

Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion

Good Examples

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Introduction

Volunteering has huge potential. There is no doubt that volunteering is a means of social inclusion and integration. However, when planning the Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion (VTI) Project, we were mindful of the fact that it is not as common for people from marginalised groups. Whilst there are some special projects or programmes that engage people from vulnerable groups in volunteering, e.g. former clients later becoming volunteers, more spontaneous engagement of those individuals in volunteering is limited.

Volunteer coordinators often avoid partnering with marginalised groups as they do not know how to approach them and what they should take into consideration. They are often worried that it will take up a lot of time and energy (which may be the case at the beginning) without seeing any satisfactory results.

On the other hand, disabled or unemployed people (and in some countries even seniors) may not try to engage with volunteering as they perceive these activities to be unsuitable for them or that they would not be welcome if they decided to give volunteering a go. In many instances they are not even aware that they can get involved in volunteering.

During the implementation of the VTI project we discovered that there are many excellent examples of how volunteering can enhance inclusion and we wanted to share them with others to demonstrate the benefits for both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs).

In this document, you will find five good practice examples from each partner country (Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Romania, and Slovakia). Some of them describe projects or programmes, others focus on individual stories of volunteers who, despite the challenges they faced, decided to participate in volunteering. Although some examples overlap, we believe that every story is unique and offers a valuable insight into the motivations and benefits of volunteering.

We hope these stories will inspire many individuals to get involved in volunteering and will encourage volunteer coordinators to welcome diversity in their organisations.



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Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion

– Project Information

Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion (VTI) is a European project with the overall aim to increase the social inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups through volunteering in partner countries and to share already existing experience/practices/tools in this field. There are eight partners cooperating in this project:

- Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations, Slovakia
- Volunteer Ireland and Dublin City Volunteer Centre, Ireland
- Frivilligcentre og Selvhjælp Danmark (FriSe), Denmark
- ÖKA – National Volunteer Centre, Hungary
- Volunteer Centre Osijek, Croatia
- PRO VOBIS – National Volunteer Centre, Romania
- brīvprātīgais.lv, Latvia
- Volontariato Torino – Vol.To, Italy

Project Objectives:

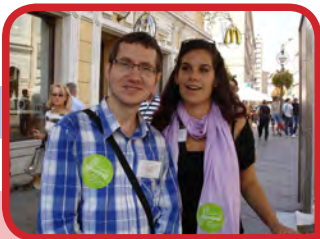
1. To share experience among partner countries on how to involve people from vulnerable groups in volunteering.
2. To set up a framework for cooperation with different groups of vulnerable volunteers:
 - people with disabilities
 - people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds
 - long-term unemployed people
 - seniors
 - other groups such as migrants, minority groups (e.g. Roma), etc.
3. To provide framework for training of volunteer coordinators on how to approach and cooperate with these groups of volunteers.
4. To collect good examples from partner countries that can serve as an inspiration for other volunteer centres and volunteer involving organisations.
5. Time Frame: August 2013 – July 2015

Project Products:

- Collection of best examples of involvement of marginalised groups in volunteering (electronic document in English and the partners' languages)
- Recommendations for volunteer coordinators on how to approach, involve and coordinate volunteers from various marginalised groups (electronic document in English and the partners' languages)
- If you want to know more about the project, feel free to contact any of the project partners (see the contact information at the end of this document).



CROATIA



Maksimilijan Jevtić

Age: 33

About me – getting started...

My name is Maksimilijan. I decided to start volunteering with the Witnesses and Victims Support Office at the Rijeka County Court after reading in the newspaper that they were seeking volunteers. As I was unemployed for over a year at the time it was the perfect opportunity to use my free time in the best possible way – volunteering, through which I could contribute to the development of not only my community but also my own personal development.

My volunteer engagement...

My volunteer role there involved providing emotional and informational support to victims and witnesses of crimes, with the aim of informing them on the course of judicial proceedings, their rights and what to expect of the courtroom proceedings. All this contributed to minimizing their fears as well as the negative effects of stress from having to provide evidence in court.

During 2011 – 2012 I was also involved in a project called 'Equal opportunities – inclusive volunteering as a path to greater integration and employability'. As part of the project I had the opportunity to complete workshops in Strategic Planning, Proposal Writing, Budgeting and Reporting. This helped me to gain a valuable internship.

The Victim and Witness Support Service (VWSS) provided the following training: 'Fundamentals of counselling work with victims of sexual violence' and 'Working with victims of domestic violence', including Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

I later became the head of the Rijeka branch of the VWSS and my volunteer involvement increased; in addition to working with victims and witnesses, I was also responsible for coordinating the work of volunteers, representing the work of the VWSS and its subsidiaries, helping in organise and facilitate meetings and a number of other administrative tasks.



Benefits...

In December 2012 I was declared volunteer of the year for the City of Rijeka. All this would not have been possible if it had not been for the support of Association for Civil Society Development (SMART) and the Office and Association for the support of victims and witnesses of which I am still a volunteer. Based on a number of skills and competencies that I gained through volunteering, I got an internship in my chosen field of law in January 2013.



From all this I conclude that volunteering is something that changed my life and opened many doors that had previously seemed closed. I would recommend volunteering to anyone - dare to and take the step, because through the selfless help to the ones in need we are not only changing their, or our lives, but we are gradually shaping the world into a better, more beautiful and more humane place.



Mile Mrvalj

Age: 55

About me

As a child I was brought up in the spirit that the greatest human virtue is to help people in need – the elderly, powerless and disabled. So from early childhood I was encouraged to help people in my neighbourhood (I bought supplies for them, helped with physical work, etc.).

Helping humanity drives me in progressing human civilization. I spent years in occupied Sarajevo during the war and during this time got to witness volunteerism in all its greatness. The city, with a population of 500,000 citizens, was surrounded for four years and had no electricity, water or food. Daily bombings were part and parcel of life in the city. However, I witnessed hundreds of international volunteers selflessly bringing food, medicine and drinking water in convoys. That's how I lived and worked in Sarajevo - as a mobilised soldier, a person who fights to survive, but also as someone with responsibility for caring and looking after his mother who had cancer. My difficult life situation didn't keep me from helping others though.

After the war I went into private business. This collapsed after 10 years and I ended up losing all my assets and became homeless. Five years ago I came to Zagreb as a homeless person and for three years I was living like a stray dog; my only source of income was from collecting bottles. Sometimes I would find good food in bins to eat. In Croatia, a person without a registered place of residence has no rights: no access to social care, no rights to social or financial assistance from the Red Cross, no health insurance, no right to register on the labour market or the right to vote!

Getting started...

However, in such circumstances, the faith and hope inside me grew stronger, and I met many wonderful and noble people who unselfishly helped me. In particular I would like to mention an association and a humanitarian project for homeless people - a magazine called *Street Lights* and Sanja Bunić and her project 'From Book to the Roof', organised by the Zagreb City Libraries. There were also many noble young people who put a lot of effort and time to help others in need.



My volunteer engagement...

Even though I am in a situation where I am forced to live off other people's help, I felt a strong need to do something to help other homeless people who are (the vast majority) in a state of depression. During the last two years I have organised four charity exhibitions and dozens of lectures on the issue of homelessness in primary, secondary and third level colleges. I have participated in many public debates and have willingly participated in promotions and campaigns organised by Volunteer Centre Zagreb, individuals, NGOs and various other institutions. Four documentaries were recorded about me. In the media I am known as the most famous homeless person in Croatia, and through numerous appearances on television, radio and in the press I am trying to make the public more sensitive to the problem of homelessness and to draw attention to the problems and challenges they are facing.

Last year I raised money through humanitarian activities and shared it among the homeless. I am volunteering with two associations and two foundations; my work has been recognised in the Volunteer Centre Zagreb and I was nominated for a 'Volunteer Oscar in 2013'. I was the first homeless person to gain the legal right to register a residence at the Centre for Social Welfare, after a long struggle with the bureaucracy. I will soon establish an association for helping homeless people and that will be the crown of my struggles.

Benefits...

Finally to emphasise: AS MUCH AS YOU PUT YOUR TIME AND EFFORT INTO VOLUNTEERING, YOU WILL ALWAYS RECEIVE MORE YOU GIVE! The one who understands this does not need anything explained, but the one, who does not understand, will never understand regardless of how much you explain!



Slobodan Čajkovac

Age: 33

About me...

As many people who know me are aware, I was raised in an orphanage. I find similarities between that and volunteer work: both share the same need for helping and understanding others who are different, sharing good and bad times, and both make you a stronger and better person. I fitted into volunteer work very fast.

Getting started...

I came to the Red Cross in 2003 to meet a friend. She introduced me to Denis who was the coordinator for young volunteers and Goran, the future coordinator. After I met them we spent a while chatting. They told me that I could become a volunteer as well if I wanted and suggested meeting other young volunteers at their regular Thursday meeting at the Red Cross. I thought about it for two weeks and finally decided to go to one of the meetings to see and hear how the young volunteers' team functioned.

After a few meetings I decided to join the Red Cross.

My volunteer engagement...

Volunteers in the Red Cross work in two units: the Red Cross Youth and the Field Unit. I volunteer in the Field Unit. The Field Unit transfers things, sets-up tents on the field, provides a presence at various cultural events and so on. I am always ready to help and nothing is too hard for me! My friends and colleagues that I work and volunteer with can confirm that.

Benefits...

I have been volunteering in the Red Cross for over 10 years now and during this time I have met good and wonderful volunteer friends and associates. To sum up my volunteer experience I would say that I am a person who is always ready to help and that I give all of myself because volunteering fills me with joy and happiness.

The inclusive volunteering programme of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Split – Croatia

"Prejudice towards people with disabilities and their working abilities are very deeply rooted and it takes a lot of effort to give them an opportunity to volunteer. You need to get to know each volunteer individually, their abilities and limitations. It is necessary to choose volunteer positions that suit them and prepare beneficiaries to help support them".

Organisation: Multiple Sclerosis Society of Split

Founded: 2011

Staff: 25

Volunteers: 17

Funding: donations

Aim: To develop a programme of inclusive volunteering and involve volunteers with disabilities in order to help people with Multiple Sclerosis

Target group of volunteers: people with intellectual disabilities (young people who previously stayed in institutions for children without parental care)

Contact details: Zdravka Dominović, volunteer coordinator,

Tel. +385 21 468 225 E-mail: dms_split@sdmsh.org

Website: <http://www.multipila-split.hr/>

Activities

Volunteers accompany people with MS on various activities such as attending an appointment, tasks at home or going out for a social activity. They help with arts and crafts in the MS Society such as art workshops and making birthday cards. In fact, volunteers are involved in every area of the Society such as: helping with photo workshops; organising craft fairs, events, fishing, bowling; organising social activities such as games and singing; visiting patients at home or in retirement homes; help with shopping or administrative work like writing a letter or going to the post office etc.

An experienced volunteer coordinator coordinates the volunteers and their tasks. The Society has established a long-term partnership with *Swallow*, an organisation that works in the area of inclusion. Their beneficiaries volunteer in the MS Society of Split on a regular basis.

Benefits

For some of the beneficiaries of the MS Society volunteers were readily welcomed because of their first hand knowledge of the situation. Thus, these vol-

unteers were accepted; however, some of the beneficiaries later admitted to having reservations about their abilities. They were surprised by the volunteers' readiness to work, motivation, independence and compliance with agreed terms. The Society noticed over time that people with MS were welcoming towards new volunteers. Volunteers were able to win over almost everyone with their ability to listen, their empathy and compassion for patients who often felt that the community didn't understand their problems. In one example the Society was pleasantly surprised by how well one volunteer was accepted amongst the immobile patients in the retirement home. His sensitivity towards them along with his good communication skills impressed them and they established a very close relationship with him. He took them out for walks, for ice cream and cakes or shopping for example. This volunteer even learned how to drive a wheelchair and how to overcome small obstacles in one. This enabled him to be mindful of the safety of the beneficiaries and as a result mutual trust was built. The beneficiaries let the volunteer into their world. He was emotionally connected and involved - if the beneficiaries got into an argument he would try and resolve it. He couldn't understand why family members didn't visit more often and organised visits for the beneficiaries and their family members.

