

## **2018 youth exchange experience**

### **Personal Stories of Participants from Curacao**

#### **My/ Our perspective**

If you actually think about it, life is such a beautiful thing. We have to learn to appreciate the little things, cause at the end of the day those were the big things. This project opened my eyes, it showed me that even though all of us live on an island, we have such good opportunities. We met great people, we saw different perspectives and maybe we didn't have so much time together, but these people inspired me. They inspired me to be better, to get out there and spread my wings. Here on the island we are raised that the adults know best, that we have to follow their footsteps. But honestly if you want something, you have to fight for it, be true to yourself and go get what you want. The world is such a big place and if u want it, it is yours.

The activities that we did together taught me that you don't have to judge anyone in this world. Someone may be smiling, but you have no idea what they're going through. That is why we must always be kind and we should smile more often. If you can change someone's day with just a kind word, do it. Most of the time people think that if someone has issues, we have to send them to the doctor. NO, it all starts with you, the man in the mirror. Let your smile change the world, don't let the bitterness of the world change your smile. If we all work together, we can make this a better place.

I am so happy that Curaçao could have been a part of this project and I thank God that our people who were chosen was us. Because I think in this moment, we were the ones who needed it the most. This was exactly what we needed, the push. The push to show us that we don't have to be afraid of the future, we have to be excited and we have to be open for anything that comes in our way. In the beginning I bet all of us were super nervous, because we all have insecurities, but now that the project is over, we can say that we made a lot of friends, friends for life. And it is so incredible, because now we know we are not alone anymore. The people were so amazing to us and they showed us that there is hope for us.

It is so crazy to think that us, here living on a small island, an island that technically no one knows about, have friends in Moldova, Georgia and Portugal. When we go on vacation or when we go study abroad, we will have people that we can visit or even if we are in any sort of trouble we have people who can help us. Life can change at any minute, it can take a 360 turn, but I bet for us, this was the best 360 turn....

So with all of this being said, I want to give a huge thank you to everyone who made this possible for me and for us. Because maybe for others it may seem like something small, but for me/ us this is something so big and we can't wait to have more great experiences.

## Personal Story 2

### Day 1

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2018 at around 4pm I was on a bus heading to the airport to receive the young people from Portugal, Moldova and Georgia, as I arrived I decided to stand where I can see their plane land (mirado) and it didn't take long before me and my fellow youth exchange members from curacao caught a glimpse of the blue pearl from KLM as it came into view it was a sight to behold as we all stared in excitement for their arrival, I have filmed all of this as it is a memory worth re-living, the anticipation was big and for what felt like forever we stood there at the arrival ready to meet them, one of the first people to come out was David from Portugal, we chatted like we have already known each other for years though he wasn't aware that I was part of the upcoming youth exchange, when everyone came out I walked towards the group as I finished filming their arrival david turned and looked at me and asked "are you with us ?" I hesitantly said yes not knowing what to expect, david gave me a handshake with excitement and it was right there and then that I knew this youth exchange was going to be an amazing experience

On the first day we met up at CurOase were the host Fokje Schippers received us with open arms we played some games to get to know each other and learned how to greet each other according to the mix of cultures that was present we had the chance to swim in the pool play board games ect and lets not forget the amazing dinner that we had that night too overall for me it was a great first day and I couldn't wait to get home to talk about it, sake to say I got almost no sleep that day.

### Day 2

We got the the B&B at around 9 and got ready for the program for that day which was mostly carried out by Salome and Sandro who are a total sweetheart. we played some more games to get to know each other a little bit more and kind of break up the tension and build the confidence and trust among us and I gotta say good job on that Salome and Sandro you did well, after that we were divided in groups of 5 to discuss what our expectations, fears and contributions are regarding the youth exchange after we did that one member of the group had to walk forward and present what they have written down, for my group I did that part though I was a bit nervous and anxious everyone was so welcoming and relaxed that for a second I forgot anxiety existed, after that we went over the rules for the youth exchange which was carried out by Salome and Rezi from Georgia and after that it was time for lunch, the food again was amazing and to die for after we ate we had some free time and some of the folks went for a swim in the pool, it was surprising how comfortable they all felt at an island that many of them didn't even know about, and now on to the fun stuff, after that at around 3pm we went into the heart of curacao for a quest, we were divided in groups of 5 with 2 locals in each group we had a list of tasks that we had to complete in order to finish the quest for me seeing how easy the quest was I took it slow with my group to let them soak up the beauty of what I call home we finished the tasks and I took them to otrobanda showed

them around a bit and they loved it, job well done by me I guess, after that at around 6 we went back to the B&B for a delicious dinner and then wrap up the day

