cooking groups mixed nationalities and paired more fragile volunteers with more stable and welcoming ones. Volunteers with previous ESC experience supported newcomers spontaneously.

Roles

The Legambiente coordinator planned activities and partnerships and ran sessions on sustainability, waste and climate change. The Ostello staff worked alongside volunteers every day, in turns. Joint trainers ran selection, on-arrival training, final evaluation and individual support in delicate moments.

3.4 Activities step by step

Climbing at Monte Barro · One day

Objective: experience physical activity as a way to overcome fear, with the support of the group
Led by: a climbing instructor, with Ostello staff
Materials: climbing equipment provided by the instructor

Volunteers learned the basic techniques and safety rules, then climbed in turns while the others belayed and encouraged them. Nobody was asked to “perform”: everyone chose how high to go. Several volunteers with fewer opportunities named it their favourite activity: “even though I was scared it was really cool to push myself… everybody was cheering on everyone and we all wanted each other to succeed”.

3. Legambiente Lecco

Building an ecological area, step by step · Across the month

Objective: create a space for correct waste sorting at the Ostello, and a result that stays
Led by: Ostello staff
Materials: recovered furniture, sandpaper, rust-proofing paint, wood impregnant, paints and brushes, masks and gloves

The work was divided into clear phases, each with its own skills and effort. Every volunteer could choose the phase that suited them best, and the decorated doors carry the group's creativity. The area is still used by the Ostello's visitors.

3.5 Voices and lessons learned

“It's okay to fail”

Volunteers described more self-confidence, more courage to leave their comfort zone, more autonomy and greener habits: a more plant-based diet, recycling, more time in nature. One volunteer from a rural area, at her first experience of this kind, discovered she could manage on her own: “it's okay to fail, as long as I don't quit and try it out again”. She also realised that being in nature is good for her mental health. Two volunteers continued volunteering after the Team, one at the Ostello and one in a long-term ESC project. The final questionnaire rated the experience and the group 4.8 out of 5.

> *“We had a very lucky combination of people with similar values and open-mindedness.”*
>
> A volunteer, Denmark

> *“I've learned to leave my comfort zone and take initiative, it's not that scary.”*
>
> A volunteer, Ukraine

> *“Communicating how you feel makes living together in a group so much easier.”*
>
> A volunteer, Germany

> *“I learnt how important it is to push my limits without any pressure or expectation but with an open mind.”*
>
> An in-country volunteer, Italy

Do it again: A two-day on-arrival training; two subgroups rotating on activities; one concrete activity useful to the territory at the centre of the month; rotating cooking and cleaning groups.

Change: Holidays in the middle rather than at the end; longer lunch breaks on heavy days; more variety in weekend food; protective equipment from day one; more time for the Park's nature; a peer-support pairing from the start.

Avoid: Underestimating isolation; communicating dates, holidays and extra costs late or unclearly; long repetitive tasks, the hardest for volunteers with attention difficulties.

04

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Fattoria l'Arca

Belvedere Marittimo (Cosenza) · two two-month Teams
30 March – 29 May and 6 October – 5 December 2025

1st mobility: 16 volunteers from 6 countries; 12 with fewer opportunities, 3 fleeing the war, 6 in-country. 2nd mobility: 20 volunteers from 9 countries, aged 18 to 29; 14 with fewer opportunities, 3 fleeing the war, 6 in-country.

1st mobility: 16 volunteers · Italy, France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Ukraine · 2nd mobility: 20 volunteers · Italy, France, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Ukraine

4.1 Context

Fattoria l'Arca is an organic social farm and agritourism on the Calabrian coast, active since 2002 and certified organic since 2005. Volunteers lived inside the agritourism in triple rooms with private bathrooms, and ate meals prepared by the farm's cook with the farm's own products. The house rules were clear from the start: no alcohol, no phones at meals, fixed meal times, silence at night and no food waste.

The two groups brought together young people from rural areas, young people with a migrant background, young people fleeing the war in Ukraine, young NEETs, volunteers facing economic difficulties or discrimination, and volunteers with health needs. For several, it was the first experience abroad.

4.2 Healthy lifestyles in practice

“From the field to the table, together.”

