

Case studies of two young participants of Svitac

Adin Midžić is a Bosniak who is 25 years of age.

Growing up, he felt socially excluded and found it hard to engage with other children. Adin lacked confidence, and so tended to fill his time with solitary pursuits. He watched the world pass by his window. He felt isolated and as though he did not fit in.

He had always had an interest in music, but there were few opportunities for him to develop this interest. At the music workshop he met Sanjin Vošanović, who is Svitac's music co-ordinator. He found Sanjin to be open, engaging and knowledgeable – he suggested new bands and demonstrated different ways of making music.

Svitac provided an environment in which he could engage with members of other national groups and develop and expand his musical interests. He took up samba and began to learn to play percussion instruments. With a friend from Svitac, he then formed a heavy metal group. His group, which was made up of Svitac participants, played at a music festival which Svitac organised. Adin played bass guitar in this performance. For a shy boy who had struggled to fit in, this was a whole new experience. Now he was the centre of attention.

Svitac also provided an ideal environment in which Adin could develop his language skills and develop the values associated with peacebuilding. Speaking to foreign volunteers, from various countries, provided him with a learning environment which was very different to that which he had encountered in school. He began to work as a translator and helped the volunteers to teach English and German in Svitac's language classes.

After working closely with EVS (European Voluntary Service) volunteers, he personally saw the benefits of their work. He decided to become an EVS volunteer himself and put his name forward for an open call for EVS volunteers to work in the Netherlands. He had a fantastic experience and, after returning, impressed his friends with all the benefits and experiences that he had gained. After leaving school, he travelled to Germany and worked as an EVS volunteer for 11 months. In his work he attempted to recreate the open, friendly and creative atmosphere that he had experienced at Svitac.

He now works to promote the values and principles of peacebuilding through Svitac's work.

Maja Tomić is 23 years old

I was 15 years old and had always found it difficult to fit in with my peers. My views on society were different from the local norms. I was not interested in a person's nationality, race, sexuality, or religion, I preferred to distinguish someone on whether they are a good or bad person. This was and still is an unpopular opinion to have in Bosnia, the opinion that we as a community of people are in fact, mostly the same.

Svitac activities helped me to improve my language and artistic skills. Svitac became a safe space. At Svitac I had friends to talk to and make cool things with, for example a dream catcher I still keep in my room.

I believe going to this workshop during the summer started a long process that had a huge impact on my life. Bit by bit I started to speak about my insecurities and fears. I became a regular attendee at creative workshops for a few more years, further developing my vocabulary in English and improving my confidence.

Whenever events such as Future Shorts film festival were held, I assisted in making decorations or preparing the space designated for the festival. High school started around the same time, and my problems with fitting in continued. I made some friends and started expressing myself more, but I only ever felt really at home in the Youth centre, where I was free from segregations or stereotypes.

When I was about to turn 18, a classmate told me about the possibility of applying for a short-term EVS opportunity in the Netherlands. I decided to give it a go, and in a matter of weeks I was selected. This was shortly after the floods of 2014 which left many people without a home.

During my one month EVS, I met people from 12 different countries, travelled across the Netherlands, and fell in love with youth work. Making kids smile, some of the kids learned English just to be able to talk to me. This still warms my heart. The night I came back home, I immediately e-mailed Svitac's main coordinator and asked if I can continue as a volunteer in Brcko.

I have volunteered at Svitac for a while and I have also worked as a mentor and EVS assistant. I will do this as long as my university commitments allow. I gladly help at the youth center and help with the workshops whenever I am in Brcko. The work and environment of Svitac has truly helped me develop as a person, gain confidence, and inspired me to do good things and help others in return. **I now study Psychology at University and aspire to specialize in developmental Psychology and special education.**

Without Svitac, I might never have found the kind of work I truly love and want to pursue as a career. Instead of trying to make me narrow my view of the world, Svitac opened my mind even more towards peace and equality. It truly made me a better person.