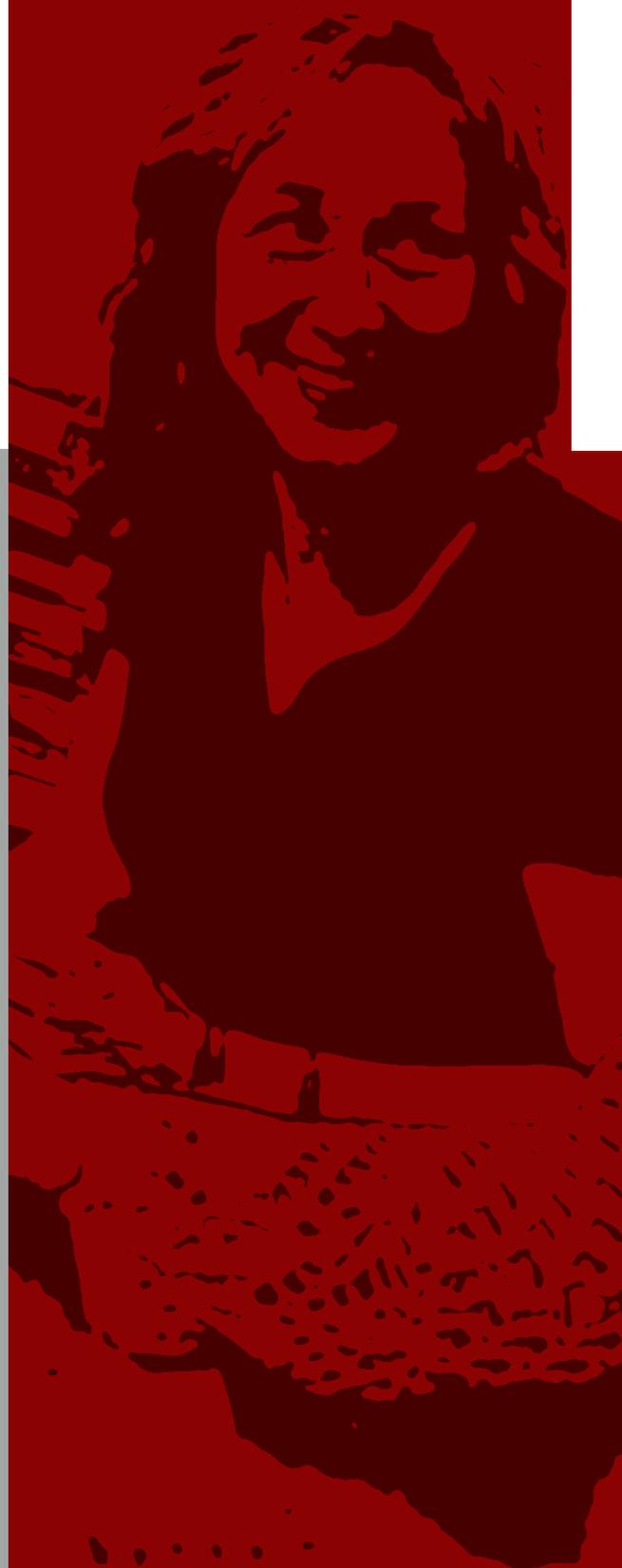


The joy of giving: how volunteering contributes to social inclusion

TOGETHER FOR SOCIAL EUROPE
BRIEFING ON VOLUNTEERING



09

solidar



Together for
Social Europe



Glossary

- Social services and their users have a number of **special characteristics** as compared to other services of general interest. That is to say that as services they aim to bring about the realisation of social policy objectives and social rights of individuals and groups and are an integral part of social protection systems. And their users are also often dependant – needing guidance and support – ill, handicapped or living under economically precarious conditions.

- **General interest:** A good or service that promotes the common good i.e. shared and beneficial for all (or most) members of a given community. They are subject to a public service obligation that should guarantee users access to quality services at affordable prices.

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What is volunteering?

Although there is no one definition, a common understanding has evolved that is “wherever people engage together in activities to help each other, support those in need, preserve our environment, campaign for human rights, support various activities of sport organisations or initiate actions to help ensure that everyone enjoys a decent life – both society as a whole and the individual volunteers benefit and social cohesion is significantly strengthened”¹

The provision of social services, the promotion of social inclusion and the participation of all in Europe strongly depend on contributions from volunteers. They are indispensable in a wide range of EU policy fields such as youth policies, integration of migrants, civil protection, humanitarian aid and development, and human rights. Voluntary activities are also part of informal and non-formal learning for people all through their lives.