Zagreb City Libraries

*Library – a place where anyone can make a contribution to the community!
Sensitise, connect and encourage changes!*

Organisation: Zagreb City Libraries

Founded: 2010

Staff: 558

Volunteers: 46

Funding: public funding, donations

Aim: inclusion of people at risk of social exclusion

Target group of volunteers: homeless, elderly people, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed

Contact details: Sanja Bunic, volunteer coordinator, Kristina Krpan, volunteer coordinator

Tel. +385 1 4694-327E-mail: kgz@kgz.hr

Website: <http://www.kgz.hr/>

Activities

The majority of our volunteers are engaged in one of the following three projects:

1. **The Library with Doors Wide Open** is a project that encourages reading, life-long learning, social integration of children with disabilities, young persons and adults with disabilities.

2. **Project 65 Plus** is a project that deals with the social integration of the elderly, active inclusion in cultural and social events where the elderly are not only service users but also the creators of the programme.

3. **A Book for a Roof**; (<http://www.eifl.net/zagreb-city-libraries-croatia>) is a project that empowers homeless and long-term unemployed people for active engagement in social and cultural affairs and participation in the labour market. It also aims to change stereotypes about homelessness and libraries.

Volunteers assist with information, literacy, arts and language learning workshops; reading clubs; promotion of homeless programmes and help with organising *Bring Along A Friend* events etc. Experienced volunteer coordinators coordinate volunteers and their activities. Individuals willingly give their contribution to the community through various events at the library and therefore they often apply for volunteering.

Benefits

The greatest benefit for users and volunteers is the opportunity to expand their social networks. This happens from feeling accepted, having freedom to express their own personal values and the opening of new possibilities. In addition, the library helps break down stereotypes about libraries as places where you can only borrow books; they are preferred partners in the implementation of projects. They also help expand the support network of various NGOs and institutions by making them aware of its resources (human, space, contacts, etc.) and ultimately become a more visible presence in society.

Before working with representatives of socially excluded groups it is important to be informed about, and get in touch with, organisations that work with them. Additional support from experts in various fields (psychologists, social workers, lawyers, etc.) is often required. Organising additional training and supervision for project managers and the volunteers is helpful. Through regular feedback on volunteer engagement you can show volunteers their significance for the benefit of individuals, projects and organisations that will further motivate them.



D E N M A R K



Jan

Age: 51

"Lonely Elderly people benefit greatly from visits by people with learning disabilities. Making a difference for the elderly is also a way out of their own loneliness while providing greater self-esteem, says Jan – a volunteer for the volunteer organisation Joy."

Every other Thursday Jan takes the bus to the local Community Centre to visit Gunnar who is 93 years old. Jan is a volunteer, with the volunteer organisation Joy, whose members include those with mental disabilities that visit the elderly in their homes or in nursing homes. Jan has been a visiting friend for Gunnar for two years: 'I feel like I make a difference to Gunnar in a different way than the staff, because they never have time for him. But I have plenty of time. Had I been at home, I would have just slept or looked at the wall, and Gunnar would have probably done the same. But when we're together, we enjoy ourselves and laugh together,' says Jan.

Anna Birthe is coordinator for the visit arrangements in the local Community, and she is excited about the programme: 'The residents get some experiences that are beyond what the nursing home can offer and it spreads happiness and life in the Centre among older people that are visited by volunteers from Joy.'

Bringing life into the nursing home

One of the major advantages of this project, according to Jens Christiansen, project manager of Joy, is that people with disabilities are being valued as a resource: 'The group is on the outskirts of the labour market. Being a volunteer gives them social recognition. They become part of a larger community where many others also normally function, participate and share recognition that it provides. They feel that there is someone who can use their resources and talents to do something, and they share the joy of doing something meaningful for others and are being appreciated for it.'

A smile is contagious

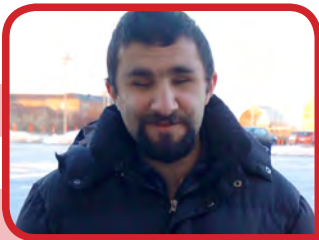
Visiting friends are, where possible, matched with residents who have the same interests, so the volunteers come and do something they love with somebody that they are happy to be with: 'Both parties get something out of it. The resident will have a relationship outside their home or the Community Centre, and

the visiting friend gets to make a difference - it creates joy both ways!,' says Anna Birthe .

Gunnar agrees and is really happy to receive the visits: 'Before I was just staring into space, and there was nothing to do, but with Jan's visit there is something to look forward to,' says Gunnar.

Jan nods and says his family and friends also are busy: 'Everything is moving so fast - for young people in particular. I prefer to talk to older people, where you can sit quietly, and I think it's fun to talk about old times and see pictures of trams and houses with thatched roofs.'

Jan thinks their time together is just as important to him as to Gunnar: 'You get something back when talking with another person. It gives me joy and him too. When Gunnar gets a smile on his face, I also get a smile, and I always go home happy from here' says Jan Jensen.



Osman Sari

Age: 21

21-year-old Osman Sari is a Kurd and blind. When he came to Denmark from Turkey five years ago, he had no passion for life and was completely dependent on his family. At the Institute for the Blind, he met other blind people and found out that you can have a dignified and active life despite your disability. Here began a new and very active life for him.

'My mental birthday is April 15, 2009 - it was a Wednesday. The day I accepted that I'm blind and I can still live an active life. The first 16 years of my life I lived in Turkey, and no one in my circle of friends or family understood my disability. When I was reunited with my father in Denmark, I started at the Institute for the Blind - and it was here that I learned about my options. I was offered support, faced expectations and demands that helped me to develop into an independent person', says Osman Sari.

It is mainly the opportunity to influence his own life - and others with disabilities - that gives Osman courage to be active as a volunteer and stay involved in several different organisations.

21 years old and a 'voluntary squid'

Osman's strong community involvement has led him into several organisations. Today, he is a member of several Kurdish organisations, Danish Association of the Blind and the Danish Association of the Blind Youth, the Association of young people with disabilities, the Socialist People's Party and User Council of Institute for the Blind.

Osman believes the best thing about living in Denmark is that he has influence on his own situation, and being active in various organisations helps him to improve the condition of other people: 'You can describe volunteering as a car. Imagine a giant truck with many wheels. In this way are the volunteers. When I helped to organise a spring conference in one of the organisations, I was one of the wheels on such a truck', says Osman.

I am a volunteer because I cannot help it

Osman had many good reasons to engage in voluntary work: boredom, desire to break social isolation, awareness of his possibilities, a search for national and cultural community and he would also like to meet a girlfriend. Today he just wants to make a difference and help others.

Although Osman has been active since he came to Denmark, he knows that there are not many people like that in the organisations. And he is not very optimistic because he knows how difficult it is to get more minority-Danes to participate. He hopes that those with an ethnic minority background will become more active, so he will not remain as unique. He would also like to make organisations more diverse.

As he became more independent and learned more about living with his disability, he is also more aware of how much he could do for others. One example of his involvement is with families from ethnic minorities who have children with disabilities, where he sees a particular need for more information and knowledge.

He also points out the importance of good role models and therefore he simply can't stop his volunteer work.



Helle Axelsen

Age: 58

Volunteer Center Vesterbro in Denmark has developed and implemented a project called 'The first steps', in collaboration with Springboard, which works to pave the way back to the labour market for people in a difficult life situation - people living with different types of mental health problems. The project has created suitable matches between mentally vulnerable people and local voluntary organisations.

Helle Axelsen, of 58 years, is one of those who have benefited from the collaboration: 'I suffered from depression after being bullied at my workplace. This led me to Springboard, which helped me find a new direction with my life', says Helle.

Through Springboard Helle got in contact with the Volunteer Centre, where she had several conversations with organiser Morten Staun, or as Helle says: 'I talked with a wonderful guy who helped me to clarify my needs and to find a place where I could volunteer'.

Helle is currently a volunteer visiting friend: 'My motivation to start as a volunteer was great, but I had no confidence in myself. Therefore, it was really nice that I was received so well, both at the Volunteer Centre and in the volunteer organisation, and received a lot of support in the beginning'.

Engelsborg Olsen, manager of the organisation behind the Visiting Service, also highlights the importance of the initial introduction to the volunteers as vital to the success of the project: 'When someone starts as a volunteer, I spend a lot of time getting to know them, learning about their weaknesses and strengths. It is very important to know about their difficulties because it allows me to give as much support as needed. It is important to have a really good relationship with the volunteers and for them to really know that I will always support them.'

I got the courage back and I was ready for the next step

Helle's time as a volunteer has been of great benefit to both parties: 'Her work with us has been very relevant, both for the residents and for herself, and she is back to her old self again. I also feel that Helle has grown with the tasks; she takes on more things, seems happier, and has regained a lot of her competencies back', says Engelsborg Olsen.

Helle herself says that, as a volunteer she has gained a lot of new social contacts and positive experiences, which has given her faith in herself again. It has meant a lot to her that someone wanted to support and care for her. She is now ready to take the next step and is applying for an educational course as a Health Service Secretary. The fact that she is considering going back to education for the third time in her life, is a bit of a surprise even to herself: 'I had not imagined that I was about to start a new education at the age of 58, but heck, I'm not afraid and I know I can do it!'

Anyone can contribute something

Volunteer Centre Vesterbro has produced a method booklet about the project, which says: 'The experience of the project clearly shows that psychologically vulnerable people can be dedicated and resourceful volunteers who contribute new qualities and values to the organisation. Experience also shows that the organisations, with relatively simple methods, can provide a good framework and organise the volunteer work, enabling the psychologically vulnerable the opportunity to contribute as volunteers. It is the belief that volunteering has a number of positive effects for the individual and that everyone can contribute something that has formed the basis for the project.'

Double Minorities

Danish Disability organisations have started a project with a focus on promoting opportunities for participation in the Danish society for people who have a disability and belong to an ethnic minority group. The aim is to prevent marginalisation and social isolation.

Purpose of the project:

People from ethnic minorities, and also living with a disability, represent a minority of the minority, which may increase the likelihood of marginalisation and isolation in the community. The aim is to promote equal opportunities for participation in community life for people with ethnic minority backgrounds and disabilities, to strengthen their networks, to broaden their knowledge of how to access the opportunities available within the Danish society.

Furthermore, the project aims to ensure that organisations are better able to include ethnic minorities in voluntary work and thereby strengthen the integra-

tion process: 'A great deal of effort in the project is to focus on cultural understanding and diversity in organisations, according to their ways to communicate, recruit and plan different activities or ways of organising the voluntary work', says consultant for the project Sara Coachman-Iversen.

Valuable resources:

The project continually collects experience and knowledge, as well as test methods and activities that promote inclusion. The activities consist of various meetings and courses, including diversity training where representatives provide tools useful to work with the target group.

'It's important to think about the diversity, when you want to recruit and involve new types of volunteers', says Sara Coachman-Iversen and furthermore gives a few recommendations:

- Identify role models that can bridge the gap and support between the organisation and new members.
- Use direct contact and dialogue to get the message out to wider audiences or recruit in new forums: e.g. pharmacies, medical centres, hospitals, disability associations, etc.
- Experiment with new types of activities that can attract a wider type of volunteers.
- Experiment with other forms of language in dialogue with ethnic minorities.
- Clarify the need for expertise and resources in the voluntary group so that they may reflect a broader target group's needs and interests.
- Split the voluntary tasks into smaller parts to support different needs and resources - e.g. coordination, coffee-making, ball games with the kids, etc. There are many other tasks that can suit people, even if they are not fluent in Danish or have a disability.

The project has trained 'bridge builders' who share their personal stories of living with a mental or physical disability and having an ethnic minority background. By telling their stories, they create an open dialogue with organisations on benefits, challenges and unique opportunities of involving people with disabilities and of migrant background in the work of the organisation. The hope is that organisations will see them as valuable resources that can actively contribute to the organisations and their development.