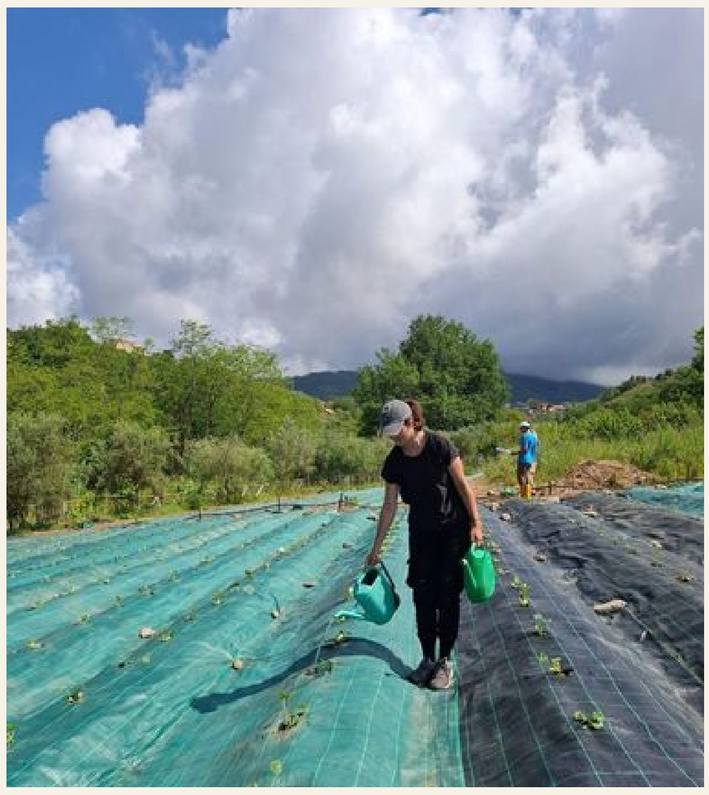
The heart of the experience was farm work: weeding, sowing, planting strawberries, harvesting twice a week, picking olives, caring for fruit trees and beehives, selecting products for the market, collecting eggs, repairing fences and drainage channels. Working the land showed volunteers how much effort lies behind good food, and many said they would waste less food from now on.

One day a week was devoted to workshops with local associations and artisans: ceramics with Associazione Agorà, basket weaving with an artisan from Verbicaro, making tortelli with the farm's cooks, rafting on the Lao river, music and dance with young people with disabilities from Progetto OASI, and a morning with children and mothers at the Punto Luce in Scalea. In the second mobility, the group also attended a public Peace Talk on the European Union and peace.

4. Fattoria l'Arca

A typical week

Four mornings of farm work, from about 6:30 to 12:30, with free afternoons; one day of workshops; two free days. A one-hour Italian lesson and a one-hour reflection group every week.







4.3 Making room for every difference

Choose your task

Every evening or morning, the host coordinator listed the tasks of the day: repetitive or varied, heavy or precise, individual or collective. Each volunteer chose according to abilities, physical state and energy that day. Nobody ever worked alone, and new tasks were learned next to someone more experienced.

Time and tools for understanding

Time was planned for translation, timetables were visual, and information was given well in advance so doubts could be cleared early. When some volunteers could not walk long distances, a car took them to and from the beach clean-up.

Italian for real life

Weekly Italian lessons started from a basic level, with dialogues, songs and games. Each lesson prepared the vocabulary of the coming activities: rafting, ceramics, recipes.

A bridge in the field

When the group reported unclear instructions and unequal effort, they agreed on a five-minute briefing before work, smaller groups and volunteers in charge of explaining. Italian volunteers translated the coordinator's instructions; one called it “a wonderful chance to develop leadership skills”.

4. Fattoria l'Arca

Roles

The host coordinator led the farm work and took part in the on-arrival training and final evaluation. A mentor met volunteers individually when needed. The Joint referent ran the weekly reflection group and was always available for individual or small-group talks.



