

Evan Kindle:

Welcome back to another episode of "The Places You Can Go," the podcast that explores the incredible study abroad opportunities awaiting students in Seville, Spain. I'm your host, Evan Kindle and today we are joined by Elliott Garvey, an English teacher at BLS Language Academy, a proud graduate of the University of Georgia, and a passionate advocate for international education. Elliott has a rich background in teaching English as a Second Language, Cambridge English Exam Preparation, and even has experience as a TEFL Course Instructor. Additionally, we are joined by one of our summer study abroad students, Kashraf Rizwan, a Marketing and Sales major from the College of Dupage to add her insights as our guest host on the podcast. So welcome to the show, Elliott we are thrilled you could join us!

Elliott Garvey:

Thanks, Evan. It's great to be here.

Evan Kindle:

A big component of the study abroad experience is finding ways for the students to immerse themselves in the local community. One possible avenue to do this would be to volunteer with the BLS Language Academy. Can you start by providing an overview of the volunteer teaching assistant opportunity available to our ICS students who sign up to teach at BLS?

Overview of the Volunteer Teaching Assistant Opportunity

Elliott Garvey:

Absolutely, Evan. At BLS Language Academy, we offer an exciting volunteer teaching assistant program specifically designed for international students. This program allows participants to assist our experienced teachers in the classroom, providing valuable support in various tasks such as leading small group activities, helping with lesson preparation, and offering one-on-one assistance to students. It's a fantastic way for students to gain hands-on teaching experience while immersing themselves in the local culture of Seville.

Cultural Immersion and Connection

Evan Kindle:

That sounds incredible. Speaking of immersion, how does volunteering as a teaching assistant at BLS help international students connect with the local culture in Seville?

Elliott Garvey:

Volunteering at BLS offers students a unique opportunity to engage deeply with the local community. By working closely with Spanish students and teachers, they experience the culture firsthand. For instance, they participate in local festivals, join in on community events,

and often share meals with local families. This immersion helps them build meaningful connections and truly understand the Spanish way of life.

Evan Kindle:

Can you share any personal stories or examples of students who have built meaningful relationships with the local community through their volunteer experience?

Elliott Garvey:

Certainly. One of our former volunteers, Anna, from the UK, developed a close bond with her host family and the students she worked with. She was invited to family gatherings and local events, which not only improved her Spanish but also gave her a second family in Seville. These experiences are quite common and are a testament to the deep connections our volunteers often make.

Benefits of Volunteering

Evan Kindle:

That's heartwarming to hear. How does volunteering with BLS enhance a student's overall study abroad experience compared to those who don't engage in such volunteer activities?

Elliott Garvey:

Volunteering at BLS enriches a student's study abroad experience by providing a sense of purpose and belonging. It allows them to contribute to the community, gain practical teaching experience, and build a professional network. These experiences often lead to personal growth, increased confidence, and a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances that they wouldn't get from just studying.

Impact on Local Community

Evan Kindle:

And how do the local schools and students benefit from the presence of international teaching assistants?

Elliott Garvey:

Local schools and students benefit immensely from the diversity and fresh perspectives that international teaching assistants bring. Our students are exposed to different accents, teaching styles, and cultural insights, which enhances their learning experience. Additionally, the international volunteers often introduce new teaching methods and ideas, which can be very beneficial for our regular staff.

Skills and Personal Growth

Evan Kindle:

What skills do students typically develop when volunteering at your academy, and how can these skills be beneficial for their future careers, especially if they are considering working abroad?

Elliott Garvey:

Students develop a range of skills including cross-cultural communication, classroom management, and adaptability. They also gain experience in lesson planning and teamwork. These skills are incredibly valuable in any career, particularly for those considering working abroad, as they demonstrate the ability to thrive in diverse and challenging environments.

Overcoming Challenges

Evan Kindle:

What challenges might students face when volunteering as a teaching assistant, and how can they overcome these challenges? How does BLS support students in navigating these challenges?

Elliott Garvey:

Students might face challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and adapting to different teaching styles. To overcome these, we provide comprehensive orientation sessions, ongoing training, and support from our experienced staff. We encourage open communication and are always available to assist with any difficulties. Our goal is to ensure that our volunteers feel supported and confident in their roles.

Long-term Impact and Networking

Evan Kindle:

How can volunteering at BLS contribute to a student's long-term perspective on global citizenship and cultural sensitivity?

Elliott Garvey:

Volunteering at BLS helps students develop a greater sense of global citizenship and cultural sensitivity by exposing them to diverse perspectives and ways of life. This experience fosters empathy, open-mindedness, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. These qualities are essential for anyone looking to make a positive impact in today's interconnected world.

Post-Graduation Opportunities

Evan Kindle:

For recent graduates, what opportunities are available for them to return to Seville and teach English after their semester abroad ends?

Elliott Garvey:

For recent graduates, there are several opportunities to return to Seville. They can apply for full-time teaching positions at BLS or other language academies in the region. Additionally, we often have openings for TEFL Course Instructors and other roles within our organization. These positions provide a great way to continue their professional development and deepen their connection with the local community.

Evan Kindle:

That's fantastic. Elliott, thank you so much for sharing these insights with us today. It's clear that volunteering at BLS Language Academy offers a wealth of opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Elliott Garvey:

Thank you, Evan. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

Evan Kindle:

And to our listeners, if you're considering a study abroad experience, check out all of the volunteering opportunities that are available to the international students at the ICS. Consider this opportunity as a transformative part of your study abroad journey. Thanks for tuning in to "The Places You Can Go." Until next time, keep exploring and embracing the world around you.