Context

Volunteering is a policy field at the crossroads of European policies and is not dealt with as a distinct sectoral policy by the EU. The EU understands volunteering as an important expression of active involvement and participation of citizens, as stressed in the 2001 White Paper on European Governance. The Treaty of Lisbon would establish a legal basis for specific aspects of volunteering, such as the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe or the Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

In 2005 Heads of State and Governments gave their support to the “European Pact for Youth and Promoting Active Citizenship” putting forward policy coordination and joint action in the three fields of “employment, integration and social advancement”, “education, training and mobility” and “reconciliation of working life and family life”. In March 2008 the European Parliament voted in a report on the role of volunteering recognising the contribution it makes to the economic and social cohesion of European societies and to the social integration of disadvantaged persons and vulnerable groups at the local level.

Volunteering is currently addressed within a range of programmes and initiatives focusing on certain age groups (in particular on young and elderly people) and policy areas. Some EU programmes, such as “Europe for Citizens” and “European Action Programme on Life-long Learning”, focus on an exchange of experiences and good practice. Others promote mobility across Europe and support capacity and infrastructure building. These programmes and initiatives however, do not yet take full account of the relevance of volunteering in solving a variety of political, social and economic challenges that the EU faces today, which would call for a cross-cutting approach.

SOLIDAR has been part of a coalition of European level NGOs advocating for a European Year of Volunteering in 2011 (EY2011), endorsed by a Council Decision in June 2009. Taking up the momentum of the EY2011 on Volunteering it should be ensured that in the 27 Member States “political powers realise that the voluntary sector is the first place to look for answers that neither the governments nor the market can provide”² as volunteers are delivering change and tackling many problems that face today’s society. SOLIDAR has continuously highlighted the important role of volunteering and the need to set up enabling frameworks in policy work around social services and an effective civil dialogue. Please visit www.solidar.org to read more.



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¹ Quoted from “The European Year of Volunteering EYV 2011 – Discussion paper” (version of December 2008), prepared by NGO Alliance for EY 2010

² Ibid.

About Community Service Volunteers

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) is a SOLIDAR member from the UK. Founded in 1962, CSV is now the largest volunteering and training charity in the UK. CSV has more than 15,000 partnerships with statutory, public, private sector and voluntary organisations, community groups and the media, and involves around 230,000 volunteers annually in meeting social needs and in providing innovative responses to social challenges. CSV is involved in many aspects of public life from the environment to education, from health and social care to crime prevention and community cohesion, and from training and enterprise to campaigning for increased citizen involvement.

In recent years, CSV has developed its work in mental health and has created a wide range of initiatives which use volunteering as a means of supporting people with severe and enduring mental health issues in their journey to recovery.

www.csv.org.uk

Meet Aloyse in the UK

Aloyse is 36 and was brought up in France. After spending 12 years travelling across North and South America, she finally settled in London in May 2000. Aloyse experiences bi-polar affective disorder and has been admitted to a psychiatric unit several times. In April 2003, after leaving hospital yet again, she made two promises to herself – to look after herself so that she didn't have to go back to hospital, and to get a job that she found fulfilling.

Under the framework of the Capital Volunteering project, she volunteered to help others with mental distress – befriending, supporting and escorting people to activities. This led to paid work delivering training for a local Mental Health Promotion Unit and Social Services. Aloyse was asked to sit on its recruitment panel and is now a member of Capital Volunteering's Board.

Having already completed a Masters degree in arts, Aloyse is naturally involved in a number of Capital Volunteering's creative projects. "Music is my passion," she grins. "I get enormous satisfaction from developing ideas with people." However, one of her greatest achievements has been setting up Volunteer Involvement in Training and Learning (VITAL), that aims to give people who use mental services the support they need to develop vocational skills in either mental health or education.

If it hadn't been for volunteering, Aloyse is certain that she wouldn't be where she is today.

What the social workers think

"Starting in 2004, Capital Volunteering is a pan-London programme which tackles issues of mental health and social inclusion through volunteering. The programme is focused on people like Aloyse with severe and enduring mental health issues, and features around 100 diverse volunteering projects.

