

The Othona Community in December 2020.

Festive greetings from all at Othona. We are approaching the end of a very strange and difficult year for everyone and our hopes and prayers during this advent period are that 2021 will be a much better year.



We have had the pleasure of hosting four young volunteers funded by the European Solidarity Corps for the past year. It did not turn out to be the experience they were expecting but as you will see from their insights below, they have gained a lot from this time.

They arrived in February to find the Centre closed for visitors and in the middle of a major overhaul of our energy system, as our Spanish volunteer, Maria, describes it “We started in February with a lot of cold and a complicated situation, for example we didn’t have a kitchen for cooking, or heating, and we didn’t understand our managers”. Just as we were finally about to reopen in March the covid-19 pandemic really took off and we were shut for the lockdown but fortunately were able to open in the summer albeit with drastically reduced numbers. However, as Laid, our French volunteer, describes it “Despite the covid-19 we all had a great time especially this summer with so many people, I enjoyed meeting and working with different people and learned to know them”. Our volunteer from the Czech Republic, Jana, said “It has been an enriching experience, I met many interesting people and have made good friendships in this year”

Our volunteers have worked hard during their time here and you can see the evidence of this all around the site as well as their time taking care of visitors coming here. Our Italian volunteer, Stefano, said “This Community gave us a lot of different experiences and feelings. This year I learnt many different skills such as painting, wood chopping, a lot of maintenance and language skills. I have also improved my cooking skills, and this is my passion and I hope that with my food I could give pleasure to the members of the Community. Maria described the rhythm of life here at Othona during the lockdown “Our days during the pandemic were very busy. We worked in the mornings in the gardens, tidying and cleaning up the buildings, painted the new Education building, studied English.... and in the afternoons, we had time for sport, reading, studying and art. In the summer we enjoyed time with members of Othona and had a little ‘normality’. Jana said “When it comes to my

work most of all I enjoy time in the kitchen, improving my cooking skills, discovering new recipes, learning from the others and sharing a bit from my culture. During the lockdowns I had more time for working outside, I learnt about permaculture and about animal care”.

During this challenging year our lovely volunteers have been a very positive presence to have at Othona and the Community has benefitted immensely from their time here. They have also gained from this experience, as Laïd described “Even during this hard period. I’m really happy to have chosen this volunteering at Othona and I especially found out a lot about myself, learned new skills and enjoyed chatting with different sorts of people. I’m so grateful towards everyone here and I really advocate others to come to Othona to appreciate having time alone with yourself and also with others”. Stefano said “I will never forget Othona in my life, I feel part of the Community and would not change this. I hope to come back as soon as possible to see the real Othona life without the pandemic”. Jana said of her time here “I enjoy Community life with regular Chapel meetings as well as spending time in nature. Also, for Maria this was a memorable year “This year I learned a lot of new skills, about gardening, using power tools.... But most important of all I learnt about myself. This Community for me has meant peacefulness, family, studying and spirituality and I hope I can return”

I hope you had a chance to meet our volunteers whilst they were here, sadly they are leaving us in the next few weeks and will be much missed. The Centre is closed now due to the tier 2 regulations and we plan to open again in February next year. I hope you can come and visit us next year and we wish you all a peaceful and happy Christmas.

Tim Fox is Warden/Manager, with Debbie and Richard Sanders. Want to visit?—See Website www.othonaessex.org.uk - then ring Othona at Bradwell (it’s down East End Rd and through East Hall Farm) on 01621 776564. Free Parking for all visitors to Othona—just ask for an exit token to leave through our wind-powered gate.