4.4 Activities step by step

Workshops by the volunteers · Whole Team

Objective: value each volunteer's passions and skills, and give the shyest a role
When: from selection to the end of the Team
Led by: the volunteers themselves, alone or in pairs

Already in the selection interview, each candidate was asked which workshop they could offer. During the on-arrival training a brainstorming session collected ideas next to the calendar, and slots were set aside every week. Participation was always optional, as facilitator and as participant, and activities focused on learning, not results. Volunteers led portrait drawing, macramé, watercolour, a tiramisù contest with a recipe half in English and half in Italian, soap in recycled milk cartons, embroidery, knitting, bracelets, yoga, a weekly run and a photo walk. They named these workshops among their favourite moments.

Basket weaving with a local artisan · One day

Objective: learn a traditional craft, meet the local community, work on process rather than result
Duration: one day, in two shifts of nine people
Led by: an artisan from Verbicaro
Materials: natural materials such as olive branches, willow and reeds

The artisan showed every step and taught volunteers to recognise and collect the materials, so they could go on alone. Volunteers helped each other weave, in a calm and collaborative atmosphere. A volunteer who was not in education or employment described it as the activity that struck him most. The artisan later invited the whole group to lunch at his country house.

4. Fattoria l'Arca

4.5 Voices and lessons learned

From mud to happiness

A young volunteer arrived at the Arca in a difficult period of her life: her first volunteering experience, in a country she had never seen, with people she did not know. She was scared, but her dream of working on a farm was stronger. One of her first tasks was planting strawberries, and that moment stayed with her. The hoe became her “worst enemy”; olive picking became her task. Before, she says, she could not even touch the grass with her hands; at the end, her days were full of mud, and she was happy. At 22, she says that if she had known about an experience like this earlier, she would have left earlier.

After the first mobility, one volunteer stayed to work at the Arca, another found a job in an educational centre for children and an Italian volunteer started an internship in youth mobility. After the second, Ukrainian volunteers joined new ESC and Erasmus+ projects, a French volunteer started a long-term ESC and two Italian volunteers decided to apply to the fire brigade and the forestry corps.

> *“Spending time in nature gave me a lot of calm and well-being that I was missing living in the city.”*
>
> A volunteer

> *“I have learned to be more respectful of food and dare to say ‘NO’ to food waste.”*
>
> A volunteer

> *“It made me braver, calmer, and more confident in who I am.”*
>
> A volunteer, Ukraine

> *“Everyone is really different but everyone can fit together if we communicate.”*
>
> A volunteer

Do it again: Weekly reflection with non-formal methods; workshops by the volunteers; meetings with local associations and artisans; a group agreement written by the volunteers; Italian linked to the activities.

Change: Fewer activities in the final evaluation week; a clearer weekly structure with a plan B for bad weather.

Avoid: Waiting for volunteers to ask for help: short signals in group reflection call for an individual talk. Underestimating logistical problems in the accommodation.

05

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Cooperativa ONE

Crotone (Calabria) · 24 March – 23 May 2025 · two-month Team

19 volunteers from 9 countries, aged 18 to 31: 12 with fewer opportunities, 3 young Ukrainian women fleeing the war, 4 in-country volunteers.

France · Italy · Ukraine · Belgium · Bulgaria · Greece · Hungary · Poland · Spain

5.1 Context

Volunteers lived in double and triple rooms at Ostello Casa di Chiara, in the historic centre of Crotone, and worked with a wide network of local partners: Cooperativa Terre Joniche and Bella Calabria, two assets confiscated from the mafia; Associazione Sabir and Associazione Agorà, which welcome migrants and unaccompanied minors; Camper on the Road, which collects food for people in need; the newspaper Il Crotonese; a youth American football team; Amici del Tedesco; and Alle Hand in Hand, which works on permaculture.

The group brought together young people with economic difficulties, young people moving from study to work without a clear plan, in-country volunteers from Southern Italy who had never had the chance to go abroad, and four volunteers aged 18–19 at their first experience away from home.

5.2 Healthy lifestyles in practice

“A city to discover, people to meet, and space to lead.”

Daily life at the hostel was the first healthy habit: cleaning, maintenance, gardening, small restoration works and cooking, in small rotating groups where each person chose the task that suited them. At Terre Joniche volunteers worked in the fields and the garden of land confiscated from the mafia, combining outdoor work, local food and education to legality. With Camper on the Road they collected and distributed food to people in need, side by side with local volunteers.