Website: www.dobbeltminoriteter.dk

Mentally disabled create joy as visiting friends

The organisation Joy offers a friendship to people who are not able to use other visiting services. Joy is a voluntary social organisation whose members, including people with developmental disabilities, visit the elderly in their homes or in nursing homes. The aim is to establish a relationship between visiting friends, with mental or learning disabilities, and elderly people with no mental disabilities. In that way, the visiting friends' social network is expanded, and they experience a boost in self-esteem, that arises from the voluntary work and making a difference, as well as having an impact on another person.

Joy began in 2010 and today, besides the visiting service, they invite famous people to give lectures in local Community Centres once a month. Joy also arranges trips every fortnight to attend cultural events, and every summer they arrange a party for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Joy has 15 volunteers who help regularly, from one to six times a month, and another 10 volunteers that help a few times a year. In total there are now 12 visiting friends and 200-250 people are attending their annual events.

The benefit is mutual

Project Manager Jens Christensen explains that the volunteers with learning or mental disabilities fill a gap that exists in the voluntary sector, as they are visitor friends for people who would otherwise not get a visit. It can be difficult for ordinary visiting services to find visitors for elderly people living in nursing homes, because they are not as attractive for many other volunteers.

Steps to become a visiting friend

To become a visiting friend, one must meet the same requirements as any other volunteer in a befriending programme: 'You have to want to be a volunteer, you have to be good, to be sweet and kind to others, and you have to be stable and to be able to comply with agreements. These requirements are all the same for anyone who wants to volunteer', says Jens Christensen. 'But perhaps Joy's volunteers need to be reminded more often about the agreement', he clarifies.

When you do not get money, you will be even happier!

Joy is a society that grows quietly and can grow even larger. Jens Christensen estimates that it can carry up to 40-50 active members, but also says: 'We all know each other very well today, and that is also very important in the future.'

For many of the Joy's volunteers, it is an honour in itself to be a volunteer: 'When you do not get money, you are even happier', says one of the volunteers who is looking forward to new experiences as a volunteer with Joy.

Website: www.besoegsvenner.dk

The background of the image consists of a repeating pattern of horizontal stripes. The stripes are colored red, white, and green, arranged in a sequence that mimics the Hungarian national flag. The word "HUNGARY" is centered in the middle of the image, spanning across several of these stripes.

HUNGARY



Károly Gulyás

Age: 36

Károly Gulyás is 36 years old and was one of three siblings. Károly and his brother were put in a children's home at a very young age. Their only sister stayed in the family home; but neither she, nor their parents keep in touch with the two brothers. Károly and his brother grew up very happily in the children's home in Buda, where he had always been very active in the social life of the community.

After he became 18 years old, he began working in the children's home and stayed there for the next 10 years. People loved him, particularly that he was a bright, nice, and helpful young man. The termination of his employment and the circumstances forced him and his brother to move into a Mentally and Psychiatrically Disabled People's Home in Tordas. He adapted well to the new environment, became employed in social work, and joined in the institution's sport programme and cultural life. Károly does not reside in the Home but in a nearby apartment with his fellow workers. He is in a relationship and lives almost entirely independently. He works in the Home during the day and participates in recreational activities. He is the key player of his handball team that had some considerable successes, as well as a member of the dance group, where he is able to indulge in his great passion for dancing.

Since his arrival at the Mentally and Psychiatrically Disabled People's Home, Károly has been doing volunteer work for the Home and the Foundation "Jövőt Nekik" (Future for All). The Foundation's main aim, with the assistance of parents and volunteers, is to help residents of the Home in their social integration, their physical and cultural activities and the expansion of the range of their opportunities. Károly does a lot of volunteer work for the Foundation and they can always count on him to volunteer after work hours when he has no other training or dance rehearsal. As a volunteer, there is no task Károly would decline. He does everything to the best of his abilities, be it distributing flyers, cleaning the local Volunteer Point, organising events, helping around the house, or helping out with gardening for the elderly in the village. At the severely disabled department in Tordas, Károly, along with other volunteers, helps out with every day chores, such as walking and feeding the patients of the department as well as some reconstruction work in the building.

His most important volunteer work, that also gives him the most pleasure and a great sense of achievement, is teaching handicraft techniques mainly involving the use of paper and recycling. He loves creating paper flowers and passing on the secret of pa-per weaving. He is exceptionally good with his hands, has a great sense of



colour and he is incredibly patient. His sense of empathy and communication is exceptional. It does not matter what language his students speak or whether they have a disability, Károly teaches everyone his techniques without hesitation. The nickname 'Knight of Roses' was given to him because of the fantastic paper roses he creates.

Besides successfully utilising his skills, Károly is not only gaining success and recognition for himself but also playing a big part in the positive appraisal and acceptance of the disabled people by the larger society. His work speaks for itself and whoever has a chance to get to know him, soon starts to like him. Such a socially responsible view of life is not typical of young people grown up in children's homes, therefore his example is also a positive outcome of a great pedagogical and educational work.



Mboh Ekale

Age: 39

Background

He was born in 1975 in Cameroon. He attended primary and secondary school in his native town Kumba, and graduated from Yaounde University in natural sciences. Due to his educational background, his fluent French and English he worked in different positions at multinational companies in Cameroon. Because of the permanent unrest and lack of safety in Cameroon he left the country, asked for asylum in Hungary in 1999 and was transported to a refugee camp.

How he got in volunteering

During his detention, the Budapest based Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization (founded in 1992, providing moral and legal support for asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, minorities) visited him in the camp and provided legal

help to obtain his residence permit in Hungary. After having been released from the detention camp he had establish a life for himself in Hungary; he worked as freelance web designer, programmer, learned Hungarian and started volunteering at Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization.

Activities

He has been playing important role in various projects of the programme called **"Addressing racism and discrimination through education and sport"** as:

- A regular lecturer and organiser of human rights education in secondary schools from 2003 to 2013,
- A football trainer, manager of the „African Stars” team of the Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization, consisting of refugees, migrants (he played football from childhood). The team was set up in 1994 and is a member of the Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ).

Lectures and workshops on humanitarian right issues in secondary schools were always well received and contributed to the promotion of tolerance among different cultures. These events were often followed by friendly football matches between the school team and the African Stars team. Sport is a very efficient way to combat racism and discrimination against foreigners. Playing scheduled matches with the other teams of the Hungarian Federation serves this purpose effectively.

Mboh has been also active in the organization of rallies, including the recent 'Bring back our girls' campaign - (Hungarian event of the international movement for the release of 276 kidnapped Nigerian girls.)

Parallel with his daily work and volunteering he participated in trainings for NGOs, in the areas of media, human rights, intercultural education and in 2013 he successfully completed postgraduate studies in computer sciences.

Challenges

As a refugee, he faced discrimination and all other disadvantages of this situation. In his volunteering his personal skills enabled him to be accepted by Hungarian partners, organisations and the success of his work promoted his inclusion into the Hungarian society.

Benefits

Not only did he managed to improve his personal conditions but contributed to a better understanding between the Hungarian society and migrants.

Contact

Mahatma Gandhi Human Right Organization

www.gandhi.hu; gandhiegyesulet@gmail.com/ katalin.gellert@gmail.com



Tamás Horváth

Age: 55

Background

Tamás Horváth, a single, 55 year old homeless man moved to the temporary home of the Social and Rehabilitation Foundation in 2008. Very soon he built up good contacts with the other residents, adults and children.

How he got into volunteering

He always found time for the housemates, even though he was busy working as an electrician. He taught single men cooking and advocated for their interests within the home. As a creative and open-minded person, he easily managed contacts between residents and social workers. In spite of his personal difficulties, Tamás started to organise social programmes and excursions for the residents of the home.

Activities

Tamás became the Volunteer Coordinator of the rehabilitation unit, which is a home for single men, who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Since Tamás started to organise the programmes for Christmas, Easter, etc., the residents of the home participated in the programmes more willingly. From January to December 2012 Tamás organised an event or programme almost every month. He had creative ideas on how to entertain children and encouraged the mothers to cook and bake together. He built up connections among the three temporary homes for families and rehabilitation homes for homeless single men. Tamás focused mainly on activities for the children living in temporary homes for families. On the International Children's Day they have buried a time capsule containing children's personal items and memories, with the aim to open it together five years later so that they will not forget each other. During the 'Volunteers' week' programme, Tamás organised and coordinated the construction of the playground. All these programmes and events were carried out with the active participation of children and their parents, single men of the rehabilitation unit and the staff and volunteers of the Foundation.

Challenges

Tamás worked hard on rebuilding his living conditions and leave the temporary home for good. At the same time, he was trying to make sure to improve the lives of the other residents. The other challenges he faced were lack of motivation of the home residents and acceptance by the social workers and the Foundation's staff.



Benefits

Thanks to Tamás, all the programmes and initiatives became more attractive for the residents because they were able to have their say. These joint activities contributed also to a stronger acceptance of volunteers by the home residents and increased enthusiasm within the Foundation's staff members. Moreover, following the example of Tamás some of the adult residents became Volunteer Coordinators.

Tamás has already left the temporary home and found a permanent job and has now a balanced private life. His volunteering and its recognition, including the 'Volunteer of the Year Award' in 2012, helped to develop his personality, overcome difficulties and to find his own place in life.

Nem adom fel! Alapítvány (Never give up! Foundation)

Duration of the project

from 2006

Objectives

to promote the social acceptance of disabled people and Roma persons and to involve them in volunteering

Activities

The Foundation started in 2006 with the money collected by street musicians with disabilities. At that time, this was a new way of encouraging community spirit.

They performed the first large-scale charity concert in 2008, in the Papp László Budapest Sport Arena under the title 'Jobb velünk a világ' (The world is better with us) and slogan 'Mindenki elég gazdag ahhoz, hogy másoknak segítsen!' (Everyone is rich enough to help others!). Youths with disabilities were involved in the organisation and implementation of the event and the income of the concert amounted to 11 million Forints, which is an equivalent of €38,000. This sum was donated for the renovation of the Csíksomlyó orphanage in Transylvania, Romania, founded by a Franciscan monk Csaba Böjte.

Following the success of the 2008 concert, the 'Jobb velünk a világ' programme continued in 2009, with the donations amounting to 5.2 million Forints. This sum

was spent on the establishment of a 'Nemadomfel ház' (Never give up! House) for vulnerable Roma children. This project aims to eliminate the root causes of poverty and segregation that are hindering social inclusion. Nowadays there are three homes of this kind in Hungary - in Szendrőlád, Martonyi and Pánd.

Disabled volunteers and the Foundation's staff kept on convincing local families to accept these homes and encouraged Roma children's parents to help the running of these homes by volunteering.

Groups of disabled volunteers visit these villages every 2-3 weeks and they organise various activities for the local Roma children. For instance, blind volunteers teach basket weaving, ceramic arts and music; disabled volunteers teach origami and help with homework; volunteers with intellectual disabilities play with children, etc. These encounters are very fruitful for everyone and inspire the residents of 'Never give up! House' to not to focus on their difficulties, but to contribute to the improvement of their living conditions. It is a great achievement that in the frame of this project Roma children give a helping hand to disabled youth out of their free will.

Subsequently came the idea to involve local Roma people in volunteering. In the Edelény region 100 Roma persons were recruited to volunteer with the aid of EU funds. The programme consisted of training delivered by people with disabilities and preparation and planning for the project, including building personal contacts. Lastly, every participant visited three sites: a prison, a nursing home for older people and a home for disabled people. The biggest success of this project is the fact that participants regularly return to volunteer at those sites.

Links: <http://www.nemadomfel.hu/>, delyreka@nemadomfel.hu

The City Is For All (A Város Mindenkié)

The members of The City is for All are homeless and formerly homeless people, those struggling with housing problems and their supporters, who all work together for an egalitarian and just society.

