

YOUTH OUTREACH IN VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

2012-2015

Project „Volunteer for tomorrow“
Beneficiaries: Sillamäe Society for Child Welfare, NGO Peace Child Eesti,
Tallinn Sport and Youth Department, Vaivara Commune Administration
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STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS:

Civil Society Development Plan 2011 -2014.

One of the main state-wide strategic documents that supports the development of volunteer work is the Civil Society Development Plan coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior, as it has articulated as one of its purposes the volunteer work is recognised and valued in the society and volunteers have been included in the activities of civil society organisations' (CSO) activities and coordinated.

“Civil society Development Plan” is a plan under the auspices of the regional minister. The plan has been put together to ensure that all actors in the field have a joint understanding of civil society's purposes and action routes.

The development Plan has five themes: citizen education, CSO capacity and viability, CSO and public sector partnership in public services, involvement, charity and philanthropy; all which are very intertwined. Civil education instils values and skills to be more involved and have a voice in joint decisions. CSOs contribute to social problems solving for example by providing public services. And so that citizens would be active and capable of fulfilling their roles they need support structures.

BACKGROUND: VOLUNTEER WORK

But what is volunteering in the first place? We can bring out the following official definition:

Volunteer work signifies giving your time, energy and skills voluntarily and without getting any financial compensation in return, mainly in public interest to benefit the society. Helping your family members or giving monetary or itemised donations.

Volunteer work has an important place in the development of a democratic society: volunteer work enhances active citizenship, volunteers raise the capacity and the quality of service in NGOs and volunteer work has a remarkable socio-economic impact and value. The importance of volunteering is increasingly more recognised on the international level and in Estonia. Volunteer work is based on people's own initiative without financial gain. That said, organising volunteer work still takes resources, politics and strategies. In supporting and organising volunteer work, public, private and third sector have complimentary roles and opportunities.

Volunteer work is a unique experience that gives an opportunity to gain new experiences and knowledge and to widen perspective and meet people who you wouldn't otherwise meet and take part in activities you wouldn't normally even think of. Volunteer work is a practical activity that enhances self-assertion, communication skills, responsibility, the skill to work in a team, and through common activities also helps overcome national boundaries and create a more open and tolerant society.

European Year of Volunteering 2011

European Union has assigned the year 2011 to be the European Year of Volunteering. It is a year-long campaign to acknowledge the work of current volunteers, face their challenges and to encourage more people to participate. The purpose of the activities planned for the year:

- a) raise general awareness about volunteer work, its value and opportunities to participate.
- b) strengthen the abilities of organisations to involve volunteers.

In order to achieve both purposes, an environment that is favourable to advancing volunteer work and recognising volunteer work as the most important form of civil activism, are both prioritised.

Estonia

In Estonia there are ca 1 million people between ages 15-74. 27% of them have knowingly acted as a volunteer. Volunteers contribute the most into the following fields: charity, environmental protection, advancing local life and animal welfare. At the same time in Estonia there is a rather large number of people (20%) who have taken part in campaigns, clean-up actions etc who do not acknowledge these activities as volunteer work. With them you could say that nearly half of Estonian population has at least once during a year acted as volunteers.

Compared with non-volunteers – most participation is registered with younger people (15–24) and least the eldest (65 and more). In terms of education lesser education also means less participation. The same is true for people on maternity leave, and seniors. Also, being paid more means more participation in volunteer work.

78% of all volunteers take part when it is a concrete assignment. For that group, the most important this is feeling needed and spending time in a profitable matter. They have a positive view about volunteering and their interactions with organisations who gather and direct volunteers have generally been positive. People have the least confidence in the economic viability of the organisations and less is also those who believe that the organisations actively search for new volunteers. The state draws criticism – expected are more legal regulation of the field and more general valuing of volunteering. Almost all people of this group are ready to act as volunteer in the future, but only when an opportunity presents itself.

(Source: Volunteering in Estonia 2009)

PROJECT „VOLUNTEER FOR TOMORROW“

Awareness about volunteering is still very small among young people. Therefore with Sillamäe Society for Child Welfare (SSCW) leading, we have taken on ourselves the task of advancing this topic through the project „Volunteer for tomorrow“, so young people would understand better what volunteer work is and what its value is so they would be more motivated to participate themselves. Project's main activities were info seminars across Estonia, 3 thematic conferences and a Young Volunteer Action Week, and in addition to SSCW the main partners in the project were Tallinn Sport and Youth Department, Vaivara Commune Administration and NGO Peace Child Estonia, as well as other supporters across Estonia. Project's outcomes are a study guide and a project initiative database on the websites <http://vabatahtlik2011.sscw.ee>.

