Hi, I’m Kayleigh from Gateshead in the North East of England.

I have attended 3 Erasmus+ projects with Champions Factory. Being asked to go on another one is an honour! This time the project was entitled ‘Again Together for Active Lifestyle’ raising awareness on the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle. When asked whether I wanted to go I was also asked to find 7 other participants to join me.

Once I had found 7 other participants, I was asked to work out their travel plans to get from their home town to Varna, Bulgaria on a budget of 275 euro per participant, challenge accepted! This is a lot more difficult than I initially thought, but reassurance from Lucie and Claire gave me the encouragement to do it. As this was my fourth project and I found the participants, I was asked to be the Team Leader.

I’m writing this blog to share with you my experiences on the project. I joined Champions Factory on this Erasmus+ project for an 8-day programme with a group of participants aged between 18-30 from 5 European countries (UK, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece). The title of the project was Again Together for Active Lifestyle the aim was to increase knowledge around a healthy lifestyle and the importance of sport and physical activity.

This was the first project where I didn’t know any of the UK participants before attending; I found this rather stressful leading up to the trip. Myself and two other participants from Newcastle travelled down to Manchester to get a direct flight to Varna, getting to know them lowered my stress levels. We arrived at Varna in the middle of the day and received instructions to get the local bus from the airport to the hotel. This didn’t worry me as much as I thought it might as I had an idea of where the hotel was and therefore where to get off the bus.

When we arrived at the hotel we were greeted by Aleks (the manager of youth projects for Champions Factory) I feel like I know Aleks very well and it’s amazing to see her each time I attend these projects! We arrived at the hotel at lunch time; after lunch, we were given free time until that evening when the other participants should have arrived.
That evening I found out that two projects were running at the same time meaning there was double the number of participants, 83 in total. We began the evening with some ice breakers and energisers and the amount of people there was rather overwhelming; in the past there has only been approximately 30 participants so I felt out of my depth. I was thankful for the encouragement from Lucie, and how lovely the UK participants were lowered my anxieties massively and helped me to look forward to the week ahead. One of the more exciting things about this project was the fact I saw familiar faces from the previous projects that I had been on.

The next day we received an opening presentation from Shirin, the General Director of Champions Factory. We discussed the programme ahead and what was expected from the participants. We then got started properly and went to the beach to play a complicated game which needed the participants to talk strategy. I unfortunately can’t take part due to an ankle injury, but I’m a good spectator and cheerleader.

The day after we were split into our own country groups; within these groups we had to decide on a traditional game from our cultures which we were going to deliver as a team. Everyone immediately agreed on Duck, Duck, Goose and we worked as a team to think of the best way we could deliver this to a group of 70 participants. After this we all took part in all the other countries traditional games and found that we all share the same types of games, all with different names.

Our 3rd day was free day in Varna city. We were also given a city challenge which wasn’t compulsory, but we attempted to complete as many challenges as possible. Mostly we spent the day getting to know one another better, developing a good bond and exploring the city.

The next couple of days the group were split into 8 teams from a mixture of countries. We learnt about education through sport is and how sport can be used as a fundamental tool in teaching almost anything. We initially done this by being paired with someone from the opposite sex, being secured together and having to play a football match. The participants soon learnt that they had to adapt their play to work as a team and be successful. After reflecting on the game, the teams needed to create their own sports session with clear objectives to be achieved. The next day they delivered these sports sessions to the rest of the group.

As an outsider due to my injury; it was amazing to see the UK participants thrive and share their ideas on sports sessions and very heart warming to watch them deliver the sessions! There was no doubt in my mind the capability of the UK participants, but it gave me a warm fuzzy feeling inside watching them do what they do best! They made me very proud!

Each evening is an intercultural night; where each country delivers a presentation on their culture. It gives the rest of the participants an insight into the other cultures. For the UK intercultural night, we all decided we wanted to showcase our culture in an interactive way, we did a quiz with additional bonus rounds. Afterwards we were showered with praise for our evening which left the other UK participants on a high.
The final couple of days included farewell activities, future planning and the handing out of certificates. As a leader; watching the UK participants receiving farewell messages off the other participants, getting their certificates and thinking about taking part in future projects gave me a sense of pride. It was amazing to be able to share the great experiences I’ve had on these projects with other young volunteers from StreetGames and sharing the work of Erasmus+. 

I just want to say a massive thank you to Champions Factory and Erasmus+ for yet another amazing opportunity! Also the support and encouragement from Lucie at StreetGames which helped me through my anxieties of being the group leader. Lastly, I want to say a massive well done to the UK participants for your enthusiasm and participation in each and every workshop. You all did me proud and you all were an asset to the United Kingdom and StreetGames.

Onwards and upwards to the next project!

Over and out.