

SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

Involving and activating seniors
in local community



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Find the best ways to encourage seniors to volunteer

The age group of over 60-year olds is growing every year in most of the European municipalities. The associated challenges are the same everywhere – social exclusion of older people, marginalisation, and loneliness. One of the measures that can help older people to stay active in their community and interact with other people is volunteering. It gives the opportunity not only to socialise, but to feel needed and appreciated, develop new skills and use the life experience to help others. In this guide volunteering is seen as an activity that benefits the society around and is delivered with no financial gain.

THIS GUIDE

This guide tells you how to organise, manage and promote volunteering for seniors. The guidelines are based on the views of senior care and senior association experts from Estonia, Finland and Latvia, who have seen the many faces of senior volunteering in their countries. We have acknowledged that the path to volunteering usually follows a similar pattern: getting to know volunteering, getting interested in volunteering and choosing the right activity. The challenges in this path are diverse, but not impossible to solve. Especially reaching the less active is a complicated question while it remains as the key when solving loneliness and social exclusion. Equally important is to make volunteering an exciting and meaningful

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You can see this same path in our guide. The given guidelines are suggestions – you can choose the parts that would work in your organisation. Along each guideline we introduce you to an example. These best practices offer inspiration, but you are also welcome to copy them.

It doesn't matter if you're from the local council, from a NGO or you are a senior volunteer yourself. We wrote this guide with all of you working with senior volunteering in mind: to encourage you to see senior volunteering from a wider perspective. Seniors have wisdom, they have experience and they can contribute and bring value to the society. Activating seniors is good for their mental health and well-being but also good for their community.



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Tip #1

Make sure that within your organisation there is a positive view towards senior volunteering.

Tip #2

Think what kind of help from volunteers would be needed at your organisation.

Tip #3

Collect information about different volunteering tasks and let the seniors you work with know about them.

See volunteering as an opportunity

VOLUNTEERS INCREASE MUTUAL VALUE

To be able to activate seniors in volunteering, it must be understood as a positive opportunity. Seniors can take part in local voluntary activities organised by NGOs, but another way is to enhance voluntary work in your own organisation by developing tasks that volunteers can do. Notice that in your organisation seniors can take part in various roles ranging from simple coffee making to managing events alongside professionals.

- Organisation can do more - working with volunteers you can manage more activities and more services.
- Saving costs - volunteers use little resources but their output is high.
- Diverse know-how - volunteers have various work and life experience.
- The feeling of community - an opportunity to involve local citizens not only to identify problems but also to give an opportunity to solve them.
- Expanding social network - through the volunteer you can meet interesting people with different experiences.

FROM AN IDEA TO ACTIVATION OF OTHERS

Antonida (60) started to give regular Chinese exercise technique lessons at day centres on her own initiative. With support from social workers at the moment there are more than 20 participants in each group. Last year she received award "A Volunteer of the Year 2015".





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Understand seniors' needs

DIFFERENT SENIORS, DIFFERENT NEEDS AND DREAMS

While some seniors have a passion for knitting, some might be more into motorbikes. Still many voluntary jobs are designed to fit those with interest in social and health care, while also other volunteering tasks bring wellbeing and meaning to life. Volunteering is about helping and feeling meaningful so the tasks can vary as well. To find out what seniors in your area are interested in, you have to get to know them.

SPACE FOR EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

Block café in Turku is a low threshold meeting place where seniors can come to talk to others. It was established when it was realized that some seniors who feel lonely and tied up to their homes, find it very hard to start socialising again. Many feel like they don't fit into the idea of an 'active and social senior'. In the Block café seniors are greeted with familiar employee and they can participate in a way that fits to them. Some like to observe, some like to discuss more. The discussions are not facilitated by an employee, but by the community. In this way seniors can come as they are and discuss in a safe environment about their interests, dreams and worries. When listening to the conversations, you can find out what seniors actually would like to do and even encourage them to participate.

Tip #1

Start with discussions about daily life to find real needs.

Tip #2

Don't ask directly what seniors want, they might not know.

Tip #3

Accept that not everybody wants to be a volunteer.



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Tip #1

Volunteers should have the option of choosing how much they want to participate.

Tip #2

Tasks should be different that everyone can find something they would enjoy.

Tip #3

Some volunteering tasks can be project-based, only lasting for a specific amount of time.



