

Belgium workcamp- Special Olympics Game 2016

(29th Apr - 11th May 2016)

Special Olympics



Special Olympics Belgium was founded in 1979 and is officially recognized by the Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee. It organizes National Games every year (alternatively in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) in Belgium. These competitions are mainly open to any athlete with intellectual disability who regularly practise a sport at his/her own level. These activities creates a platform for athletes and general public to work together and bring social cohesion to the society. In 2016, National Games took place in La, Louviere, which was my workcamp and our main focus was the game Bocce.

Struggle before departure from Hong Kong

At the very beginning, my parents were not really impressed by the decision of going Belgium since there was a bomb attack in the capital city Brussels in the late of March. It was just one month before the workcamp commences. They thought it was too dangerous to go there. However, at that time, I have decided to go to Belgium workcamp at any cost. I have told myself that could be a turning point of my life if I can be there. In the end, I still booked my flight to Belgium. On 26th April, I have arrived Belgium safely. And my journey begins!



During the workcamp, our work can be divided into two ways: Physical work and providing guidance to athletes.

1) Physical Work

In the workcamp, we have been led by two group leaders: Gaetan and Gil. They both assigned us into two teams to handle the physical jobs. One team mainly focused on assembling and demolishing of the building structure like steel. While the others will assist in setting up tournament areas like rolling up the carpet for the game 'Bocce', also we helped in putting chairs and tables in the cafeteria. At the same time, we need to the grouping of signage for the preparation of the Game. We all enjoyed it and found it very meaningful.



2) Provide assistance to athletes

Other than the above physical work, we were also responsible for helping the athletes and the staff in the tournament area. I am so glad to be part of it. For instance, we need to follow the instructions given by the reporting officer. And then we gave the relative color of the jacket to different players and sometimes we need to help them to put on the jacket. In the waiting zone area, me and other volunteers were singing songs and keep chatting with the players. We tried our best to give the support to the players! During the game, we need to lead the players to designated area for the competition. Though it was a repetitive work, we all enjoyed it since you can feel the pleasure and passion given by the players and the spectators!



During the two weeks in Belgium workcamp, I have experienced some culture shock in terms of food, drinks and the people encountered.

Culture shock 1) Belgium people are meat lover



Meat is an important part of food culture of Belgium. You can easily find meat in every meal for example Salami, sausage, beef, chicken fillet. I still remember at the first night when we arrived, we had a barbecue dinner which is full of meat selections. During the workcamp, we ate most of the time at the cafeteria in the work centre. They served us with meat with lasagna which is really different from Asian cuisine. But I quickly adjusted myself into their food culture.

2) Beer Culture

Another well-known thing in Belgium is Beer. In Belgium, they have over one thousand of different beer. During the free day of workcamp, my group leader, Gaetan, a typical Belgium who brought all of our volunteers to some local Belgium bars to have beer tasting. He introduced us some famous beer in Belgium. The Leffe is one of my favorite!



3) Belgium people are extremely friendly



During the Special Olympics, I was lucky enough to meet two of the managers: Bart and Veerle. After the workcamp, when I decided to visit another city called Antwerp. They even invited me to stay in their apartment for five days. They were very kind to treat me food and accommodation, they even drove me and accompany with me to some tourist spots. (Gasoline is expensive in Europe!) I had a really good time in Belgium and I was really impressed by the generosity and hospitality by the Belgium people.

When I look back now, there are two things that I was inspired by the workcamp. First of all, we need to be respectful, humble and open minded. Once we know that we are only a global citizen, there will be no more cultural burden. In other words, you can listen to the others and learn their culture. The easiest and quickest way to make friends with the locals is: to live like a local. By trying the local cuisine, beer and sometimes, learn and speak few words in local language. For example, I learn some basic greeting in French: 'Bonjour! Comment Ca va?' 'Ca va bien!', it means 'Hello, How are you? I am fine'.

In addition, we need to be brave enough to start conversation. I still remember on the first day we arrived at the workcamp, the group atmosphere was a bit weird. Twelve volunteers are from various countries like Germany, France, Czech Republic, Thailand, Korea, Kenya. We were basically strangers. But I was the first one to propose to take a 'Selfie' together. This little gesture indeed helps to break the ice. Most of us started to talk to each other afterwards. From time to time, I also really paid attention to check with other volunteers to ensure no one is being ignored. I believe a strong relationship bond among the group is the key factor to achieve success.



In one word, workcamp is a helpful tool for bringing you to another different places to change your mind. Thank you again to VolTra for the promotion and coordination work with the organization Javva.