Through participating in this programme and thanks to volunteering, over 4,500 people have experienced, or are experiencing, improvements in the social inclusion aspects of their lives. Volunteering can be a real relief as it enables them to take part in something positive and creative instead of sitting with their therapist and crying their eyes out. Through volunteering people with mental health problems can feel responsible, useful and regain confidence doing enjoyable work.

The Capital Volunteering programme knows it is aiding recovery when people describe real improvements in their physical and mental health, when its work has provided a new focus, helped people to find a way to break the cycle of illness and hospitalisation, and move forward, and contribute to their community. Success is evident, as Aloyse's case best exemplifies, when people's current lives and future hopes have changed."



About Humanitas

Humanitas is a SOLIDAR member from the Netherlands. It is a volunteering organisation that helps people regain control of their own life and empowers them to stay in control. All of Humanitas' projects are related to a specific target group, like homeless people, former prisoners, lonely people, and former psychiatric patients. Many activities are in addition to the legal tasks of the local government. The common vision behind all these projects is the conviction that people who control their own lives are happier and have more self-confidence.

The Home Administration project is a specific project to address over-indebtedness. It helps people to structure their private administration at home, to get insight into their financial situation and to train people in managing their own administration.

www.humanitas.nl

Meet Anne in the Netherlands

Anne is 45 years old. She got married at 29, and together with her husband bought a nice house in a decent neighbourhood which they could easily afford with their double income. Anne has twin 10 year old boys. She became a single parent shortly after their birth when the couple got divorced. They had to sell the house with a loss of € 45,000 and the debt was split equally between the spouses. Her ex-husband pays monthly child support for the boys.

Anne works 30 hours a week as a secretary in the municipality. Her ex-husband doesn't pay the alimony and the costs for a lawyer to enforce the payments are high. Anne's salary is € 25 above the threshold to be entitled to all kinds of free assistance, like exemption from taxation, membership fees for sports clubs etc.

One of the boys has a crippled leg; he has had some physiotherapy but should do sports three times a week. The other is very sensitive. Neither of the boys socialise easily. The school's social worker advised counseling for both boys, but Anne can't afford it. Because of Anne's financial situation, many activities in and outside school can't be enjoyed by the boys. Trips, museum visits, parties and all things boys like to do are not possible for them. The boys don't have friends in school. Anne wants to give them a solid base for a good future. But she doesn't know how.

For Anne, inclusion means

- Allowing her boys to do the same activities as their peers, especially with regard to their future education and socialisation.
- Not being disadvantaged against by the taxation system, in accessing health and social services as well as other leisure time activities.

What the social workers think

"Like other over-indebted people, Anne feels like she's in a downward spiral, with the repayment of loans often higher than their actual income, the debts often just keep growing until the electricity and water are cut-off and they are evicted from their houses. In this process they become more and more socially excluded, with children in particular suffering as they cannot do what they and their friends would like. Exclusion often leads to a feeling of shame about one's situation and an increasing non-participation in different aspects of society."

"Helping other people has helped me cure my own depression; it has filled me with confidence... I have improved my health and integrated into society again, doing something worthwhile."

VOLUNTEER,
BRENT VOLUNTEER CENTRE



Interview with members of staff at CSV and Humanitas

HUMANITAS

What is the role of volunteers in providing social services?

Social and health services rely heavily on the contribution of volunteers. Volunteers contribute to providing services ranging from visiting services for socially isolated people, assisting in day centres for older people or in institutions for special care children; coaching activities supporting and empowering people to take charge of their own lives again; organising holidays for people with disabilities and/or chronic diseases; and assisting drug users and prisoners. Volunteers are also indispensable in responding to disasters, for first aid services, as well as for rescue services.

And their role in promoting social inclusion?

Volunteers are instrumental to promoting inclusion and the participation of all in society through their engagement with the socially excluded or those at risk of social exclusion. Volunteering is a tool to empower those who are socially marginalised, helping them to re-connect with society. This is particularly true for Humanitas in the case of over-indebted persons.

CSV

What does volunteering give to your organisation, society and the volunteers?