### Day 3

At this point I am dead tired and sleep deprived but determined to keep on going we arrived at the B&B again as usual around 9 we shake up with the folks and get ready for the program, Georgian group then talks to us about the what Erasmus+ is and what the possibilities within Erasmus+ was, now I already knew a little bit about Erasmus+ but I got a whole other world of information and really felt lucky to be part of something so big, after that the program continues and we are then told to select out key groups, there were

- Fairytale Group
- Videos & Photo Group
- Project Report group (4 different languages)
- Project Flyer

I chose Video and photo along with Nina (GE), Cornel (MD), Tao (GE) after we chose out groups we had lunch and some time to kill, I went for a swim with the guys and had a total blast despite them sometimes speaking their native language and me only understanding a little bit of Russian :)

After that we played an intercultural simulation game called BaFa BaFa where the point of the game is to show that traditional things in your home country might not be taken the same way in other countries for example “BaFa Ba” in the beta society meant something offensive

Then we moved on to a game called step forward for this game we all got a piece of paper with a role we had to follow, we stood in the street and Rezi read out some phrases and if the statement he said is something you agree with according to the character written on your paper you must take 2 steps forward, this game taught us that there are people in the world that have it harder than us and that we should be thankful for what we have in our lives and appreciate everything we have for some it was a little bit emotional and we shared our stories of experiences we had feeling unequal I myself shared my story of how I have been bullied since I was 4 years old.

After that we had dinner and the group were preparing for the cultural evening to present their cultures Georgia was up first and they spiced things up with a quiz and for every right answer you could choose a prize, either red wine white wine or their infamous “ChaCha” which is a really strong alcoholic drink to me that was the highlight of the night, the night went on with presentations of Moldova and Portugal, the best part was their food there was an array of different things to choose from and they were delicious and quite different from what we are used to here in Curacao.

### Day 4 & 5

Strange, we all are from very far but we have so many in common, even a proverbs with same meaning. After sharing proverbs which was unique experience we had a free time. On day 4 we the group from Curacao were invited to go to the beach with the other folks the original plan was

to go to kenepa which is indeed one of the most beautiful beaches on the island but that ship sunk when the bus driver just simply decided he won't come... we then decided to go to mambo beach, upon arriving they were not so excited for mambo because they wanted to experience something more tied to nature and as we know mambo beach is basically a money spending beach but as the tension released everyone went down to the beach and we had overall a great time we swam to the back rock platform at the beach and saw some colorful fishes and even baby fish even a little lobster which was the highlight of that day, after that we went back to the B&B for dinner and ended the day on a good note and because the day didn't go as planned they asked for the next day some more free time which meant we had more time on 5<sup>th</sup> day to prepare our cultural presentation. On fourth day we worked until late to compensate free time on 5<sup>th</sup> day – Moldavians made presentation and we had to go corner by corner to explore what are good sides of many cultures in one country. It was easy but still eye openable fo me because Curacao is a place with many cultures.

Upon waking up on day 5, we in our teams prepared activities for FELIS foundation kids, It did not take much time. It was a big rush to get everything ready for the presentation in the evening. we were all excited but we we're not fully ready, me and my mother who greatly helped with everything were running around in the supper market getting the last supplies for the food that and drinks we were going to serve that evening and then...things started to go a little south on us, a member of the group voiced her opinion on not being part of the presentation so we needed a solution around 1 in the afternoon she arrived and we brainstormed how to get her in the presentation which was a sketch we managed to get her in and all was set and ready for the presentation, we practiced and practiced and then more practice and we were ready we all went home to get some rest and prepare for the big night I think with all of us the nerves started to settle in as we were preparing for the presentation everything ran good and we were ready we had a few minor hiccups but the presentation went smoothly we had 2 local dancers who showed them the local folklore dances we have here on the island and at the end to top it all off we had a beautiful carnival show they all loved it and up until the last day they were still talking about it overall the night was an amazing and memorable one .