Movement and mental well-being came through a training session with the local youth American football team and through workshops proposed and led by the volunteers themselves: yoga and meditation, Latin and Greek dance, theatre and the management of emotions, photography and music.

5. Cooperativa ONE

A typical week

Five days of activities a week, up to 36 hours, with two free days, sometimes midweek, and two days of holiday a month, all explained during the on-arrival training. Five rotating cooking teams, with names chosen by the volunteers, prepared meals for everyone. Weekly meetings with the hostel coordinator and the Joint referent, and Italian lessons, rated 4.6 out of 5 by the volunteers.

5.3 Making room for every difference

An application open to everyone

The call asked only for a CV and a short questionnaire with practical questions: willingness to do manual work, food preferences, how you face change or conflict, what you want to learn. No previous experience and no Italian were required, and candidates without a Supporting Organisation were helped by Joint to find one. More than 70 young people applied.

Choice in every activity

At Agorà, each meeting offered several workshops in parallel, so quieter volunteers could choose crochet or painting and more outgoing ones music. When dance lessons proved uncomfortable for some, the group was given the choice between dance and other activities.

Language

English was the common language; the Italian volunteers bridged with partners and residents, and many activities with migrants were non-verbal: cooking, music, crochet, painting, a map with images of the countries of origin. When needed, the Joint referent acted as mediator.

Practical support

Joint checked travel tickets before purchase, explained how to reach Crotone via Naples or Rome, and paid the pocket money in four instalments. When some volunteers did not have a suitable bank account, a practical solution was found with the group.

Roles

Cooperativa ONE followed the volunteers in their activities, provided board and lodging, held weekly meetings and monitored everyone's well-being. Local partners and experts led the single activities. Joint handled selection, the contacts with Supporting Organisations, travel, the on-arrival training for volunteers and staff, monitoring, agreements, pocket money and Youthpass. The Joint referent gave additional support to the volunteers with fewer opportunities, during activities and in free time.

5. Cooperativa ONE

5.4 Activities step by step

Three afternoons at Agorà · Three meetings

Objective: meet young migrants as equals, through activities that need no common language
With: the staff and guests of Agorà's second-reception centre
Preparation: a screening of “Io capitano” and a group reflection on migration

Each meeting offered several workshops at the same time: cooking African dishes, music, crochet, storytelling and painting inspired by the guests' stories. Everyone chose where to take part. Together with the guests, volunteers crocheted a blanket in memory of a newborn who died in the 2023 Steccato di Cutro shipwreck. In the last meeting, a map with images of the countries of origin opened a conversation about the places the guests had left. Agorà, Sabir and Camper on the Road were the activities volunteers liked most, and several made friends with the guests.

Journalism with Il Crotonese · Workshop

Objective: reflect on the experience and give volunteers a voice in the local community
Led by: the editorial staff of Il Crotonese

The editorial team explained how a local newspaper works and how to write an article; the first meeting also introduced the story of the Steccato di Cutro shipwreck. Each volunteer chose a topic based on their interests and wrote two pieces: one about their own volunteering experience and one about a current issue. One article per volunteer was published. Writing helped volunteers reflect on what they were living, and made the project and the European Solidarity Corps known in the city.

5.5 Voices and lessons learned

A demanding group, and what it taught us

The group was large and very diverse, and living together was not always easy: tensions emerged late, house rules were often not respected, the calendar changed at short notice and some partners did not speak English, so volunteers sometimes felt of little use. The final evaluation reflected it: the volunteers rated the experience 4.4 out of 5 and the group 3.6. Yet many described more self-confidence, more openness to others and the ability to set limits, and several discovered they want to work in the social field. Some continued with long-term ESC projects or local volunteering.

> *“This project is a good opportunity to go outside of the comfort zone.”*
>
> A volunteer, Ukraine, before departure

> *“I believe this experience will help me gain greater self-confidence and a better awareness of the world.”*
>
> An in-country volunteer, Italy, before departure

5. Cooperativa ONE

Do it again: A one-week on-arrival training with rules built by the group, a letter to your future self and early contact with partners; many different local partners; workshops led by volunteers; journalism with the local newspaper; rotating cooking teams; Walk & Talk, River of life and a feedback circle at the end.