Because volunteering is a very wide topic, it includes the private sector, governmental institutions and third sector. Therefore we need to develop discussion among young people and elders to create a common perspective and a future strategy to more effectively involve young people in volunteering. The project's activities have shown that among young people interest in the theme is large, but knowledge and experience not so much yet.

Why young people?

It is very important to involve young people in volunteering, because volunteering is a unique experience that gives new knowledge, widens your perspective and enables you to meet people, with whom you may not otherwise cross paths and be involved in activities you wouldn't have thought of. Volunteering is also a practical activity that develops self-confidence, communication skills, responsibility, ability to work in a team, and advances joint values. In addition, one can receive invaluable work experience that can turn into a starting point for a career. Studies have shown that those who begin volunteering when they are young are most likely to continue volunteering when older.

METHOD

Project's main outcome however, was this youth outreach strategy aimed at different societal institutions.

The info seminars conducted in each county of Estonia acted as the foundation, but the main strategy development occurred during the 3-part conference series that included that field's experts and young people themselves. Through public discussions we have included comments and ideas to ensure that the strategy spreads as wide as possible. In development we have taken into account youth opinions and expert knowledge, and the strategy should in the future increase the value of volunteering and youth knowledge and motivation.

The sequence of conferences:

1. Young Volunteer Conference I (Preparation) 21-22 October 2011 – sub-heading „Volunteer work – to whom and why?“ Directed towards young people.

Altogether 5 working groups were formed. Every working group had a leader and every group's purpose was to answer the main question „How to involve and motivate young people to participate?“ in five different fields:

- a) Volunteer work and its importance; (What is volunteer work? Do young people know what volunteer work is? Why is volunteer work important?)
- b) Volunteer work in school and education system; (how and why should a young person participate in school life, would it be necessary to change the education system for it?, nonformal education in schools, developing volunteering etc)
- c) Involving into volunteer work; (How and why should young people be involved in volunteering? Is there enough information? How to develop networking for involving young people in volunteering better? etc.)
- d) Volunteer work and the public sector; (participating in the activities of the local governments, cooperation between young people and elders, youth project and participation in committees)
- e) Volunteer work recognition; (is volunteer work valued? Is volunteer work valued? How should volunteer work be recognised?)

The purpose of the group work was to work out main challenges and solutions.

2. Young Volunteer Conference II (Evaluation) 3. November 2011 sub-heading „Volunteer work through the perspective of the expert“. The purpose of the conference was to develop and evaluate the result of the first conference. Among the participants were school teachers, local government employees, youth workers and other experts directly connected to youth work in Estonia.

Work was conducted through two main methods:

- a) SWOT analysis
- b) Value-based analysis on connected groups

The purpose was to frame youth proposals and present their own strategic suggestions.

3. Young Volunteer Conference III (Action) 13-14. December 2011 sub-heading „Youth – the future of volunteering?“ The final activities to the strategy were added during the third conference.

MAIN ACTION ROUTES

The synthesis process that took into account all pre-work aimed to create a strategic framework which has altogether four main action routes. Or in other words, define the main question: “How to involve and motivate young people to participate in volunteering?” in the context of the Estonian state, local governmental level, NGO context and the school system.

Action route 1: State

FIELD OVERVIEW:

In Estonia, today, we are missing the legal definition of volunteering and legal regulation mechanisms that would be jointly understandable and enforceable. The Civil Society Development Plan has set for one of its purposes volunteer work advancement and developing.

Volunteer Work Development Centre and the Ministry of the Interior are the main actors that work for supporting CSOs in involving volunteers in their activities on the state level. In September 2010 with the support of National Civil Society Foundation, five county volunteering centres were opened. In addition several of the ministries and CSOs coordinate volunteering in their specific fields.

THE STRATEGIC PURPOSE:

Power structures develop volunteering through creating a beneficial legal environment and supporting youth organisations who involve volunteers.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES:

- **Legal framework of volunteering.** Volunteering is missing a clear legal framework. To achieve it this requires greater cooperation between the ministries to create a joint framework of volunteering.
- **The valuing of volunteer work on state level.** Studies have shown that volunteer sector’s reputation is generally good. The importance of the theme with the general development of civil society has become more centred, but a lot of work remains to be done.
- **Finance system that ensures youth organisations’ activities effectiveness and sustainability.** Volunteer work requires state financing Third sector financing has increased constantly, but it is project based and makes it more difficult to make future plans.
- **Volunteer work reward system.** We need to work out a state wide bonus system to acknowledge, reward and value. Acknowledgement inspires and motivates volunteers and the creation of volunteering initiatives.
- **Favouring the involvement of nonformal education in the education system.** Through legislation and changing educational programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES:

The last chapter aims to suggest the steps and concrete activities actors working in this field should take to achieve the purposes of their field and the strategy in general.