The group is based on voluntary work and provides an opportunity for homeless people to stand up for their dignity and fight for the right to housing. Homeless people play a leading role at all levels of our organisation. The City is for All organises campaigns and actions to defend homeless peoples' rights, advocate for their interests and change the negative social perception of homelessness. They also work with the media to change the idea that homeless people are helpless and hopeless, and to show that they too are able to stand up for our rights and human dignity.

Volunteering with The City Is For All

There is a difference between being a volunteer and being an activist. Although activists also dedicate their free time to a social cause, they are also advocates of a cause, especially a political cause – political in the sense that a citizen takes responsibility for the issues of the community. The City Is For All is one of the unique organisations in Hungary in which people who are affected by the issue organise themselves to achieve social change. In this organisation, homeless and formerly homeless people take action to achieve the right to housing in Hungary.

Who are The City Is For All activists?

Although homeless people make up the majority of the membership, the organisation is an alliance of homeless and non-homeless people, and the latter provide support in running the organisation and training and empowering homeless activists to become successful advocates of their cause.

Recruitment – where and how?

Individuals interested in volunteering have to participate in 3 activities or workshops organised by the association and later come along to one of the regular Monday meetings, where they accept their membership.

Benefits of working as an activist in The City Is For All

Working in The City Is For All is a transformative experience for both homeless people and their allies. The non-violent communication practice, the empowering working style and the consensus-based decision making process allow members coming from different social groups to learn and acquire new social skills from one another in a very supportive environment. Members increase their knowledge about the root causes of homelessness, the Hungarian shelter system and the Hungarian public administration system through discussions at the weekly group meetings, through organising direct actions or programmes and meeting their decision-makers, or at special trainings organised by the members. The learning experience is tangible and adjusted to the Hungarian context as these topics reveal themselves through life stories and issues people with housing problems currently face; which result in the dysfunction of our society.

What do the activists get out?

Homeless activists take a leading role in representing the organisation and many of the members grow to be community leaders through volunteering (somebody who is aware of their rights, respects democratic values and can advocate on behalf of their community).

I started volunteering for Third Age in 2007 and have remained an active volunteer since then. I got in touch with Third Age after seeing an advertisement in my local parish church, and, at the time, I didn't know anyone volunteering there. I have since made many friends through Third Age.

The background of the image consists of a repeating pattern of vertical stripes in orange and green, separated by thin white lines, which is a stylized representation of the Irish flag.

I R E L A N D



Marcella Sheridan

Age: 68

Why did you decide to volunteer?

I was recently widowed and I needed to do something, to get myself out of the house, to involve myself and to widen my social circle. I was devastated by the death of my husband Padraig – we had been married for 38 years – and shortly afterwards I decided to give up work. Thankfully I found a volunteering role in Third Age that was both challenging and rewarding and I have been doing it since.

What made you choose to join Fáilte Isteach?

I had trained as a teacher in the UK, although I have never taught since I moved back to Ireland 32 years ago. I saw the teaching role in Third Age Fáilte Isteach as something I could do that would also be challenging and fun, so I thought, "Let's give it a try!"

My role is a volunteer English Language tutor. Each week I teach English to small groups of migrants and help them improve their lives in Ireland by improving their proficiency in English. It was not something I had tried before and I really love it! I also volunteer as a listener on the Senior Help Line, which is a confidential listening service for older people in Ireland. I find that very enjoyable also.

What do you feel you contribute as a volunteer?

A lack of English is one of the main reasons migrants in Ireland struggle to integrate into Irish society. In our own way, the Fáilte Isteach volunteers like myself (there are 600 of us throughout the country) are helping change families' lives by enabling them to do things that we take for granted – such as do the shopping, visit the doctor, talk to the school and so on.

With Senior Help Line, I am providing an ear to listen and allowing the caller to speak frankly and confidentially about whatever it is that concerns them. Loneliness amongst older Irish people is a huge issue, and I would like to think that my hours on the Help Line go some way to helping to alleviate this.

What are the challenges and benefits of volunteering?

There are some challenges when volunteering, but none that are insurmountable and there is a lot of support offered by Third Age and by my fellow volunteers. Volunteering has had a very positive effect on me. I am staying active and I'm using the skills that I have to make a positive contribution to society. I have also learned a lot of new skills, through the training provided and since I started volun-

teering I have widened my circle of friends, and now have a network of acquaintances from all around the world.

*"It's new start, it's education [...]
It's just basically a sense of being there for them and helping."*



Tony White

My volunteering...

I work in the Rehab in Usher's Ireland. I work with clients that have been homeless, are in the middle of the addiction and are looking for a fresh start. Sometimes you are just sitting down and having cup of tea with them, talking to them, checking if they have any problems or they need help with settling into the programme. There is a lot of prejudice out there against addiction, so the lads find it hard dealing with some situations, or they face difficulties finding a doctor because of their past history.

I have volunteered for 18 months now; 5 days a week full time. It gives me the confidence to go into employment and plus it gets me out of the house and I'm feeling like doing something again. It simply gets you back to feeling normal.

The beginning...

I came in to Simon to their Detox and Rehab programme as a service user. After that I was looking for something to do so I joined the client action group and I was with them for about 12 months. It was there that I heard about volunteering.

In the past, I worked in an Autism Centre socialising with the clients and helping them train for Special Olympics. There were some volunteers that used to come in 2-3 days a week. So I knew about volunteering but I never actually thought of doing it myself until this came up.

Skills and experience I can offer...

I bring in practical experience of living on the street and being in the middle of addiction. It's good for the lads to see that they are not just doing a detox or

rehab programme and that there are opportunities. It gives them a confidence then to start moving along. Because of my experience, I also help to make the decisions that change the rules for the clients.

Challenges...

When you know people that are coming in from the streets, it's difficult for them to see you in any other life than where you were. At times they treat you differently- they treat you as if you are still on the street, as you are still one of them. It's also challenging getting used to going back to work, not getting up in the morning going drinking and just wasting your life and just starting all over again. It's like starting from day one on your first job – it can be hard at times.

Benefits...

I really enjoy working with the clients. I spent 12 years on the streets and so to see people coming in and knowing that if they put their mind into a programme properly, they can actually move on and that there are options available for them is really great.

It's giving me the confidence to look for employment and knowing that I will be taken seriously. And it gives me a sense that I will never want to get back to the way I was, I know I can't go back that way.

I also recently graduated from DIT College, where I've done a 12 week course on volunteering. I left school when I was 11, so graduating was a big thing for me.



Rahim Nazarali

Age: 37

"My own life experience is really varied. I grew up differently to a lot of people in Ireland. I lost my eyesight, I went to a boarding school from a young age and I learned Braille. I was born in a different country and I lived in different countries. My life experience is different and maybe I can share that with other people through volunteering."

When and why did you start volunteering?

I decided to volunteer because I wanted to have something interesting to do and learn some new skills. I had some free time and I wanted to use it well. I got involved with Irish Blind Sports when I was in college, at the age of 19-20. I was on their board for a while and I was running athletics programmes and trainings.

What volunteering are you doing at the moment?

When my hours at work were cut two years ago I approached my local volunteer centre to look for some volunteering opportunities. Samaritans Ireland interested me most and they came back to me quickly. I did two interviews and training, which lasted for nearly a year. I work on the helpline and face to face with people who come into our centre and are in distress or have suicidal thoughts. I do a duty of once a week for 3 hours and I have one overnight duty every two months.

Last year I started an exciting initiative called Rahimathon - a fundraiser for Irish Wheelchair Association. I walked the Royal Canal in Ireland, which is 140 km long and we fundraised €1,800 for new computers. I decided to do it again this year and I walked the Grand Canal, which is 132 km long. We got a lot of publicity on the national radio and some newspapers so it's really good and it's great challenge and I'm so happy that people got behind it.

What are the challenges?

I was worrying about my visual impairment and what could I volunteer for. I wasn't sure how accessible it would be to work with Samaritans, but they are really good. For example, we have to keep the record of each call and since I am not able to write it myself, there is always another volunteer willing to help me. The biggest challenge so far was when I had to deal with two callers in crisis situation – they were both suicidal. This stayed with me and on one stage I thought 'God can I do this or maybe I should leave?' The support I was offered

by the organisation was amazing and I felt really reassured and decided to continue as I believe that the calls make a difference.

Do you feel that you learned skills you can use outside of volunteering?

Samaritans are about listening and teasing out how people really feel. I noticed I've become more active listener with my clients at work and also even with my friends. I found that I don't give them advice as much as before when I was quick to fix their problem rather than listen and get them to talk about it and come to their own conclusions.

"I'm thinking sometimes 'Why am I here on this earth?' For me it's very important that I can look back and say I'm glad that I made difference in some way – even if it was just small."

Rothar



Rothar means bicycle in Irish Gaelic language. Rothar was set up in 2008 as a community bike shop which takes donations of unwanted bicycles, fixes them up and sells them on and also provides bike repairs. Their mission is to help creating jobs and employment opportunities, promote a cycling culture, donate revamped bikes to schools and vulnerable groups and contribute to meeting waste reduction targets.

Volunteering with Rothar

Volunteers are essential in Rothar's work. They dismantle the bikes for parts, carry out small repairs and keep the shops tidy and sometimes do customer service. Usually there are between 20-40 volunteers involved with the organisation at one of their three shops.

Who are Rothar volunteers?

The groups that Rothar are targeting in their recruitment include ex-offenders, people who have been homeless and long term unemployed people. The organisation makes sure to provide them with the exact same working conditions as paid staff, by including them in the processes and making them part of the team.

Recruitment – where and how?

Many volunteers find information on Rothar website, through Volunteer Ireland

or the network of local Volunteer Centres. Some of the volunteers are referred by the Probation Office and other agencies working with ex-offenders. It is mostly a very informal process and if an individual wishes to volunteer, the organisation will endeavour to offer them a spot.

Benefits of involving volunteers

By involving volunteers from diverse backgrounds, the organisation exposes itself to new ways of seeing things and it enables them to keep its dynamism. Volunteers are a great help to make the organisation more efficient thanks to the tasks they carry. Having experienced volunteers means also that organisation has a pool of people that can be recruited internally for paid positions, plus 25 people already managed to find employment in other bicycle shops. It also has to do with reflecting the diversity that exists in the Irish society, enabling staff, volunteers and customers to meet, talk and co-exist.

Are there any barriers in the way of their voluntary commitment?

We are looking here at personal circumstances, such as social welfare related visits, child-minding responsibilities or meetings with different agencies. Sometimes it is also required to provide extra tuition when a volunteer has a disability.

What do the volunteers get out of it?

Many of the volunteers have building or mechanic skills, but they never had an opportunity to use them on a professional level. By volunteering with Rothar they experience great personal development and an increase of self-confidence. They also find a safe space where no one is asking about their backgrounds or past, where they can learn a skill and make friends.

Third Age

Third Age is a national voluntary organisation working to promote the value of older people's contribution in communities in Ireland. Third Age has over 1,300 volunteers throughout the country, mainly older people working variously as listeners, tutors and advocates.

Volunteers are involved in three national programmes:

Tutors for migrant families – Fáilte Isteach (means WELCOME IN in Irish Gaelic language) provides free classes in conversational English for migrants since 2006. Currently, there are 67 centres in 21 counties, with 700 volunteers positively impacting 2,000 migrant families each week.



Supportive Listeners – on Senior Help Line, a national telephone listening service for older people. This is a peer-to-peer, confidential listening service, involving more than 300 older volunteers. In 2013 the helpline received 30,000 calls, many from isolated and lonely older people.

Advocates for nursing home residents – on SAGE, (Support & Advocacy Service for Older People).

There are over 120 trained volunteer advocates working in over 100 nursing homes in Ireland, and this service is being developed in acute hospitals and in the community.