Embrace diversity

WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF AN ORDINARY PERSON

When some seniors consider volunteering as a way of helping, they feel that they don't have the skills or knowledge needed. "I'm not social enough" is sometimes an answer from them. It might be that they image volunteers to be supervolunteers, who are energetic, positive and always ready to help. This is however not the case. When you have lived for over sixty years, you have learned skills that can be used to help others.

THE POWER OF DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

Soili (74) from Turku, Finland, has been a volunteer for the last twenty years while participating in the work of multiple associations. "There is something for everyone. You can go and try different tasks and decide which one you are the most interested in." When first starting volunteering in the Finnish Red Cross, Soili didn't want to commit for weekly activities, but soon found herself as a volunteer friend to a lonely senior. Now Soili is managing and designing health and wellbeing projects at the local chapter of FRC. "I really like to come up with new ideas and see them coming to reality. This is my way of helping others. For some it could be participating in fund-raising, making coffee at senior events or simply supporting a lonely senior."





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Tip #1
Collect ideas on what seniors would like to do through a survey or a workshop. Remember to inform this to the right target group.

Tip #2
Let seniors know that they can come up with their own ideas.

Tip #3
Create opportunities to volunteer for short time without big commitments.

Create new activities with seniors

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Some seniors don't have earlier experience with volunteering and so it's very important to create familiar connections between their former knowledge and volunteering. If senior likes to visit the day centre, you should see if there are any activities in the day centre where elderly could act as volunteers. Organisations that haven't had volunteers before, must rethink what activities could be done with volunteers. It's essential to write a description of these activities so the seniors can get clear overview. Good way to create new voluntary activities that are meaningful for seniors is to organise a workshop with seniors to design new tasks, promote volunteering and share experience.

SENIORS KNOW THE BEST WHAT THEY WANT TO DO

Maime (76) has moving disability but she still wants to help others. She provides company to a lonely senior via Skype. Her grandchild installed it and taught her how to use it. "Senior left alone might lose interest in the world and feel troubled" says Maime. She sees that seniors are often mistrustful but when a grandchild recommends a companion lady, it's easier to embrace the stranger. It's also easier for relatives, if senior family member can talk about problems and thoughts to trustful companion lady.



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Provide clear information

Tip #1
Provide specific and short information.

Tip #2
Make sure there is a place where all information is available.

Tip #3
Notice that fears and unclear expectations are caused by lack of information.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION DECREASES CONFUSION

People who have not volunteered before are often confused what “volunteering” means and are afraid to get engaged. Fortunately clear and specific information can decrease these fears. Being a volunteer may include different roles. Thus merely invitation “Come volunteer!” might leave an unclear message what kind of activities are meant. It’s important to give an overview of the process of becoming a volunteer, obligations and responsibilities, also cooperation with other team members. It’s significant to explain that volunteering activities don’t require specific skills and that one can choose what to do.

FINDING THE RIGHT TASK

Club Two Bridges organises sport events and has involved volunteers for years. Club has understood brilliantly how important clear information is. In their webpage they have pointed out specific fields where volunteers can be involved: logistics, track designers, secretariat, drinking areas, photo-team etc. Also the potential volunteers can choose in which specific event they want to be involved in. Club has specified their expectations for volunteers and pointed out training and motivation possibilities. In result, the potential volunteer has clear information what is expected, list of possible activities and how the voluntary actions are rewarded.



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Tip #1

Be creative and also test what kind of promotion works the best.

Tip #2

Use your existing networks to spread information.

Tip #3

Think how to motivate your volunteers to act as ambassadors and thank them for their work.

Promote activities

SPARKING INTEREST IS THE KEY

Without promotion you can't find seniors to activate. Promotion has to be diverse: the less active seniors need more convincing than active ones.

- Collect volunteer stories and share experience - look for stories which describe why people are volunteering, what motivates them. Use "word of mouth" and share volunteer stories in media and internet.
- Most volunteers are recruited by existing staff, volunteers, supporters and clients - make sure everybody involved with your organisation knows which roles you are recruiting for.
- Think of the networks your potential volunteer could be involved in - enquire if the network can distribute the information.
- Find events where you can market volunteering - save most of the work and resources.
- Distribute informative brochures - place them in the libraries, hospitals, cultural places or do it face to face.
- Use your local volunteers as ambassadors - they can invite and encourage others to volunteer.

USING EVENTS IN PROMOTION

To recruit new volunteers for the Volunteer Call Centre for Seniors in Riga seniors were invited to promotion seminars to inform about the possibility to become a volunteer. Seniors volunteering in the Call Centre shared their experience and also motivated the others to join them.