### Day 6

On day 6 in the afternoon we went to the felis foundation to spend some time with the kids there it was a really fun time seeing the kids interact with the guys and girls from Moldova, Portugal and Georgia I even threw a little acrobat show in there that got them really hyped up, nothing better than making kids happy, further we didn't have any more activities for the day so we all went home to get some much needed rest. The rest explored Otrobanda with Gerda.

### Day 7

We had group game again to build a tower out of paper without using verbal communication sounds tough but the results were amazing unfortunately I didn't participate in this one as I had twisted my ankle but I saw how they were able to communicate without saying a single word and use team work to build their towers after that the tallest tower to stand for a whole minute gets the

win. After all Natalia showed easy ways on how to write and brainstorm for project ideas we also brainstormed in our teams of 5 and we want to do these project ideas in future in Portugal, Curacao and Georgia. In the evening we all went to our selected groups in which case I was in the photo and video group where we had to do photos and videos from project.

### Last Day

On the last day it was pretty much a sad yet exciting one the morning started with us having a little breakfast at the B&B and proceeded to finish working on our key group projects in my case the film I finished editing mine and took the rest of the day to chill and talk with the guys and girls and overall just trying to soak up the last day and someone even confessed to have a little crush on me, fast forward to the evening we had a barbeque where we all presented out group projects and little did I know I Inspired one the locals Saisa to come up with a project to expel social anxiety among youth, it was a really touching moment for me to hear that I inspired someone, after that we received our youth passes which was something I am really proud about we then said our goodbyes which was not the most fun moment because they had a lot of fun with us, but as it said at the end of my video...The Fun Will Never End...



## Radio Visit Report by Gerda van Petersen

On the 13th of November the last day of our project, we were guests at Curom one of the most popular radio stations in Curacao. In the talk show one whole hour, of Cesar Palacios, we were interviewed and we could talk about our Youth Exchange 'Bouquet of Culture'. From each participant country, there was 1 representative and from Curacao 3 and Gerda as the leader of the Felis Curacao Foundation. All of the participants were very excited for this interview. Gerda explained the Erasmus+ program, aim and the target group for the YE. The participants talked about their life-changing experience. As this was there last day there was a lot to talk about and to share with the youngsters on the island about the impact this event has already had on their lives.

The locals were very impressed and all of them are still talking about how their lives have been turned around like 360 degrees. We had 6 girls from a shelter for abused girls. The whole team of this shelter had been listening to the radio that morning. They were so impressed with the answers and explanation that their youngsters were giving in the interview that the director had to ask a couple of time if 'the voice was really from one of his pupils'. The impact that this event has on the locals is huge.

The day after the interview I was called by the employee of the department of social and economic development, with the question if I could talk at their annual event on the 6th of December. But on that day, I'll be at the information day organized by the Dutch NA in Utrecht. Also, I received an email from the Department of General Affairs with the offer to help me with paperwork and permits to receive youngsters from the ESC on our Island. This process usually takes a lot of time and bureaucracy. People are very impressed.

We also had a guest from Reda Social which is the organization that divides the government budget among the NGOs every year. He is still talking about the cultural evening and especially the impact the exchange has on the local shy and society scarred youngsters. Of course, they want us to continue and they are doing everything they can to support us.

Because of this event and all the leaders that we've invited on the cultural evenings, we are gaining the trust of leaders (and parents) on the island that are working with youngsters with fewer opportunities. In December, as a result of this event, the director of the Foundation for Social Care and recovery is going to Portugal for a training. We will continue to build relationships and activities to reach our youngsters with fewer opportunities. Next year we hope to take some of them abroad for a whole new life-changing experience.