Diversity in volunteering

Volunteers are recruited through a variety of sources, including local volunteer centres, local parish initiatives, the church, active retirement groups, or local leaders, national advertising campaigns and word of mouth. By involving socially excluded volunteers, the organisation is enhancing the breadth of experience that volunteers bring to their projects. All the volunteers on the Senior Help Line programme are deliberately over 60, as the organisation is attempting to provide a peer-to-peer listening service. There are a number of volunteers from diverse backgrounds, including migrants, members of the travelling community, older people and Gay / Lesbian / Transgender groups. The oldest volunteer is 91!

Volunteer for Fáilte Isteach

For Fáilte Isteach, increasingly many of the older volunteers are coming from a migrant background, and often many of them started as students of English on the project. They bring a huge amount of experience and insight to Fáilte Isteach, as they understand the exact problems and concerns faced by the migrant students.

To make sure that the project is inclusive, volunteers are not required to have teaching qualifications or experience, as full training is provided. Each volunteer has clearly defined role and is aware of the time commitment required of them, and that they are free to walk away if they are not happy with the experience.

The greatest benefit for the volunteers is an increased sense of self-worth because of the vital contribution they make to their community and society in general. *"I can't believe I'm doing this – me, teaching English to people from all around the world!"* is what many of the older volunteers say.

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ITALY



Asma Makdani

Age: 31

Background information

I am 31 years old, and was born and raised in Morocco. I married my fiancé, who had already settled in Italy, and decided to apply for the legal documents needed to live in Italy. It took me one year to obtain them, as I had to move back to Casablanca temporarily and attend a language course. I kept looking on the internet for job opportunities and courses available in Turin.

How I got involved into volunteering

Through an old acquaintance of mine I got in touch with the association Camminare Insieme (Walking Together). Ever since, I have felt at home among those people. The association treats the people attending its activities equally – I have felt like 'a person' rather than 'a Moroccan woman' or an 'Arabian woman'. During debates, my opinions were taken into account and I was treated without prejudices. I felt relieved, even during difficult times, because I realised that even though I was an immigrant living in a new country, I was not alone. The volunteers of the association have helped me greatly with studying for the Italian language test; they explained the most complicated subjects, school materials and shopping at the food bank. I know I have been very lucky to meet these people, who have supported and trusted me, and I kept wondering how I could return such big favours.

Activities

As soon as I was done with my courses, everyone started looking for a job for me. I found a place as a nursery school educator outside Turin. I also applied to be a voluntary assistant at the doctor's practice within Camminare Insieme. I helped as receptionist, secretary, interpreter, and sometimes as personal assistant to the doctor where I was in charge of writing prescription on the computer. Voluntary work has meant a lot to me. Personally, I truly felt part of a society I was actively contributing to. Professionally, I took up new skills and learnt how to organise events, parties and meetings.

Challenges

The shift from the recipient role to the 'volunteer' has been psychologically marked by conflicting feelings. On one hand, I felt happy and accepted, and on

the other hand, there were certain expectations from the outside world. It triggered envious reactions among some of the other migrant women, and I received requests for special treatments on a 'brotherhood basis' (we come from the same country, you should help me more). It really took me a while to understand my role and limitations of my duties. Another major challenge was the ability to accept and respect other viewpoints. I understood that full awareness of one's own prejudices is crucial, and they can be overcome only through modesty, self-awareness, observation, listening and training.

Benefits

I volunteered for the association for a short-term and this opportunity made me feel like I really belong to this community. Even now when I walk into the association or the doctor's practice, I remember sitting there with my hopes and fears. It is a nostalgic feeling. Through volunteering, I also had a chance to attend training courses, including a course of cultural mediation. My relationship with the Camminare Insieme is worth more than any contract or material remuneration, because it is my home, and those in it are my second family.

Gabriele Piovano

Age: 29

Background information

I am a 29 year old male living in Turin, and I have a spinal pathology. My condition has forced me to use an electric wheelchair to get around. On 1st March 2008, I fulfilled a big dream, which was to start living on my own and independently from my parents. I currently live with an assistant who helps me do all those things that I cannot do alone. With my parents I could not be totally independent because they were in charge of the house and all that it entails. Now I can. Even though I have an assistant 24 hours a day, I am the boss of my own house and I have to take care of myself and everyday life in its entirety. I think of the personal assistant as the arm, and the disabled person as the mind.

How I got involved into volunteering

Since I was a child, my mom had been taking me with her to the meetings she chaired at the association 'Spina Bifida' - they are taking care of people affected by spinal pathology. At the age of 14 I joined the Italian Red Cross where I worked as a telephone operator and was in charge of emergency calls. This was due to my belief that disabled people should not only be the recipients of social care and attention, but also if possible, play an active role in society. I spent 7 fantastic years there, and at 18 years of age I also started my own adventure

in voluntary work with 'Spina Bifida'. I had the task of presenting the reality of voluntary work at a regional TV programme, where the President of Council for People in Difficulty (CPD) Paolo Ferrero was among the guests. That night he asked me to meet him again, because he thought I could be a young and resourceful volunteer with CPD. That news made me feel in seventh heaven, and a few days later Paolo asked me to join the Board of the association, to which I replied positively of course! Since then I have worked to improve accessible means of transportation and health care. A few months ago I advanced further in my career and was elected as Vice-President. I truly feel this is my path.

Activities

Every morning I go to work by taxi because the municipality of Turin gives the opportunity to those in wheelchairs to use taxi paying only the cost of a bus ticket. At work, I deal with medical examinations bookings and medical visits. Being very involved in social issues, often after work I go to the meetings held between public bodies and various associations, which aim to solve the numerous problems faced by people with disabilities. I always travel alone and often by bus. Fortunately, in Turin many buses are adjusted to the needs of people in wheelchairs.

Challenges

I want to be able to take decisions regarding my own life and not just be an object of care. I have always believed that every person, able or disabled, should take control of their own existence. Often parents do not let their children become independent because they think they should always protect them and make sure that their life proceeds without any additional problems to those that already exist. I personally believe that this is wrong, because you have to allow disabled children to also make some mistakes, so they can become more mature and responsible. My parents were instrumental along my 'journey'. Thanks to their determination, their love and their attitude to make me feel like a 'normal' kid, that I have this desire to fight and live.

Benefits

Engaging in voluntary work has certainly played a major role in improving myself and enabling me and others to understand how beautiful life is. It also proved that leg-impairment is not an absolute impairment and that disabled people are exactly like all others and it is up to us, in the first place, to consider ourselves as normal people.



Rambo

Age: 24

Background information

Giò is a 24 year old Turin-born Roma boy. His family comes from Bosnia and is constantly moving across the country. He was named after 'Rambo' because of his grandpa's passion for Stallone. Talking about his childhood he recalls his early years in Rome, where he used to wash and get changed before entering school and give the clothes back before returning to the camp. At 8 years of age, he moved with his father near Bergamo. One of his favourite pictures sees him with his sister Senada standing in a tin shack covered with banners and flags on the inside. 'We had neither water, nor electricity' says the young man. 'My sister and I had to walk miles to fill up our canister'. Then Rambo left the shack behind and went to Turin, to join his relatives, who sheltered him in an old car in front of their caravan, in the nomad camp of Strada dell'Arrivore. At that time his mother was in jail and only after her release she decided to give custody of the children to a community. Through the support of the local community staff, Rambo attended the 4th grade for the second time and showed great cooperation with his mates and teachers. At the community he met Carla e Beppe, who later became his foster parents. They marked his life profoundly. They showed interest in his life, they were checking on him regularly and walked him to the city centre just for the fun of it. 'Carla e Beppe supported me and prompted me to read and study. I travelled with them to many countries and they believed in me.' says Giò. He obtained his high-school diploma at the Steiner's Institute of Graphic Art in Turin; last year he took part in a European project and came first out of twenty-seven. He was awarded by the president of the parliament and he was also offered a one-year internship at the European Parliament in the communication department.

How I got involved into volunteering

Rambo got involved in volunteering when he realised that inside Associazione di Animazione Interculturale ASAI (Multicultural Activities Association) there were children from different cultures who needed his help to have better things in life, and who could benefit from his creativity and inspiration.

Activities

ASAI has been working in Turin for almost twenty years. It focuses mainly on Italian and foreign underage people born here. Thanks to its numerous volunteers placed all over the city, ASAI offers Italian courses, after-school tutoring, art workshops and other events that allow all participants spend time together.

In the area of Porta Palazzo, right in the middle of the city, Italian, Moroccan, Chinese, Egyptian people and others from all over the World, meet in the largest city market. This Babel of languages and cultures sees ASAI welcome hundreds of minors on a daily basis. For those attending the centre in Porta Palazzo, they are welcomed by Giò, who is constantly in a good mood. He is in charge of a creative workshop for primary school pupils and helps to organise afternoon activities. His training as graphic designer enables him to offer a photography course, whereby children get to understand more clearly the history and current situation of the neighbourhood. Rambo is currently volunteering at the ASAI and cooperates with the social services for minors in Turin.

Benefits

Volunteering was never difficult for Giò because through his friends he got the knowledge of how ASAI worked with the children. Initially, it was a little bit challenging for him to familiarise himself with the world of the children, but by now he managed to organise well the afternoon activities and the children are very happy when they attend his classes. Apart from ASAI, Giò got also involved in other activities and projects with other organisations, including the Municipality of Turin, social services and different elementary schools.

The Golden Age for LGT People

Organization: Lambda-Torino

Duration of the project: since January 2014

Objectives

To raise awareness and to advocate for inclusion of elderly (over 60 years of age) Lesbian, Gay and Trans (LGT) people in both private and public services and society; to tackle loneliness and social exclusion of elderly LGT people; to contribute in creating a culture of inclusion and promoting equal opportunities for all within the services for seniors in the province of Turin; to create an innovative service that meets the quality standards of the European directives on the issue of inclusion of senior LGT people.

Target group

The project seeks to create a help desk for senior LGT people. As they grow older, they enter a world of services that may not be familiar with LGT people. Our mission is to bridge this gap and to advocate for inclusion and receptiveness of

private and public services. Our main aim is to foster the effective inclusion and participation of all elderly people regardless of their sexual orientation. But, at the same time, not to take for granted that elderly are asexual. In many cases, having lost connection with families and not having children can lead to a situation of marginalisation and exclusion wherein elderly people can face a huge problem of loneliness, in addition to the lack of assistance in their daily lives.

Activities

Within the project, we intend to provide telephone support that facilitates contact with the LGT association, an orientation to public health and legal services in place, and, last but not least, recreational activities to overcome isolation and social exclusion.

We are working to build a safe space for elderly LGT people; we don't want to substitute the services already existing, but to provide an opportunity for participation and collaboration with elderly people. During the first stage of the project, a group of 15 volunteers, with a range of age from 25 to 74, has been recruited and trained to deliver the activities. This is an important step in promoting active ageing and mutual help. Active ageing allows people to realise their potential for physical, social and mental well-being throughout the course of life, and to participate in the society. Ageing takes place within the context of friends, work associates, neighbours and family members. This is why interdependence as well as intergenerational solidarity are important principles of active ageing. Volunteering in our project creates an opportunity to get involved and to promote social integration.

Contact info

Tel. +39 011.0361121, Fax +39 011.0361121, e-mail: lambda.torino@gmail.com

Links

<http://www.lambdatorino.it/>

Mamma Luigia Project

The project aims to start-up an innovative social-housing model where different groups of tenants, such as ex-prisoners, young people at risk of poverty and students can live together sharing one big house. They will also participate in common activities including meals, workshops, weekly meetings, evaluation and planning, as well as creative courses and home care. The tenants of the house are directly responsible for the management of the house and they are also responsible for several programs of active citizenship, which aim to include the local community



– especially senior people and people with disabilities – from the neighborhood. The house was donated by the Monsignor Savarino Association.

The objectives of the project are:

- 1) To provide accommodation and practical support, for a fixed-term, to people experiencing housing difficulties.
- 2) To gain skills in order to get job opportunities and economic independence, by setting up workshops of creative expression, e.g. designing sets for theater plays and making gift-cards for special occasions, including weddings, baptisms, etc.
- 3) To raise awareness about social issues through exhibitions, concerts and conferences.
- 4) To create opportunities for exchange and mutual support among the tenants and other citizens, through maintenance of green areas or other practical supports aimed to help the population most in need: elderly living alone, disabled.
- 5) To learn how to grow a vegetable garden to sustain enough food house and to create a small business model among the local community.