Part of the ethos of volunteering is that not all outcomes can be measured in quantitative terms, and therefore qualitative feedback is valued very highly. Examples of results for volunteers include building relationships and trust, and for people who were previously isolated, living on the edge of services and communities, a sense of belonging, usefulness and purpose, in short, a real 'social inclusion'. By working for others, volunteers are active citizens, helping to improve social cohesion and their own skills and sense of belonging to society.

Is volunteering politically recognised in the UK?

The value of volunteering has been increasingly recognised by policy makers, especially since the 2007 White Paper called 'Care Matters' which stressed that local authorities need to ensure that volunteering forms a central part of the

activities open to young people in care. These and other policy developments highlight the extent to which it is now acknowledged that volunteering offers the potential to improve outcomes for people with very differing needs. Perhaps more important however, is the fact that policy statements about the value of volunteering are now being supported in the performance management and improvement framework for local public services.

Is volunteering free?

Volunteering is freely given, but not free of cost. Government at different levels and businesses need to invest in the recruitment and training of volunteers. Volunteers also need to have their costs covered and be covered by insurance on third party liability. Voluntary activities need to find formal recognition in different branches of the social protection system.

What would be your major demands to your national governments?

CSV: First, opportunities to volunteer in the public sector.

Volunteers lengthen and strengthen services and help governments to deliver more for less. Staff need training in how to work with volunteers so that they can serve in health and social care, education, crime prevention, parks and environmental protection, emergency services and child protection. Doctors, nurses, teachers, planners, police officers and emergency and defence personnel should all learn how to engage and deploy volunteers.

Government should review its procurement and commissioning processes to specify activities and outcomes - not just "value for money".

And of course we want our government to support the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

Humanitas: We need help from local governments to financially support the recruitment and training of reliable volunteers - which is costly - as well as covering their expenses. We also think that it is important to point out that in times of budget cuts, governments should not encourage the use of volunteers for matters that should be dealt with by professionals.



Volunteering in Europe

At least 3 out of 10 Europeans volunteer and 80% say that active participation in society is a crucial part of their life, recent results of a Eurobarometer survey indicate. In concrete numbers this means that around 150 million European citizens put into practice common European values such as solidarity, social cohesion and active citizenship on a regular basis.

To encourage and strengthen this level of involvement, recognition and support are needed including additional steps at European level for a better coordination of activities, legal frameworks and policies to encourage volunteers and to improve the framework conditions for voluntary work, making it more attractive for those who want to volunteer.

Together for Social Europe

is a one-year project which aims to demonstrate that a more social Europe is necessary for a socially sustainable and cohesive Europe. SOLIDAR seeks to demonstrate this by highlighting SOLIDAR members' experiences of working with socially and economically disadvantaged people and putting forward proposals to EU and national decision makers.

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All Together for Social Europe briefings are available on www.solidar.org

SOLIDAR is a European network of 53 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs (more social Europe), international cooperation (decent work for all) and education (lifelong learning for all).

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SOLIDAR's recommendations for EU decision makers on volunteering

1. Recognise volunteering by

- Legally recognising the political, social and economic contributions that citizens make to society through volunteering.
- Working towards a strong volunteering infrastructure across all levels comprising legal frameworks that foresee a right to participation in society through voluntary work for all.
- Developing framework conditions to attract volunteers, including investment in the qualification of volunteers in the framework of lifelong learning programmes in both informal and non-formal learning.
- Promoting the transnational dimension of volunteering and new tools to meet existing challenges by coordinating actions within Member States.

2. Make the European Year 2011 on volunteering a success by

- Granting the year with a sufficiently generous budget – at least equivalent to previous European years like the European Year 2010 against Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- Making all related policy work geared towards better recognising the millions of citizens already volunteering and its contribution to society.

3. Develop and defend adequate legal and policy frameworks at European level and within Member States for accessible, affordable and quality social services that also build on contributions from volunteers by

- Recognising the specific characteristics* of social services and their users and acknowledging the role and potential of volunteers, and designing policy frameworks to support intergenerational activities.
- Elaborating a voluntary framework of quality principles at European level, particularly in detecting and addressing the challenges of adapting social services to (new) needs, better covering marginalised persons or groups and better embedding them in structures at local level.
- Making sure that general interest* concerns and objectives prevail in case of conflict with the application of Community rules, which includes not assessing the contributions of volunteers as an economic advantage and thus considered a distortion of competition.