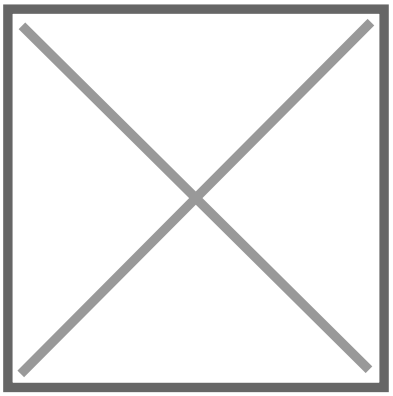

COALA System

Description

What challenge inspired this recipe?

Order to enable peer-to-peer support for incoming ESC volunteers we created the COALA-system (COALA= cooperative alliance of assistance) = â??local buddiesâ?•.

â?•ï¸•**Grenzenlos**

Ingredients :

You will need to organise a training / preparation for the local volunteers in which they have to be briefed about the aims, structure and process of the system before they will be handed a COALA-buddy. The responsibilities but also boundaries should be clear: e.g. COALAs are not responsible for the volunteersâ?? safety. They are not an emergency contact, simply a â??leisure time mentorâ?•, a â??first friendâ?•, a person to seek peer advice from â?? but not professional help!

You will need some information about each of the COALAs and each of the ESC volunteers in order to know who to match with whom (e.g. age, common interests, common languages spoken, etc.)

After the training for COALAs and the assessment of all participants the matches should be made.

Participants should be informed about the matches via e-mail, provided some context information and with each otherâ??s contact information

Needed: staff resources for COALA training, matches, follow up with COALAs and volunteers (how is it going?)

Step by step guide

Previous ESC volunteers (either youngsters who have participated in an ESC activity abroad through Grenzenlos and now returned, but sometimes also ESC volunteers who participated in a project in Vienna and then decided to stay) are asked if they want to become a COALA â??local buddyâ?• for future international ESC volunteers who will volunteer in Vienna. If they agree, we will match them with one of the newly arriving ESC volunteers.

Both the COALAs and ESC volunteers receive an e-mail before the project starts with the information that they have been matched as COALA-buddies and we send them each otherâ??s contact information, so they can already get in touch before the project start.

Often it is the COALAs who help us (Grenzenlos) with the pick up of the new volunteers from the airport/bus/train station and who accompany them to their accommodation, give them their welcome folder, hep with buying a SIM card etc in the first day(s).

Generally, the buddies should stay in contact with their COALA â??babyâ?• (the ESC volunteer they were matched with) throughout the ESC activity, to occasionally meet up with them, support them with e.g. questions related to leisure time, social and cultural life. The COALAs also support us at Grenzenlos to organize a monthly leisure time program for the ESC volunteers and COALAs where they can visit different places, exhibitions, etc. together and/or do activities together (e.g. museum visit, BBQ, picknick, going swimming together, ice skating, hiking, board game night, karaoke, etc.)

For this, Grenzenlos provides some funding, so the events are accessible to all COALAs and volunteers despite their financial situation and to motivate their participation.

Through the COALA system, the ESC volunteers usually have a smoother start and are enabled to dive into Austrian culture and society first hand with a local. Knowing one person from the beginning, who already knows the city/country, the local language etc, usually makes it a bit easier for international volunteers to get in touch with the local community, find their way around town, etc. Through the COALAs, the volunteers have one additional support person (peer support) and get to know life in Vienna in a less touristy and fund way. As the COALAs are usually youngsters, who have had a volunteering experience abroad too, they can empathize with the new volunteers, as they know how it is to move to a place where you do not know anyone yet, might not speak the language yet, etc.

Important to highlight!

The COALA-system is a successful method that allows previous ESC participants to stay involved in the international volunteering community and solidarity actions, and provides valuable support to ESC volunteers coming to the host country, a first starting point in getting to know the people, places, and the language of the host country, and an additional support person, who can relate to their experience as international volunteers.

Each year the feedback that we receive about the COALA system is very positive. Participants emphasize the value of having a person of similar age as a an additional contact person, a kind of â??leisure time mentorâ?•, who can show The COALAs usually appreciate getting to know new people, being able to keep on practicing foreign languages (English, or the language they learned in their host country if there is a volunteer form that country/language group), to stay active within the ESC volunteering community, to try out organizing events, etc.

After a while some COALAs become members of our organization and therefore part of our organizationâ??s community long term.

The way we have described the COALA system above works very well for us. But of course, this â??buddyâ?• system needs to be adapted to the local realities of each organization.

Before you start cooking, keep in mindâ?¦

- n Order to implement the COALA-system you need:
    - A pool of already returned volunteers or people related to the program
    - To identify the ones that are interested in being a COALA
    - To connect them to their respective ESC incoming volunteers as their COALA-buddies: via e-mail but ideally additionally with a kick-off event where all participants are present

  Additional get together with all participants can be organised throughout the year for monitoring and exchange purposes.