Target groups:

The house has six places, divided amongst three groups as follow:

- 2 people under probation program or recently released from the prison of Turin;
- 2 young men in poverty or at high-risk of poverty;
- 2 people with housing needs;

The short term housing programme will involve almost 30 people in 12 months. Moreover, almost 100 people, especially people over 65 years of age from the neighborhood, will be involved in the activities during workshops and public initiatives carried out by the tenants of the house. There will be 30 volunteers involved in the project.

If you need more information about the project, contact:

Associazione Enrichetta Alfieri Onlus

via Paolo Borsellino, 3 c/o ex carcere "le nuove", 10138 Torino

e-mail: enrichetta.alfieri@vssp.it

www.enrichettaalfieri.ideasolidale.org

Tel: +39 349 7209915

LATVIA



Arturs

Age: 29

"If you see a person with a white cane, ask him if he needs help."

My volunteering...

I educate people about Universal Design, which is a process of creating products (devices, systems, and processes) which are usable by older people, people without disabilities, and people with disabilities operating within the widest possible range of situations. I help and teach people who use a white cane to understand and use the guidance system - street design features to aid the visually impaired. I write articles for the organisation, as well as acting as a tour guide in the city. When guests come to our organisation, I take them on a tour of Liepaja, along a route that has been specially adapted for people with a visual impairment.

The beginning...

While studying at university, I got a chance to go to the Netherlands for volunteer work. I took the year off because I wanted to try something new. There I met a lot of people and realised how much good I could do for society, rather than just sitting at home. This year abroad motivated me to continue volunteering in Latvia. After coming back I was offered a volunteer position with Liepaja Society of the Blind.

Skills and experience I can offer...

Don't sit at home when you can be useful; you can help educate others, such as teaching the guidance system for example. I was introduced to this system while in Belgium. Back then I was thinking - why is this street here? I got interested and was told that it is a guideline - a universal design element - and so I began learning. I learned the guidance system in the Netherlands. I began thinking about people who had no prior knowledge of these guidelines. Thus, after returning from abroad I began to teach people how to navigate the guidelines.

Challenges...

I feel I often have to motivate many people and sometimes I need to motivate myself. Having a target, like I did, helps: studying to become a tour guide. It is difficult, but if you do not push yourself; if you do not concentrate and believe

that you can do it, you won't be able to reach it. Sometimes the physical distance is a challenge, e.g. getting from home to the organisation when the bus is full. Educating and training people is a challenge. That takes a lot of effort on my part, as even getting from point A to point B requires focus. If the weather is bad for example, and it is windy, I have to really try and discern the sound of traffic lights to avoid accidents.

Benefits...

I have made many contacts, and I have improved my English through giving tours in English. You become braver and prove that people with disabilities do not have to stay at home. In everyday life I move around with the help of a white cane. When people see you going through the guidelines, they begin to understand and let you pass. My communication skills have also improved. I have met many new people due to volunteering. I feel safer on the street. It is much better to go to the organisation and greet people, rather than just sit at home by the computer and post comments on everything you see there. I'd rather go and find out what's new, how can I help, or go to talk about universal design and teach someone to walk through the guidelines.

Ralfs

Age: 33

"The solutions are there, if there is a desire – they can be found! If we do nothing ourselves and do not educate people then there is no point complaining about it. We are the ones who suffer."

"You pull yourself together. You know that you have to go there, that they are waiting for you. You feel needed and appreciated. I am proud that I am a volunteer. It's up to us – you can do nothing and be lazy, or you can be active and feel happy about it!"

My volunteering...

I have volunteered for „Otrā elpa“ for four years now. The organisation runs three charity shops and a cafe. I sort different items, clothes, books etc., which they then sell to get funds for various social projects and charitable purposes. Donations need to be sorted so we know which ones are good for selling, which ones will be taken to prisons, crises centers, animal shelters, and which need to

be thrown away. I also look after the shop so no one steals anything. I arrange books on the shelves in alphabetical order and prepare and attach price tags.

The beginning...

I first heard about charity shops on the radio. In the beginning I just gave a donation of goods to be sold there. I liked the place and found the ethos very appealing. I springcleaned my house and gave away all sorts of items, and I was delighted. Instead of keeping unnecessary things, I could give them away and make someone else happy. Later the organisation asked me to volunteer if I had free time. I learned that part of the money raised goes to projects aimed at helping others. At first, I did not say anything about my illness, because they did not ask for anything. When I had to disclose it, they accepted me the way I am and their attitude continued to be just as positive. When I was in the hospital they came to visit me and took care of me.

Skills and experience I can offer...

Attitude and desire to change things for the better. Not to live according to certain standards or other people's expectations.

Challenges...

In the beginning I was shy. I came and stood in the corner somewhere. Now I have gained my confidence. I know what needs to be done and how; if I don't – I ask. It has all changed for the better. It used to be stressful in the beginning as you have to be ready to adapt, be able and ready to switch from one thing to another. In general, working with people is not an easy task. Sometimes others do not want to talk with particular customers so I have to talk to them. When I interact with them they do not feel looked upon and judged by their appearance.

Benefits...

I learned to communicate with a wide variety of people. Some will come to the shop as they know you and want to meet and talk to you. They think I am responsive and friendly, and then they come up to me and ask for something. You make new friends, gain knowledge, and learn a lot of new things. You meet people you can rely on, who will understand you and provide mutual assistance. No one focuses on the fact that you're different. They acknowledge me. Lately I am spending less time in the hospital. I come here, communicate, and meet people. I have stopped being afraid of people, and enjoy going out in public to participate in activities.

"If you have something spare, share it with others as it can serve a purpose"

Inara and Venta

Age: 68 and 72

*"Old age is a nasty thing; so my mom told me and I am telling you.
– But you see, you are smiling despite the nasty thing.
– I am proud of the fact that I am a volunteer!"*

My volunteering...

A couple of times a week we come in to help; the organisation only has two employees. It receives foodstuffs, office supplies, clothes and other donations. We register everything and call our members/families to arrange a suitable time for them to come and pick up the items. It is a time-consuming job. We have to ensure that each family receives assistance and therefore we have to know exactly what donations are in stock. The busiest times of year are during Christmas, Easter, and when school starts. It might not sound like a lot but the organisation always needs extra hands to help out.

The beginning...

Inara: I have been volunteering for two years now. I worked all my life and never had much free time until now. You get used to being busy all the time and when you retire feel that something is missing. Even if you are retiring, the energy is still there as well as the desire to do something. It is nice that I can help someone.

Venta: I am the guardian of my grandson Arthur. When Arthur joined school, one mother asked me if I had heard about the Latvian Foster Family Association. She gave me the phone number and address and I came here to offer support. I was very well received. I have been here for six years now and have been a volunteer for one year.

Skills and experience I can offer...

We have free time. We do not want to spend it at home. We have the desire to be there for, and with, other people and to help. They have helped us, so why not give back what we can - empathy, compassion, and willingness to help someone in hardship.

Challenges...

After 48 years in the workplace you retire and have to get used to staying at home on your own. It is very easy to become lazy; you stop even combing your hair, as you do not need to go anywhere anyway. Then you have to get yourself together again, and realise that there is much more to life.

Benefits...

We feel joy. We do everything with joy. We are proud of the work done, pleased by the sense of being needed and the possibility to connect with people. It is delightful to please others. I am more than happy to come here. You know, even my heart beats differently when I come to the organisation, to do something away from home, from daily routines. I am very happy when I can help and see that my hands are still valuable, even if it is just a little thing. When I get out of the everyday problems, I feel relaxed. Otherwise when you sit at home, you start to think and those thoughts, you know... We will keep coming as long as we are needed, of our own free will until health allows, as long as we have the energy, and as long as we can do good to others. Our children and grandchildren have grown up. They do not call me every day asking – granny how are you doing? But here they do call and say - come to volunteer! I feel that I am still needed. We're glad that there is a chance to go somewhere. Our lifestyles are more active and there is satisfaction in our souls. Otherwise you sit in front of the TV and just grumble. There is greater compassion and understanding.

"Sometimes when you pay nothing you receive so much, but when you pay – you don't get the desired result... Someone without being paid accomplishes much more – it comes from their heart."

Association "Otrā elpa" (Second Breath)

Running: 5 years

Staff: 15

Volunteers: ~10 regular

Funding: donations, charity shop sales

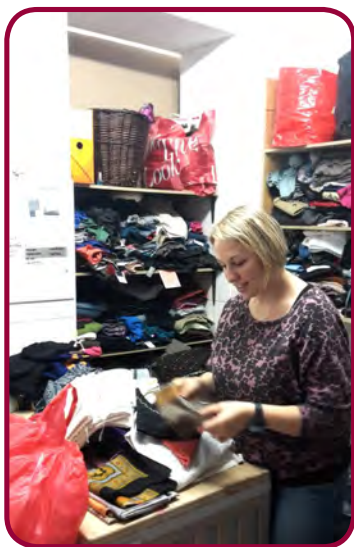
Aim: run charity shops to raise funds for social projects and charity

Target group of volunteers: youth, unemployed youth, long term unemployed, pre-seniors, women on maternity leave wanting to re-enter labour market, disabled

Contact details: Sabine Sile-Eglite, Communications Manager, Tel. +371 28357783; E-mail: elpa@otraelpa.lv

Website: <http://otraelpa.lv>

"Well done today! See you tomorrow!"



Activities

Volunteers sort and arrange all the donated goods (clothes, books, toys etc), arranging them according to their quality; ones to be sold in the shop, others to be further donated to shelters and so on. Some volunteers iron, some hang clothes in the shop, some work with books and others help with the monthly change of the whole collection. There is a volunteer who comes and sits in a room with books, guarding them from the potential theft. In each store we have one person who is responsible for the volunteers. We have a closed group for *Otrā elpa* volunteers on Facebook, where we can let them know if there is a sudden need for assistance or if we are short-handed on a particular day for example. Then we have some volunteers - youth who help with specific

issues. A graduate of Stockholm School helps us with information on franchising; another girl who is really into design goes out to talk about our design range of recycled goods. We collaborate with Apeirons - an organisation for people with disabilities and their families. As part of the programme we have regular volunteers who have been out of the job market for a long time. There was a woman who had lost her job. She volunteered with us for one year before finding a new job. You could feel that she really needed it; it was such an oasis for her, whilst also helping her to maintain her skills. Our most senior volunteer is now 56. He started out sorting books, now he also advises us on the charity auctions for speciality items such as antiques, coins, artwork etc.

Benefits

A number of initial volunteers became employees. It's a great way to observe how someone works: their style and attitude, and interest in the work and ethos of the organisation. A girl who started out sorting books is now employed with us. She has not yet obtained a librarian degree, but she could certainly go out and qualify for that type of work. When a volunteer is given a task that matches their skills and abilities, they can find satisfaction, fulfilment and growth. Many volunteers primarily come for the social aspect and the buzz, and some others like to commit and feel useful. We have a core group of volunteers who are more regular, more motivated. Volunteers give us excellent feedback and help to see what could be improved. We try to acknowledge our volunteers by preparing small gifts so volunteers feel they are valued. It should be remembered that people are very different. Each person interprets things differently; even feels differently in the same situation. But, it's very important to give feedback to

the volunteers (especially our regular volunteers), to thank them, or say – “well done today, see you tomorrow!”

“It is rewarding for them to see they are doing something good, that they can feel they are part of something big”

Association “Sirds siltuma darbnīca” (Heart Warmth Workshop)

Although technology can predict complications and the probability of a premature baby arriving, no mother is ever ready. Even though you have the essential clothes ready, everything in the shop is way too big.

“You do not need to feel sorry for people. You have to help, but not feel sorry for them. Often you do not need to do things for them or instead of them. It’s enough to say – You Can Do It!”

