

Nela Mrchkovska, who studies in the United States and **Vaidas Karpalavičius** from Lithuania, have been volunteering at the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) for the past two months. They had the opportunity to practically implement their theoretical knowledge from their studies, to observe how one civil society organization works, and Vaidas, as a foreigner, to learn more about Macedonia.



Both of them coincidentally came in contact with MCIC by simply searching the Internet. They both agreed that the procedure for becoming a volunteer is quite simple and fast, and during the whole process, they had an immense support from the collaborator responsible for volunteers and internships - Simona Ognevska.

In the past period, they were mainly focused on development cooperation, using their knowledge and skills to develop case studies.

"It was very interesting for me to constantly learn new things about Macedonia, the legal system, the governmental and non-governmental sector. I think that this will serve me a lot in the future because I plan to focus on Macedonia and Eastern Europe in my further studies," said Nela.

Vaidas, who has never had any contact with Macedonia and its culture before is satisfied that he could also join other MCIC projects during his volunteering.

"I was very lucky to join the project with the Macedonian diaspora called Birthright Macedonia. I met wonderful people from around the world, from the United States, Australia and the United

Kingdom. I also had the opportunity to see the beauty of the country, travel with them in Ohrid, Strumica and around Skopje," he said.

As an advice for future volunteers, Nela pointed out that the most important thing is to step out of their "comfort zone" and simply get involved in everything they can and take advantage of every offered opportunity.

For Vaidas, this experience opened up new horizons. He gained new knowledge about the work of the civil sector, and in the future he sees himself as part of an organization that advocates for the improvement of the environment or the welfare of animals.

MCIC has been implementing the volunteering program since 2008, and through it, a total of 83 volunteers have been supported. The organization is proud that it can assist students in developing their skills through work on various projects, as well as to raise awareness among them about the importance for all of us to be active members of the civil society sector.