Change: Move the feedback circle to mid-project and add smaller reflection groups; agree clear tasks and a language bridge with each partner; more time with associations and more sport at the start; define the consequences when rules are not respected; a plan B when partners withdraw.

Avoid: Managing group dynamics too late; a calendar that changes at the last minute: share a fixed weekly calendar in advance; leaving partners unsure of how to involve volunteers.



06

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Cascina EUtopia – P.E.CO.

Casaleggio Boiro (Alessandria) · 15 July – 12 August 2025 · four-week Team

20 volunteers from 7 countries, aged 19 to 29: 13 with fewer opportunities, 4 young Ukrainians fleeing the war, 4 in-country volunteers.

Italy · Ukraine · Spain · France · Latvia · Romania · Russia · 13 women, 7 men

6.1 Context

Cascina EUtopia is a farmhouse in the Piedmont countryside, being renovated to become a safe and inclusive place for vulnerable young people in future exchanges and ESC projects. The Team was managed by Associazione P.E.CO. of Genoa, with staff from P.E.CO. and Joint living at the Cascina with the volunteers. Living conditions were essential, and described honestly in the info pack: shared rooms for three or more, four bathrooms, three with hot water, and the option to sleep in a tent.

The group was very young, from 19 to 29, with more than a third aged 19, and few had lived in a group or abroad before. 13 volunteers had fewer opportunities, often more than one: low income, discrimination, a difficult school path, a chronic health condition, and four young Ukrainians fleeing the war. Some volunteers from the previous Team chose to stay and acted as a bridge between the two groups.

6.2 Healthy lifestyles in practice

“Small groups, cool hours, a place we build together.”

The Team's work had a clear purpose: making the Cascina ready to welcome other young people. Volunteers upcycled furniture, built two sinks from pallets and tiles, sewed sofa and cushion covers, made a mosaic table, repainted the shutters and the wood-fired oven, and prepared spaces for future non-formal education activities. Outside, they completed the path towards the road to Lerma, opened a new one towards the meadow, cared for the vegetable garden and inoculated mushrooms in the wood with a local expert.

Movement was part of every day: football and volleyball, walks, evening zumba and pilates, an e-bike tour and a trek to the Cirimilla lakes with a swim in the stream. Food was a shared project: menus decided together every week, vegetables from the garden, visits to a beekeeper and to Cascina al Cucco, a farm working without pesticides.

6. Cascina EUtopia

A typical week

To protect everyone from the July heat, work ran from 7:30 to 11:30 and from 17:00 to 19:00, with a long siesta from 13:30 to 17:00. Zumba and pilates took place at 19:20, when it was cooler. On Thursday the group planned the menu for the week; on Friday came shopping, cleaning of common areas and the weekly meeting.







6.3 Making room for every difference

Small groups, free choice

Every day the group split into small work groups, for example six people on the forest path, four on the shutters, three on upcycling, two on shopping. A volunteer with back pain took lighter tasks such as cooking, upcycling and sewing; those who could not join a work activity contributed through household shifts.

A space to recover

When a volunteer needed more quiet, a single room gave them a space of their own. One volunteer thanked staff for giving him “space and time to get back on track slowly, without straining my health”.

Step by step into the village

At the Pro Loco festival on the first days, the shyest started backstage, preparing, cooking and tidying, and moved to serving tables only when they felt ready. Weekly Italian lessons gave tools for greeting, ordering and introducing yourself; free links to learn Italian were already in the welcome pack.

Personal space

In a large group sharing rooms and bathrooms, the on-arrival activity “4 ways to say hello” opened a conversation on personal space and boundaries before tensions could arise.

6. Cascina EUtopia

Roles

The P.E.CO. coordinator led the project. Staff from P.E.CO. and Joint lived at the Cascina as logistics assistants and mentors: they organised shifts, menus, shopping and transport, ran the trainings, the weekly meeting and the Italian lessons, and followed each volunteer individually. A P.E.CO. referent led upcycling and sewing; local volunteers and producers guided the work on paths, garden, bees and farming. Volunteers described staff as “totally part of the team”.