Running: 2 years

Staff: 2

Volunteers: ~ 200

Funding: donations

Aim: to help premature babies and their parents as well as babies who lack parental care/ Baby boxes

Target group of volunteers: long-term unemployed, pre-retired people, young unemployed people, people with disabilities/special needs; large and single-parent families, long-term social care and rehabilitation centres clients and young people from specialised schools.

Contact details: Linda Vitolina, Manager, Tel. +371 28637410;

E-mail: info@sirdssiltumadarbnica.lv

Website: <http://sirdssiltumadarbnica.lv/>

Activities

Volunteers knit blankets, tiny hats and socks; they crochet and sew blankets, incubator covers and clothes. They also steam, iron, sort and pack handcrafts to be delivered to hospitals. Volunteers need to be supported and cared for, addressed in the correct way. We organise meetings to talk about premature babies and master classes on how to knit, crochet and sew as some of the vol-



unteers have never done it before. When you show a bright idea this way, volunteers approach us themselves. We do not even look for them. Information is passed from one person to another; mothers who have received a gift from us later become our volunteer as well. We communicate

without problems with our volunteers that have extra support needs. As we have gone through a lot ourselves it makes it easier to understand that even though someone looks or acts differently, it does not mean that he or she does not understand. We treat all our volunteers in the same way and we expect exactly the same from everyone. We keep saying – good work, carry on! And they do continue! Now, in bigger towns where we have big groups of volunteers, we have appointed coordinators. They are responsible for disseminating information, arranging master classes, meetings with us as well as gathering all the crafts to be sent to the organisation for sorting and packing. Lately a long-term care institution invited us to teach how and what to knit for premature babies. Most of the people there have mental health problems. And it does not matter if some of them are able just to wind yarn into a ball or if some of the crafts are not perfect in every detail.

Benefits

Volunteers have become more innovative and creative. In the beginning it was just us who planned everything that needed to be done, visited hospitals and talked to doctors and families to find out what would best suit the needs of premature babies. Now our volunteers are sharing ideas and implementing them; and it all has been appreciated by the families and hospitals. Volunteers are active, they just need to be supported and encouraged. They need to see the goal and feel motivated. Through this possibility to be a part of our group of volunteers they grow their personalities. There is this one girl with severe health problems. She can barely leave her home, but the crafts she makes amazing things. She feels fulfilled by making those gifts for premature babies and their families. There are several such cases. We are not sorry for *special people*, we say – go on! When someone goes through real hardships, then comes the understanding of what, how and when. Some time ago we were not aware of it but now we know that people do not need to be felt sorry for, they need to be supported, empowered and believed in. Most of all to be given a chance to be a part of something and be told that they CAN DO a lot!



ROMANIA



Adrian Stanulescu

Age: 29

"I think that through volunteering I became more precise in my way of thinking; I can reach my objectives as a team member, and also as a leader. I always wish to add value to projects I'm involved with. I also think that it helps me evaluate my successes and my challenges, by having an attitude to self-educate, to develop new skills and competences in communication, organising, coordinating and respecting the deadlines and my tasks. I learned the value of volunteering from my childhood; I often had the chance to meet volunteers who came to the orphanage just to play with us and to make us smile. Slowly, I realised this is what I wanted to do."

Adrian Stanculescu is 29 years old and he grew up in an orphanage in the Southern part of Romania. In the last two years he contributed approximately 1500 hours of volunteering. He initiated and coordinated the Romanian Sports Club Association (CSR), an indoor games project which offers a free range of creative and recreational, educational and sports activities for children aged between 5-12 years old.

The weekly volunteer activities were focused on organising games to help the children get to know each other better through socialising. Adrian was involved in providing all sorts of materials for the club, coordinating volunteers who ran activities for the children, and he also had responsibilities in managing the budget. Adrian had a great initiative whereby he developed a programme for donations which raised necessary funds for CSR – indoor games and other projects of the association.

Starting with this programme Adrian went on to develop other partnerships through a big annual event, Scoala Altfel (A Different Kind of School) with different schools in Bucharest. Together with George Calinescu High School he initiated a special programme for volunteering aimed at promoting and encouraging volunteering activities among young people.

He participated in various events where he coordinated sports activities with children (table football, tennis, athletics etc). Adrian is also in charge of communications and he acts as a media liaison.



Marica Ballo

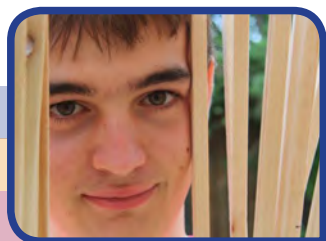
Age: 72

Marica is a 72 year old senior volunteer. She has been volunteering at the Generations Communitarian Centre for six years.

Ms Marica Ballo used to work as a technician for the Institute of Electro Technical Research inside Metrology Lab before she retired. She joined the centre after retirement because she was lonely and she wanted to do something useful in her spare time. She learned about the centre from a friend who got involved as a volunteer. Marica says that Generations Centre was love at the first sight; it was what she wanted and what she needed in that moment of her life. The Foundation is her family, where she makes new friends and gains the love of all the children. Marica participates with devotion in all of the Centre's intergenerational activities: choir, reading club, crafts, sports activities and painting.

Lessons learned through volunteering:

- Elderly people can avoid loneliness, depression and isolation, and can rediscover their value in the society through involvement in volunteering for the benefit of others.
- Children get helped with almost all problems, they get better results in school if they have support from adult role models.
- The young people learn something practical and at the same time learn how to get involved in the community. The fact that the elderly volunteers help them integrate into society helps strengthen communities and keep the young people from institutionalised centres.



Ion Chirobotia

Background info

Ion Chirobocia is a young man living in a rural area in Romania. He is from a village called Izvoarele. He has first started volunteering two years ago with an association Curba de Cultură and now he is a first year university student.

How the volunteering started

The association's work was developed to address the needs of a rural area where there were very limited activities for young people. Ion became aware of this problem and was very curious to find out if there were any possibilities for young people like him. One of his teachers in the village referred him to a new youth centre that was being set up and he decided to join the group. Initially he was reserved in his involvement and he didn't have high expectations.

After some time, he really started to enjoy being involved and active with the group and he started to feel invested in its success. He had a lot of questions for the people who were managing the activities at the youth centre and eventually he became a promoter of it. Ion was a part of the core group from the beginning of the organisation.

Volunteering activities

Ion became involved in volunteer management and helped coordinate activities for service users. He is in charge of communication, monitoring and reporting on the activities of the youth centre. The centre has daily activities for the library programme, so he makes sure that each day 4 young volunteers are delivering services for all young people in the village. He also supervises the volunteers and asks for feedback. In order to make sure all the services are delivered in a proper way, he initiated an administrative team, which is using the space in the youth centre.

Challenges

The main challenges for Ion were his initial fear of public speaking and difficulties when dealing with parents of children involved in the centres' activities. Parents often think it is better for their children to go and work in the field especially if there is the crop season. As an organisation, they try to work with the parents and inform them about the details of the association's programmes.

Benefits

Ion's self-confidence and self-esteem improved greatly, and he also developed his competencies in group facilitation, all contributing to his personal development. 'Through the high school activities in this project, I have managed to overcome my fear of talking in front of a large audience, to meet new people and to know myself better. At the same time, during this project, I have done things I never saw myself doing or that I never used to do back home: polishing, painting walls and arranging books into a library. Thanks to this project, I managed to make new friends, to spend my free time in a fun and pleasant way, and I also improved my ability to work in a team.'

Rural Youth in Volunteering

Curba de Cultură is all about reaching out to rural youth. They are an NGO committed to non-formal learning, culture and participatory opportunities. They focus on improving education levels and community engagement for young people, especially teenagers, living in rural Romania. Furthermore they take their work very seriously, yet in a relaxed, witty and humorous spirit. Their main goal is to revitalise the rural environment. The organisation is based in Izvoarele, a small rural community near the town of Vălenii-de-Munte, in Prahova county, Romania and has an affiliate organisation located in Roşia Montana, in Alba County, Transylvania.

Recruitment of young volunteers

Curba de Cultură started recruiting in 2012 from the alumni of the secondary school in the village. With the help of a group of teachers in Izvoarele they managed to gather 7 young boys and girls around the same table, and talked 6 of them into joining the initiative. Two more joined a few months later. Since then the recruitment process has two main pillars - formal and informal. Formally there are 2 annual week long events that Curba de Cultură delivers in local high schools in order to showcase their activities and recruit more volunteers – one in early autumn and one in late spring. Informally the current volunteers themselves recruit new young people by word of mouth. The novelty and participatory character of the activities is being promoted and it can be translated into volunteer language by: 'Dude, it's so cool, we get support for our own ideas. What are we doing? It's too much to explain, come see for yourself!'

Motivation & Retention

Volunteers receive recognition for their involvement in activities in the form of certificates of participation. They also receive recommendations for various projects in school and outside school. They are being invited to participate in national and international events, trainings and youth exchanges, based on hours worked, responsibilities taken and general involvement. Another strong motivational point is that the volunteers have a place to be themselves, the only place providing leisure time activities. The volunteers have a board games room, library, free broadband Wi-Fi and their own cinema. And it's the place where new volunteer projects are born each month. Another strong point is the informal, friendly and open manner in which the staff members are trained to involve the volunteers. Since formal politeness is quite rigid in rural areas, this comes as a breath of fresh air and makes young people wanting to be part of the project.

Challenges and successes

- Parents are not easily convinced of the benefits of volunteering.
- Local authorities are considering the NGO a political 'threat'.
- Total lack of funding from local and regional authorities for volunteering or youth programmes.
- Growing from 7 to almost 80 volunteers in less than 18 months.
- The area in which the programme is visible covers now towns 50 kms away.
- The positive impact in the community is being recognised by community members and by local authorities.
- Local authorities in neighbouring communities are asking for support to implement the same model – possibility of franchising.



The Princess Margareta of Romania Foundation

The Princess Margareta of Romania Foundation is a non-governmental organisation that contributes to the development of civil society in Romania. The Foundation was established in 1990 by Her Royal Highness Princess Margareta of Romania together with her father, His Majesty King Michael I. They contribute to increasing the capacity of organisations that work with children and senior citizens. Volunteering plays an important role in their activities and volunteers who get involved in the Foundation's programmes are from all age categories.

Generations Community Centre Program – a way of activating elderly people

The Generations Community Centre is the Romania's first inter-generational centre and has been open since 2007. The Centre provides social assistance and educational support to children and young people from disadvantaged families in a practical, innovative, efficient way, based on the ethos of inter-generational solidarity. Members of the community, volunteers from every age group and walk of life and senior citizens who want to lead an active life get involved in daily activities alongside the Centre's specialised team, contributing to an improvement in the social and educational circumstances of the children.

Structure of the program

Generations Community Centre involves 30 elderly people, of which 25 are volunteers and the other 5 come to the Centre for socialising (chess, rummy, Backgammon). Senior volunteers are between 47-74 years old and get involved with children in social and educational activities such as choir, reading club, crafts or sport activities. Their role at the Centre is very important, as they share with the children their life experience and also teach them what is good and what is bad, thus helping them grow and develop.

Usually, volunteers come by recommendation or see news on TV about the intergenerational program. The recruitment process starts with an interview. After a trial period of two weeks, the volunteer signs the agreement and a file is created for each volunteer, including CV, copy of identity card, role description and attendance sheet. Each person volunteers at the centre for at least 2 hours a week.

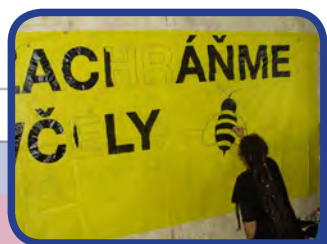
There is a monthly meeting with volunteers to discuss the challenges they encounter in working with children. Some of them are:

- Seniors tend to have a different way of thinking from the young people and it can cause miscommunication at times.
- They can't take part in all physical activities because age specifics and physical condition do not allow them.
- They don't have skills to work with the new technology and they can't give the child support in this way.

