



Ciao,

my name is Johanna Kufner and I'm from Germany. From November 2019 to July 2020 I'm doing an ESC voluntary at Istituto dei Sordi di Torino (Turin Institute for the Deaf) in Italy.

Why are you doing an ESC?

After 4 years at university studying biochemistry I needed a break and wanted to do something different. It was always my dream to live in another country for a few months. And because I'm deaf I wanted to support other deaf people. For luck I found the Turin Institute for the Deaf and asked them if they have a project for me. That's how it started.



Main entrance
in the Deaf Institute

How was the first weeks?

In November 2019 I moved from Germany to Italy. In the first weeks I met many new people. But I have already been here in October for APV (Advance Planning Visit) and have met the other volunteer (Tomasz from Poland), the organiser (André), our mentor (Laura), some people from the Institute and some new friends. So the beginning was not hard - it was just difficult to remember all names (and sign names, too!). Tomasz and I didn't know Italian and LIS (Italian Sign Language) and the most people can't use English an IS (International Sign). The communication wasn't easy and we felt overwhelmed. But the Italians are very nice and helpful so everything went on well.

When and what are you working?

We work from Monday to Friday. Our job is to support the educators. So we bring ideas for doing handicraft, painting, cooking, baking, sport, dancing, accompanying to work and so on. We're working alternating with young and old deaf people with other disabilities. So I can use sign language - my mother language - every day! If there are special events like the Christmas Party we help the Institute. In the evenings, at the weekends and on public holidays we have free time.

What are you doing in your free time?

We always go out and explore Italy with our friends: we went to museums, to cinema or to do sport (ski, ice-skating, bounce,...), did city-trips, did videos about different sign language and so on.

This is a video in IS, Polish and German Sign Language about our experiences:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yY0kzXXPQw>.

Now we have already done more videos - just look in YouTube!



Where do you live and how do you pay everything?

I'm sharing an appartement with Tomasz at the Institute. So we don't have a long way to our work. It's an ESC rule that we get an accomodation, pocket money and food or money for food from our host organisation.

Do you have language courses?

Of course we have! Every week we have 2h Italian Course and 4h LIS Course. It's really useful and so we could communicate with the Italians very fast. Sometimes when we have free time we learn Italian with a book or an app by ourselves.

Did you have hard moments?

Yes and it's normal... my hard moment was when all of Italy was blocked because of corona virus. It was so difficult for me to decide to stay here or to go home. It was good to have Tomasz to talk with because he is in the same situation. After doing a pro- and contra-list we decided to stay here and we don't regret it. Even with the restrictions we are having a great time. We had already have plans to go home for a few days and all were cancelled. So we didn't see our family and friends for a long time. But thanks to the modern technologies we can see them via videocalls and thanks to the support from the Italians we didn't feel lonely and depressed. I have learned so much from this experience and it has strengthened me!



Easter in Italy:
first time without my family,
but with my „italian family“

Which new ideas or plans did you get in your head?

In Germany I have taught German Sign Language sometimes. In Italy I have visited the sign language course and watched it from another perspective: I was not the teacher, I was a participant! It was great to experience it and now I can imagine to be a teacher for German Sign Language. When I arrived here, I can't imagine to go back to university. Now, after 7 months, I'm thinking: „Why not a master's degree?“ And I want to participate in more activities of Erasmus+!

What did you discover?

It was interesting to see the Italian way of life. Even Italy, Poland and Germany are in Europe and so near, there are many differences in culture, rules for (sign) language, behaviour, food & drink, landscape, politic,... These comparisons open my mind!

For me it is the first time that I am away from my family and friends for so long time. That I'm going to work. That I'm alone in another country and therefore

I'm fully on my own. That I really get to know the country, the landscape and the culture and not just the tourist side. And of course the delicious food and drink. Overall: I'm feeling very comfortable here, even I'm far away from home. Now I'm a bit afraid of saying goodbye to my favourite Italians, because I don't know when I will see them again.

Do you have a special message?

My motto is: „Don't dream your life, but live your dreams!“. So please don't be worried about problems that could occur. I recommend everyone to do an ESC - just dare and do it!! If you don't want to do an ESC, there are many other ways to collect experiences: Erasmus-Semester in a foreign country, school exchange, Work & Travel, Au Pair and so on. Difficult moments are normal but you will learn from them and be more self-confident. Now I can reflect myself and can say that I got many new competences: multilingual, personal, social and cultural. You grow with the challenges and I definitely learned a lot of useful things! If I have the chance to do it again I will take this opportunity!



International Day of Persons with Disabilities with our young and old deaf people in the City of Torino

*Arrivederci,
Johanna*

P.S.: If you are interested, then write an email to Istituto dei Sordi di Torino and they can help you!