

Transition from resident to volunteer

New Life Foundation |
Published May 4, 2012 |
Posted in General news, Residents, Volunteers

Pekka, 41, from Finland, first joined New Life as a resident before then switching to being a volunteer. Pekka used to be a computer software engineer, but after ten years he decided to switch careers to writing, self-publishing short stories and philosophy books. Since the winter in Finland is so long, dark, and gloomy, most Finnish people experience what is called seasonal depression. Starting four years ago, Pekka started to experience depression on a daily basis, including in the bright and sunny summers.

According to Pekka, “the primary reason for my depression in the past four years is the mistakes I’ve made in relationships.” Pekka states that “life is a series of challenges, and how you respond to these challenges defines your life.” He spent the last Finnish winter in Portugal. But as he was still depressed, he realized that he had to be a part of ‘action’. He says that this action can be anything but it must be action.

First he tried to find volunteer work in Portugal. He contacted three places, but as he did not receive any positive responses, he widened his horizons. So then he searched the Help Exchange website to find volunteer work in southern Europe or Thailand. Pekka has been interested in spirituality for a long time, so it seemed like New Life was a good match for him.

New Life staff thought that Pekka should join the resident program, due to his depression. Pekka says “I began to feel better, due to the tranquillity of the surroundings, meeting and making new friends, the meditation, and the yoga.” He has come to realize that it’s a good practice to wake up early to do Yoga. He found most of the workshops for the resident program, — especially the Cogni-

tive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) classes, to be very useful. At New Life, he found that he was more of a countryside person. He was a New Life resident for three months.

He then decided to transition into the volunteer program, as he wanted to work more than residents do, and he felt his mind was stable enough. The difference he sees between the two programs is that for volunteers the main focus is work, and for residents the main focus is personal growth.

As a volunteer, Pekka first worked in the organic vegetable garden, then he worked in the fields, and he also undertaken cleaning and kitchen duties. He then decided to make the art centre his main focus. He went through all of New Life's photography, paintings, and pottery — which was made by New Life volunteers and residents — and organized an art exhibit. The grand opening was excellent! And it was made even better by fruit smoothies served by a local Thai family. Pekka closes with this: "My mind is clearer, and I now know how to proceed in my life."

Julie, New Life Resident