

Volunteering in Victoria House; Kevin'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.

Kevin Ibañez

After finishing his studies to become a nurse, Kevin came from the Philippines to volunteer in Coleg Elidyr at age 23; hoping to extend his knowledge of autism, down's and other disabilities. When he finished volunteering for a year on the college site, Kevin came back to Wales for a second year to volunteer in Victoria House.

We spoke to Kevin about his experience with volunteering in Coleg Elidyr and Victoria House

What is a typical day in Victoria House?

Here, everybody gets themselves ready on a morning; so we start the day by meeting together at 9:00am for breakfast. When we've finished tidying up, everybody will go to work; volunteers will go with the students to support them in whatever they're doing such as weaving, gardening or in the café.

We usually eat our lunch in the coffee shop wherein one of the Victoria House residents will have helped to cook the food, before returning to whatever activity we're doing that day.

In the afternoon and evening, we'll go back to the house and everybody will have some chores to complete before we separate for whatever is happening on an evening. There's a list of what everybody will do that day, including helping to get supper together for everybody.

On a night, our residents will do what they like to do—and we will support them if they need it. Most evenings we'll spend together in the home.

What workshops or activities do you do?

During my year in Coleg Elidyr, I did quite a few things; mostly I was on the estate, doing cooking or helping students in the office. I enjoyed being in the office most of all, because it was great to be with the office staff in the day.

In Victoria House, I mostly help in the coffee shop and in the garden. I prefer the physical activities.

What were the challenges when you arrived?

I found it difficult to live so rurally; it could be hard to get wifi and there was no phone signal, which I wasn't used to. You should also be prepared for long hours if you are coming to volunteer.

Having experienced both settings; what do you prefer about Coleg Elidyr's college site over Victoria House?

Living on the college site, you get a lot more chance to socialise—not just with the students, but also with the other volunteers who live there. You get a better chance to get to know other people's culture and spend time with people from many different places.

And what do you prefer about Victoria House over the college setting?

Victoria House is in a small town, so there's easier access to public transport; the bus and the train. It's easier to get out

and about in your free time, or with the residents.

What's your favourite memory of your time with the students or residents?

The best time for me is when you see the residents or students you work with grow in their skills. In Coleg, we worked with one of our students on brushing his teeth for quite a few months; using different ways to help him to do it more by himself. When he started to do it independently, that was fantastic.

What do you like to do in your free time?

My favourite thing to do is to go out with the other volunteers, to explore the beauty of Wales. You get to learn a lot from talking with the other volunteers; about their culture and their attitudes. My favourite place to visit is Tenby Beach; I've been there many times, with many different groups of volunteers.

What do you think you've learnt in the past year and a half, volunteering?

Through the work I've done with the students and residents, I've developed my self-worth and the contentment I feel with myself; for sure it has helped me to become a better version of myself.

What would you say to somebody who is undecided about volunteering?

I am a person who loves to explore new things and volunteering in Coleg Elidyr is one of the best decisions I have made. They will help you to become selfless and to widen your perspective about life. It's worth giving a try; the experience of having been part of Coleg and the people's lives here is so rewarding and not to be taken for granted.