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Collaborate with NGOs

Tip #1

Gather information about senior NGOs in your region and share them with colleagues.

Tip #2

Spreading information of own age companions is more effective.

Tip #3

Notice that wider network means more collaboration and development possibilities.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

In every region there are senior NGOs where seniors are welcomed to join. There are also some NGOs that coordinate voluntary work. Your task is to find those organisations which already connect active seniors or voluntary work enthusiasts. Giving them information about voluntary work possibilities among elderly can build collaboration to reach less-active seniors. To spread information through own age companions and role models is the best way to reach new potential senior volunteers.

SYNERGY THROUGH COLLABORATION

Senior NGO LifeFun unites seniors who take part actively in different recreational activities. At the same time they are rarely involved in voluntary actions. Regional association Pärnumaa Volunteer Centre promotes voluntary movement but they haven't seen seniors as a potential target group yet. Bringing these two organisations together makes synergy that by itself creates new ways and possibilities to involve more elderly in voluntary activities. As said in Estonia: don't invent a wheel, find it!



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Tip #1

State in the contract whether the volunteers are insured by the organisation or if they need to arrange it for themselves.

Tip #2

Give volunteers a name tag. This way everybody knows that they are volunteering.

Tip #3

When drafting a contract, remember to keep it as short and clear as possible.

Make a contract and increase mutual trust

CLEAR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EVERYONE

Volunteers need to know what they are allowed to do and what their responsibilities are regardless of their volunteering position. In pop-up style volunteering activities these can be stated more informally but in more organised tasks a contract might be a good solution to clarify the rights and responsibilities. This way the volunteers know what they do and the organisation and the ones being helped know what to expect.

INCREASING VOLUNTEERING SAFETY IN KOTIKUNNAS

In senior home Kotikunnas in Turku, volunteers often join the daily life by arranging activities, taking seniors out for a walk and chatting with them. As many seniors who live there suffer from memory disorders, volunteers are often nervous about what might happen in case of an accident. To ensure everyone's safety Kotikunnas management made a contract that informs volunteers about the provided insurance, their tasks, professional secrecy and what aspects of their volunteering should not be discussed in social media. The management has noted that now volunteers feel safer and more confident and also that they enjoy a certain freedom to perform their tasks the way they want as long as they follow the guidelines of the contract.



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Motivate your volunteers

Tip #1

Thank your volunteers – create an event just to praise them.

Tip #2

Show that you are proud of your volunteers - create a special “volunteers message board” with information about the volunteers, what they are doing and what’s motivation.

Tip #3

Use the volunteer stories in media - they can motivate others and make volunteers feel appreciated.

INTEREST AND COMMITMENT THROUGH MOTIVATION

Volunteering is valuable for seniors, communities and organisations. To raise interest you have to consider what would motivate your volunteers. Understanding this is the key to volunteers’ wellbeing and future commitment.

- Sustain a positive environment where volunteers are allowed to ask for guidance.
- Give volunteers specific tasks, but also provide possibilities to learn new things.
- Involve volunteers - listen to their ideas and suggestions.
- Provide individual or group counselling - discuss their experience, success, difficulties.
- Have a volunteer coordinator.
- Give volunteers the responsibility and trust.

MAKE SENIORS FEEL APPRECIATED

Before opening the Volunteer Call Centre for Seniors in Riga, seniors were invited to several meetings and trainings where they could learn about gerontological issues and also think about their own motivation to become a volunteer. This helped them to see volunteering both as an opportunity to learn new things and as a challenge, too. It also made seniors feel needed and appreciated.



Space for notes

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The project “Let us be active! – Social inclusion of older people through volunteering in Estonia, Latvia and Finland” (2015-2016) promotes the social activity of seniors as volunteers in the cities of Pärnu, Riga and Turku. The project aims at decreasing social exclusion and loneliness among older people in Estonia, Finland and Latvia through involving them in voluntary work. The idea is to develop a programme that will allow older people to stay active and participate in their communities by doing voluntary work.

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Let us be active!

Social inclusion of older people through volunteering in Estonia, Latvia and Finland



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund

This guide tells you how to organise, manage and promote volunteering for seniors. Volunteering can help older people to stay active in their community and interact with other people. It gives the opportunity not only to socialise, but to feel needed and appreciated, develop new skills and use the life experience to help others.

