

# Volunteering in Coleg Elidyr; Daniela's Experience



If you are thinking about doing something different, then a year of volunteering may be what you're looking for. Coleg Elidyr accepts thirty volunteers every year from around the world to help support the students in our College in their living and education.

## Daniela Jimeno (left)

Daniela came to Coleg Elidyr when she was 19 from Aruba, in the Caribbean sea. At home, Daniela was studying social care with children (6-16), and wanted to take a gap year. She chose to come to Coleg Elidyr to get a better understanding of disabilities and how they affect a person, to support her studies.

We spoke to Daniela about her experience with volunteering in Coleg Elidyr

### What does a typical day volunteering look like?

I wake up early so I could have a shower and be in the house ready to help start breakfast at 7am. We then help the students to wake up and get ready for their day, before joining together to eat. I volunteer in Gardevias house, which is a small house with only five students; we have some time to relax and chat together after cleaning up breakfast and before sessions begin just after 9:00.

We help in sessions with trainees and have lunch with the students, before returning together in Gardevias at about 4:00. We then help to get the students ready for whatever is planned for the evening; maybe going to the pub or youth club—or to a local event in the nearby town (Carmarthen). It can get quite hectic for a few hours as we get supper ready and get ready to go.

Sometimes, we stay in on an evening and have a chance to relax — just focusing on making a nice supper. These are some of the best days, because you get a chance to sit around and talk with the students, and have a chance to bond more with them. That's my favourite part of the day; the cooldown on an evening when the house relaxes, you complete night-time routines to help the students get themselves ready for bed.

### What are the sessions like?

They are amazing; you get a chance to interact with lots of different students in the college who aren't in the house you're assigned to. I work on the estate, in the gardens and doing cooking. They are all great—working with the gardener was really nice and working with the cooking tutor to support the students has really helped me with my cooking skills!

### What memories have you made?

I have made great memories, with the students and during my time off.

With the students, my favourite memories are of those evenings in the house when there we just had a time in. We put music on and just dance together as we do our jobs around the home, and it is really a lot of fun.

In my time off, I've had a chance to visit lots of places in Wales

and in England; it's really nice to see more of these countries, even though it's really cold! But the thing that I remember most is the meals we share together as volunteers when we're home or when we go out. Our staple meal is just pasta, pesto, cheese and cherry tomatoes—we'd cook it together then eat it with little juice boxes when we were out.



### What challenges did you face as a volunteer?

Although time goes fast because you were so busy, volunteering with the students can be very tiring. On many days we'll help the students from when they wake up until when they go to sleep — and though some students were quite independent, doing things themselves others needed help with all aspects of their care.

### What advice would you offer somebody who is undecided about volunteering?

You have to be somebody who is up for long periods of interaction with the students, and to have a lot of patience with them. This is not advice but, it is rewarding at the end of the day. You can build an amazing relationship with the students. The amount of stuff you can learn here is crazy—we had another volunteer once who didn't even know how to put a sheet on a bed or how to clean a bathroom when they arrived. You become really independent when you come here; it's a really good step to grow in life.

### What have you learnt in your time in Coleg Elidyr?

I feel I've grown a lot strong and more independent, and I've had a lot of fun experiences with the different activities I've taken part in. I think that now, I see life a lot differently to when I arrived.