

European Solidarity Corps Volunteering at SOKO – Bringing Courage Along to Tyrol

Courage is needed for many things in life - regardless of your age, your goals, or the experiences you have already had. Whenever we embark on a journey into the unknown, one of the most important things we pack in our suitcase is a great deal of courage.

With exactly that kind of luggage, I arrived at SOKO in Rum last October. After graduating from high school, I wanted to leave behind everything familiar, experience something new, and learn more about myself, my interests, and my strengths. Before that, I would never have imagined spending nine months volunteering through the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) in a nursing home surrounded by the mountains. Yet after a ten-hour train journey, I suddenly found myself standing in front of my new home. Everything was new: the people, the daily routine, and especially the Tyrolean dialect, which I did not understand very well at first. Nevertheless, it did not take long before I felt at home at SOKO. Uncertainty gradually turned into routine, and strangers became familiar faces. Outside of work, Tyrol increasingly became a place I could call home as well. Surrounded by mountains, wonderful new friendships, and life in and around Innsbruck, I slowly built a daily routine that eventually felt completely natural. Things that initially seemed new and exciting have now become an integral part of everyday life.

Working with elderly people every day requires many qualities: patience, creativity to follow conversations at times, and above all, curiosity. I wanted to understand what matters to the residents of the nursing home and how they cope with growing older. One thing I often notice there is that aging requires courage. Courage to accept help when it is needed, courage to make choices that support your well-being even when you would prefer things to be different, and courage to leave your own home and come to SOKO in order to receive that support. And every day, I have taken a little of that courage from the people around me - the courage to leave home and find my own place here in Tyrol. Thanks to the residents and all the wonderful staff members, taking this step became much easier. Not a step into old age, but a step into growing older.

My ESC volunteering experience has shown me how important openness, meaningful encounters, and sometimes simply a little courage in your suitcase can be. After all, the most rewarding experiences often begin exactly where we initially feel uncertain. That is what my time at SOKO has been: the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in my life - one that I will continue here in Innsbruck.