6.4 Activities step by step

A sink made from pallets · Several sessions

Objective: turn waste materials into something useful for the Cascina, with a visible result
Led by: the P.E.CO. upcycling referent
Materials: recovered pallets, tiles, tools for cutting, sanding and fixing

A small group designed and built two sinks from pallets and tiles, while others sewed covers and made a mosaic. Tasks were divided by strength and skill, so everyone, including those who could not do heavy work, had a part. In the final questionnaire, building the sink was among the activities volunteers liked most, because it was clear and its result could be seen and used.

Written feedback for every volunteer · Final evaluation

Objective: close the Team by recognising each person's journey, especially for those with fewer opportunities
Led by: the staff living at the Cascina

At the end, staff wrote a personal message to each volunteer, naming concrete steps forward and contributions. To a very shy volunteer, they wrote that at the start they feared his shyness would stop him living the experience, and that instead he had made it. To a volunteer who always took on the least pleasant jobs: “you always volunteered”. With the Circle of appreciation, these messages were among the most meaningful moments of the closing, and they helped volunteers write their Youthpass.

6. Cascina EUtopia

6.5 Voices and lessons learned

Building a group is harder than building a sink

In the first week some volunteers often spoke their own language, and those who did not understand felt left out. The group agreed on a rule: anyone could say “Bora Bora” to ask for a switch to English. It helped, but it was not enough: at mid-term several volunteers wrote that the group had split “in interest groups” and some felt lonely. A volunteer proposed and led “Reconnection games”; the weekly meeting was used to talk openly about living together, with a “pizza” on the flipchart where each slice was an activity rated by everyone; the Circle of appreciation and the written feedback closed the Team. The lesson: with a large, multilingual group, cohesion must be built intentionally from the first days. The final questionnaire rated the experience 4.4 out of 5 and the group 3.7.

An in-country volunteer who came from a very difficult personal period found at the Cascina “a home, even if for a short time”. A young Ukrainian started a long-term ESC project in Genoa right after the Team.

> *“It has changed a lot my ability to take part without being afraid of making mistakes, and to speak English without pressure.”*
>
> An in-country volunteer, Italy

> *“If I was a little afraid to visit other countries before, now I can't wait to leave.”*
>
> An in-country volunteer, Italy

> *“I for sure widened my comfort zone and I feel like I am at home in more places.”*
>
> A volunteer, Ukraine

> *“I am more relaxed now and I enjoy boredom more, I had great time to think and reflect.”*
>
> A volunteer, Latvia

Do it again: Working hours adapted to the heat; small rotating work groups; menus and shifts built together; weekly Italian lessons; the weekly meeting with visual methods; written feedback and the Circle of appreciation.

Change: More bonding activities in the first week, before public events; individual or small-group reflection; the weekly calendar shared in advance; a clear rule on English from day one; peer-support pairing.

Avoid: Neglecting group building at the beginning; relying only on group meetings without individual mentoring; collecting health information superficially.

07

HOSTING ORGANISATION

Farfalle nella Testa

Bordano (Udine) · 20 August – 20 October 2025 · two-month Team

18 volunteers from 6 countries, aged 21 to 30: 12 with fewer opportunities, 3 young Ukrainians fleeing the war, 3 in-country volunteers.

Italy · Ukraine · Spain · France · Germany · Czech Republic

7.1 Context

Bordano is a small village in the Friulian Pre-Alps, known as the “village of butterflies” for its Casa delle Farfalle, a butterfly house and museum. Farfalle nella Testa runs it and works closely with the Ecomuseo Val del Lago around Lake Cavazzo. Volunteers lived in houses in the village, divided according to the preferences each one expressed before arrival.

The village has few services, little public transport and a community that speaks mostly Italian. For several volunteers it was the first experience abroad, and some arrived afraid of not understanding English or not coping far from home.

7.2 Healthy lifestyles in practice

“Outdoor work, outdoor sport, a village around the table.”