In order to keep senior volunteers involved in activities it is necessary to motivate them. That's why occasionally the Foundation offers them food packages, sanitary materials, trips and tickets to the theatre or museum.

The background of the image consists of a repeating pattern of horizontal stripes. The stripes are colored in a sequence of dark blue, red, and white, creating a patriotic or nationalistic theme. The word "SLOVAKIA" is centered horizontally and vertically within the image.

SLOVAKIA



Alex

Age: 22

My name is Alex, I am 22 years old and I have studied photography for six years. Unfortunately, when I started to study at secondary school, I was a drug addict and had to find professional help. It was a difficult time. Two years after that, I was struggling with bulimia nervosa. As in the past I was in the situation when I needed help of other people, I wanted to change it and be able to help others. Natural way of life is my passion and that is why I am active in various environmental projects.

I started to volunteer by a sheer coincidence. I was going to school and on my way, there was a place where the circus used to stop and carried out its performances. I felt an increasing aversion and dislike for such a place where the animals do not feel well. At that time I have decided that I will start to do something about it because I believe that currently, people have more power and they have a chance to speak for themselves and advocate for issues they care about. The first organisation I was volunteering for was Freedom for Animals and in 2014 I have started to volunteer for Greenpeace Slovakia. In the NGO Freedom for Animals, I am helping already for several years. It is not so intensive, but they still approach me if they need somebody to help with information stands located at various festivals or events, but I also organise protests against circuses. Talking about these protests, I do everything from the permits to organise a protest, through inviting people up to the actual implementation of a protest. I am borrowing banners from the Freedom for Animals. In February 2014, I started to volunteer for Greenpeace Slovakia. I am a member of the core team of volunteers and I help with everything that needs to be done: I make badges, stickers, prepare posters, banners, and if it is necessary, I can help to clean the office. The group of volunteers is currently quite small, so we are also trying to get more volunteers for the organisation. In addition to that, I am also doing other environmental activities as a private entity – I am interested in community composting. Thanks to my volunteering experience, I know how to take care of necessary permits and how to organise staff around it.

I am unemployed for a longer time, but if we talk about volunteering, I take it as an advantage. While I am looking for a job and visiting job interviews, I can devote my time to things that I am interested in. Volunteering is truly enriching my life. I do not need to sit at home but I can use my time more efficiently. When

I have started to volunteer, nobody in the NGOs really cared whether I am employed or not. They were interested in what I would like to and what I can do for the organisation. They did not know I am unemployed until we knew each other better and we started to be friends. Only then I started to talk to other people in the group about the stuff I went through. I think good relationships are very important for volunteering – if you have good relationships with people in the organisation you volunteer for, you like to go there and spend time there. And in return, you get much experience you can use in the job search or in your future career.

I am a very enthusiastic person, so I feel that I want to do more; I feel that I can help. And the feeling the volunteering brings me is almost ecstatic. However, what I really like about volunteering is the social contact it provides me with. Thanks to volunteering, I meet people who think like me and have the same interests. Thanks to volunteering, I have found out what I like – I have realised that the environmental protection and currently also protection of human rights is something I care about, something I want to be active in. If I were not volunteering, I would probably never find out.



Lucia

Age: 31

My name is Lucia and I am a very active person. In the past I was into athletics and archery was another of my hobbies. I still love to swim and ride a bike. When I don't do sports, I read books – it helps me to develop my vocabulary. Unfortunately, I am unemployed for a long time and that is why I decided to try volunteering.

How did I start to volunteer? It was simple. I put *volunteering* into google and found a website with volunteer opportunities. There I found an ad of the Slovak Alzheimer Society. They were looking for volunteers who would help them with administrative tasks. I sent them an e-mail and the project manager replied quite fast. Before I started to volunteer, she did an interview with me.

Slovak Alzheimer Society is focusing on people with Alzheimer disease. They do some prevention activities such as memory trainings or trainings for people who are working with people with this disease. In addition to that, they are also doing some awareness work. My role is to keep the database of trainees updated, to register clients who are visiting our memory trainings and to help with some tasks related to accounting, correspondence, organisation of conferences (I am often in charge of attendance sheets, registration, name tags, etc.), basically – I do what is needed. This type of activity was my first volunteering experience and because I like it very much, I have stopped looking for other opportunities. I am with the organisation since April 2013 and I feel really good there. The team is young and skilful and I can learn a lot from them. They all are the right people in the right place.

As I am a wheelchair user, it is very nice that the organisation I am volunteering in is barrier free. It is so because of the clients they are working with – all the spaces (entrance, lift, toilets, office) are adjusted to the needs of people with a physical disability, so there was no problem with the environment. For me it was the first space where I felt like I had no disability at all. There was no fuss about my wheelchair, no questions in a way: 'And now what???' Everything was so natural. Of course, the volunteer coordinator – Darinka Grniaková – had some questions. She asked me what I can do and what kind of help or support I need. Our discussion was very open and there were no issues or problems identified. I can say that in a way I am lucky that my disability doesn't prevent me from many activities. The rest was on my colleagues – they had to get used to me. Everything is a question of compromises and agreements. The only thing I would like to recommend to the volunteer coordinators who are willing to involve people with physical disability into volunteering is that they should communicate with respect, dignity, and openness. The person with a disability asks questions because he/she wants to know whether he/she will be able to fulfil the tasks despite the disability. And on the other hand, the coordinator needs to get to know the volunteer and should not be afraid to ask anything he/she needs to know. I would summarise it in this way: a person with a disability knows about his/her limitations, but needs more experience to learn about his/her own strengths and limits. And this experience can be gained through volunteering.

Volunteering gives me a great inner feeling. I feel that I can provide others with help and support even though I have a disability. Volunteering also helps me to stay in contact with people – thanks to this activity I am among people; I can develop relationships, and move further. The environment I am volunteering in is very motivating and inspiring for me. It gives me a great feeling of satisfaction. It also helps me to develop my skills and move forward. I would like to show future employers that also people with disabilities can work and maybe, in the future, also I will be able to do something big for people with disabilities.

Senior Volunteering at the University Library in Banská Bystrica

Senior volunteering at the University Library at the Matej Bel University is a volunteer programme carried out by the Volunteer Centre. The main goal of the programme is to improve services of the University Library and at the same time to increase the involvement of seniors in volunteering.

The programme is based on cooperation among volunteers and employees of the library. The role of the Volunteer Centres is to recruit, select, train, and motivate the volunteers and to help the library with the volunteer management.

This volunteer programme is focused primarily on seniors aged 50+. It creates space for seniors who can use their experience, knowledge, and skills gained through their previous professional lives. The volunteers do not need to have any previous experience with the work in a library.

Volunteers are doing simple manual and administrative activities which means that librarians can spend more time with the visitors of the library, be more available to meet requests, and provide them with more support and advice than otherwise would be possible.

The help of volunteers is very important especially during the time with increased number of visitors (at the beginning and during the semesters, when the library is open in two shifts per day). In addition, they bring new ideas and new energy to the library. Their willingness to help supports the positive atmosphere in the library and among its employees.

Benefits of Volunteering in the Library

Through volunteers, the library gains 'extra hands' which help them to provide services faster and better than without them. Volunteers get a chance to be active and to use their leisure time effectively.

Lessons Learnt

We tend to think that seniors have a lot of free time, however, it is quite a challenge to find senior volunteers who can afford (and are ready) to get involved in a regular and long-term volunteering role similar to this programme and retain their participation. It is necessary to express clearly what we want from them and how much time they would need for this type of volunteering.

Information about the project

<http://www.centrumdobrovolnictva.sk/aktualne-projekty/dobrovolnictvo-se-niorov-v-kniznici/o-projekte> (Slovak language only)

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This volunteer programme is carried out thanks to the support of the Community Foundation Healthy City in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

Volunteering for Everyone

In April 2014, the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations launched the project of inclusive volunteering for young people titled *Volunteering for Everyone*. The Platform is actively cooperating in this national project with volunteer centres active in three different regions of Slovakia: Bratislava Volunteer Centre, Nitra Volunteer Centre, and Volunteer Centre of Košice region. The project ended in December 2014.

The main target group of the project is the group of young people with fewer opportunities – young people with disabilities, with a mental illness, unemployed, young people with educational difficulties, orphans, ex-offenders, etc. These people do not have many opportunities to get involved into volunteering today in Slovakia. If they are involved, they usually volunteer for organisations that care for them as clients of self-help groups and that is something the project would like to change.

The main aim of the project was to involve at least 75 young people with fewer opportunities into specific short-term and long-term volunteer opportunities in organisations and communities they live in. In such a way, the project wanted to contribute to their overall awareness; to help them to develop their competences and self-confidence; and to support their integration into society. Another project objective wanted to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities among these young people and naturally, through good examples also to inspire similar activities. In order to fulfil these aims, the Platform cooperated with volun-

teer centres, volunteer involving organisations as well as advocacy organisations working with people with fewer opportunities.

Project activities

- Trainings for organisations willing to involve young people with fewer opportunities in volunteering (carried out in cooperation with cooperating volunteer centres) done in cooperation with experts active in the field of work with different groups (visually impaired people, people with hearing problems, people with mental illness, Roma community, etc.).
- Actual volunteering (ad-hoc or long-term) of young people with fewer opportunities in various organisations done thanks to the help and support of partner volunteer centres.
- Evaluation and analysis of benefits of the project done through a publication and a half-day workshop.

If you need more information about the project, contact [the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations in Slovakia](#).

This project has been supported by the Ministry of The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Volunteering as a Way to Employment (VOLWEM Project)

According the research on volunteering in Slovakia done in 2011, among all socio-economic groups, unemployed people showed the lowest level of participation in formal volunteering (only 13.3% while the average participation for adult population reached 27.5%). The research also showed that the low engagement of unemployed people in volunteering is not related only with their lack of interest but also with barriers related to suitable working methods that would enable awareness about volunteering and involvement of these groups of people into volunteering. These facts inspired the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations and Matej Bel University to design and implement the VOLWEM Project. This project started in October 2012 and ended in September 2014 and there were partners from three countries involved:

- Slovakia: Matej Bel University, Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations and four regional volunteer centres (VCs in Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, and Košice)
- The United Kingdom: Volunteer Development Scotland
- The Czech Republic: Volunteer Centre, Ústí nad Labem

Over the course of the project, the project partners transferred and adapted system of validation of non-formal learning known in Scotland as VSkills for Employability to Slovakia. In addition to that, they also transferred the system of cooperation of VCs with unemployed volunteers based on the active cooperation with jobcentres from the Czech Republic to Slovakia. The third part of the project was focused on the cooperation with employers with the goal to inform them about benefits of volunteering and to motivate them toward taking information about volunteering into consideration while selecting new employees.

However, the most important part was the actual engagement of unemployed people into volunteering. As part of the project, the regional VCs were approaching and discussing the opportunity of volunteering with more than 150 unemployed people. There were 96 unemployed people involved in volunteering – helping with various activities in 28 different organizations. VCs helped these people to gain (or develop) and recognize skills that are transferrable to the world of work. The spectrum of volunteers they have been working with was very wide – from secondary school students and university graduates to long-term unemployed people with low levels of education.

Lessons Learned

Despite all the benefits of volunteering, it is necessary to emphasize that although one can grow, learn, and acquire new experience through volunteering, it is not a 100% guarantee for a successful job search. Volunteering should be seen more as a tool to increase the employability of unemployed people.

Main Project Outcomes:

- Try It Another Way - methodology for VCs and volunteer involving organizations on how to engage unemployed volunteers
- Accredited training for VCs and organizations involving volunteers on how to work with unemployed volunteers
- D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie – online tool for recognition and validation of skills acquired through Volunteering with the manual on how to use it
- Survey among employers and HR professionals on how they perceive experience acquired through volunteering

Information about the project in English, project outcomes, and contact information can be found [here](#).



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