In the first month volunteers cared for the green areas of the Ecomuseum, removing invasive species such as the tree of heaven and Canadian goldenrod; in the second, they maintained the entomological path towards Monte San Simeone. In the last week they helped close the Casa delle Farfalle for the season: inventory, cleaning and a final dinner they cooked for about 130 people from the village and the partners.

The territory offered outdoor sport that no volunteer had tried before: rafting on the Tagliamento, tandem paragliding from Monte Quarnan, and a day on the Alpe Adria cycle path. Ceramics workshops, a visit to the Tiere Motus museum on the 1976 earthquake and the resilience of the community, and village life, from the San Simeone festival to concerts by the lake, completed the picture.

A typical week

Three days of field work of about seven hours, with regular breaks and shorter hours in the rain. A “programming day” on Friday with the weekly meeting, the Italian lesson, the weekly menu and cleaning. One day of extra activities and two consecutive free days. Cooking groups of three rotated every day. A week of holiday in the middle, from 20 to 25 September, allowed volunteers to recover before the second month.

7. Farfalle nella Testa

7.3 Making room for every difference

A facilitator who lives with the group

An on-site facilitator lived with the volunteers, drove the van, joined the activities, ran the weekly meeting and the Italian lessons and was the first point of reference for everyone's well-being. Volunteers called her “basically a part of the group”.

Rules that belong to the group

On arrival volunteers built their rules with guiding questions on time, space, communication and personal space, at most three rules per category. Rules were updated in the weekly meeting, for example with a list written “for the wellbeing of everyone”.

Sport for every level

All sport was led by professionals and designed for beginners, and participation was always free. Paragliding was a tandem flight with one instructor per person, in three shifts so nobody waited too long.

Language

With elders and residents the language barrier was strong. Italian volunteers and the facilitator bridged; weekly Italian lessons with games and Kahoot gave tools for daily life; meeting the elders was also a way to practise.

Culture

In the first days the Ukrainian volunteers proposed to cook vareniki for Ukraine's Independence Day on 24 August, sharing their culture and feeling recognised at an important moment for their country.

Roles

The host tutor coordinated the work at the Ecomuseum and on the trails, explained the territory and safety rules and kept the links with the local network. The facilitator managed daily life. Joint ran the on-arrival training and final evaluation and gave remote support.



7. Farfalle nella Testa

7.4 Activities step by step

A day on the Alpe Adria cycle path · One day

Objective: move together in nature, with everyone at their own pace
Route: from Tarvisio to Bordano, with two options of different length
Materials: bikes rented in Gemona

The group split into two: one part took the longer route, the other a shorter one, with scheduled stops for water, lunch and rest. Bikes were checked before leaving and swapped when needed. Since it was new for everyone, nobody started ahead, and the group supported itself along the way. Almost all volunteers named it the best day of the project.

Meeting the elders of Bordano · Afternoon

Objective: an intergenerational and intercultural exchange, and a chance to practise Italian
With: “Cjatinsi”, a group of elders from Bordano

Volunteers and elders spent a simple, convivial afternoon together, with the Italian volunteers as mediators. For some volunteers it was among the best moments of the two months, and the elders came back for the final dinner. One volunteer later joined an evening walk with residents: “they don't speak English, so it was challenging, but nice”.





7. Farfalle nella Testa

7.5 Voices and lessons learned

When instructions are not clear

In mid-September a day of field work went wrong: some volunteers had received unclear or different instructions, tension grew and the tutor lost patience too. The tutor apologised and took responsibility; after a heated discussion between two volunteers, the facilitator became the point of contact; the next day came with a precise programme and clear tasks, and the topic was taken up in the weekly meeting. The lesson: outdoor work needs instructions that are clear, written and the same for everyone, an explanation of why each task matters, and outside support for host staff in difficult moments. At the end, the experience was rated 4.5 out of 5 and the group 4.3.

The repetitive removal of invasive species was the least appreciated task: some volunteers did not see its purpose ("The work lacked of purpose, I sometimes felt useless"). At the end, volunteers described more awareness of their own needs and limits, more confidence in English and in living abroad, and the wish to join new ESC projects. A volunteer who feared she would not cope abroad wrote: "now I know that I do, and that I can handle it".

> *"After knowing so many different people in very different situations now I really know that I am not arriving late anywhere."*
>
> A volunteer, Spain

> *"Feeling lost is not a death sentence even when I am older."*
>
> A volunteer, Germany

> *"It helped me better understand my own needs, limits, and what truly gives meaning to my work and interactions with others."*
>
> A volunteer, France

> *"Even though it seemed like we were here for ourselves, she always took care of us."*
>
> A volunteer, Czech Republic, about the facilitator

Do it again: An on-arrival training on personal space and shared rules; a holiday week mid-project; outdoor sport offered by the territory; a facilitator living with the group; a final dinner with the village.

Change: Explain the real work and its purpose before departure; clear, written daily instructions; varied tasks in teams; more moments with the community; support for host staff; a proper breakfast before long days.

Avoid: Presenting the work vaguely before departure; giving unclear or contradictory instructions; keeping the meeting with the village only for the end.

8. What we learned across the Teams

Six Teams, five territories, one finding: young people with fewer opportunities take part fully when tasks are concrete, groups are balanced, the rhythm is predictable and they have a voice in the rules.

8.1 What made the difference

Concrete tasks with a visible result

Saving toads, building a sink, weaving a basket, collecting food for people in need, a path that others will walk. Repetitive tasks whose purpose was not explained were the hardest, especially for volunteers with attention difficulties.

Choice within a common path

Choosing the task of the day, the phase of a job, the workshop, the length of a route, whether to fly or watch. Nobody is excluded, and nobody is exposed.

Activities with no language required

Ceramics, music, cooking, crochet, sport, upcycling: shy volunteers and those with little English take part from the first day.

Being a protagonist

Leading a workshop, translating for the group, writing an article for the local newspaper, giving commands on a raft. For many, it was the first time they were the ones bringing something.

Dealing with tensions early

Where tensions emerged late, they weighed on the whole Team. A mid-project feedback moment, small reflection groups and individual talks help address them while there is still time.

Peer support, to be structured

More experienced volunteers supported the more fragile, and Italian volunteers bridged with staff and residents. It worked, but it was never formally prepared: a peer-support pairing should be set up from the start.

8.2 A checklist for your Team

Before departure

- ☐ Describe the work, the place and the living conditions honestly
- ☐ Interview on motivation, not on the CV; do not require previous experience or a Supporting Organisation
- ☐ Collect needs confidentially and check them with Supporting Organisations
- ☐ Compose a balanced group, with and without fewer opportunities, experienced and first-timers
- ☐ Ask each candidate which workshop they could offer

8. What we learned across the Teams

□ Organise travel support, a WhatsApp group and a pre-departure call

During the Team

□ Spend the first days on team building, personal space and rules written by the group, including what happens when they are not respected

□ Share a fixed weekly calendar in advance, with breaks, two free days and a plan B

□ Work in small, mixed, rotating groups and let volunteers choose their tasks

□ Agree clear tasks and a language bridge with each local partner

□ Brief the group every morning and explain the reason behind each task

□ Hold a weekly reflection, individual talks and a mid-term evaluation with feedback

At the end

□ Recognise each person's journey: Circle of appreciation, written feedback, Youthpass

□ Show the next opportunities: ESC, exchanges, local volunteering, training

□ Celebrate with the community that hosted the group

9. CONCLUSION

Health is something we build together

The six Teams of T4HL3 give an answer that is simple to say and demanding to practise: inclusion is not an extra activity; it is the way every activity is organised.

For these young people a healthy lifestyle meant regular hours and real rest, food grown and cooked together, movement without competition and time for the mind. It also meant feeling safe, being listened to and having a role: small groups, tasks chosen according to one's energy, rules written by the group and a weekly space to talk made this possible.

The difficulties were real too, and we have reported them because they are where we learned the most. At the end, volunteers wrote that they felt braver, calmer and more confident; some found work, some started new ESC projects, some discovered they want to work in the social field. ESC Teams are neither holidays nor perfect experiences: they are weeks of effort, care and learning that can reopen a young person's path.







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