- **Increasing state financing to youth organisations and youth initiatives**
- **State-led activities to spread information about volunteering.**
- **Initialising state level acknowledgement events.**

- **State level benefits for acting as a volunteer off your work time.**
- **Using state finances to advance volunteer work – like enabling rooms for seminars etc.**

Action route 2: Local government

FIELD OVERVIEW:

There are very different local governments in Estonia, in terms of the number of residents and financial opportunities, which also means that there are big differences between regions in terms of structure and number of volunteer organisations.

A large section of CSOs are active on the local level and in regional development. The Government of the Republic has approved the conception drawn up by the Ministry of the Interior called „The ways of delegating public services to NGOs“. That kind of contract based cooperation is a relatively spread practice in local government, with nearly 60% participating, most commonly in the social, sport, cultural and youth work fields.

In addition, city and county youth councils is a tradition that is gaining traction in Estonia. In this year alone it has seen the creation of 26 new youth councils with the help of Estonian Youth Council. However, it is difficult to find information about their activities and what they are like, as well as how effective they truly are. Also such councils often involve party affiliated youngsters.

FIELD PURPOSES:

Local governmental structures are open to dialogue with youth representatives and cooperation with youth organisations as well as involving young people in the regional development.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

- **To create by local governments, in addition to youth councils, wider regular dialog measures like community forums. Also strengthen the current ones.** To help enforce direct communication between CSOs and local government leaders and through that spark more cooperation.
- **Involving volunteers in local government’s activities and creating volunteer clubs by the local governments.** Studies have shown that only 3% of volunteers work in the public sector.
- **Favour youth volunteering by making the schools’ restrictions and guidelines more relaxed.** Especially when it comes to the use of school territory and restrictions of the school curriculum.
- **Supporting the youth organisations that work on local level and developing cooperation.** The majority of NGOs work on the local level and they need the support of their local government, both financially and content wise, to jointly work out solutions that fit everyone.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES:

The last chapter aims to suggest the steps and concrete activities actors working in this field should take to achieve the purposes of their field and the strategy in general.

- **Create youth councils by all local governments and support the work of existing ones.**
- **Increase the funding of youth organisations youth-led initiatives.**

- **Create information campaigns on volunteering**
- **Regular meetings in local government's spaces (once in a quarter) and information exchange with groups in their territories.**
- **Assign a person to the local government whose purpose is to coordinate volunteering.**
- **Volunteer acknowledgement on the local governmental level.**

Action route 3: NGOs

FIELD OVERVIEW:

As said 95% of volunteers are active in the third sector and 3% in the public sector, therefore NGOs play an especially big part in the development of volunteering.

Estonia is a small country, but with a very large number of NGOs – the 2010 report presented to the European Commission showed that in Estonia there are over 26 thousand NGOs and close to 800 foundations. Since the independence the number NGOs has risen continuously. Close to 1400 -1500 NGOs are created each year. The biggest leap happened in the year 2001 with Estonian Civil Society Development conception.

At the moment there is no way to find out how many NGOs involve volunteers and how many do not. At the same time, a crucial indicator is that only roughly about third of the NGOs have paid employees to begin with, which shows that NGOs work on volunteer basis and are often also led by volunteers.

FIELD PURPOSES:

NGOs involve volunteers, are capable of dealing with youth questions and open to cooperation with local governments and educational institutions.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

- **Information campaign on volunteering** One of the main challenges on volunteer work development is not enough awareness among young people on volunteering, which can be advanced through NGO activity.
- **Advocacy.** Civil society's role in policy design has increased through advocacy. NGOs and youth organisations are valuable in advancing youth questions on local and national level.
- **Involving volunteers in NGO activities.** Smaller NGOs are largely based on volunteer work, but all NGOs can through their activities offer opportunities to become a volunteer, whether part-time or full time basis.
- **Cooperation with schools and other educational institutions.** Like for example Ministry of the Interior's pilot program called „CSOs into schools – information events for students“. It is important that NGOs are active in seeking out cooperation.
- **Cooperation with local governments in youth work.** Within the framework of public services and joint cooperation programs and projects.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES:

The last chapter aims to suggest the steps and concrete activities actors working in this field should take to achieve the purposes of their field and the strategy in general.

- **Organizing info days to introduce to people what they can offer.**
- **When possible assign a volunteer manager in the organization.**
- **Carrying out trainings, seminars and other such events on volunteering**

- **Distribute practical and concrete information on volunteering, in the media and elsewhere**
- **Strengthen cooperation with student councils**

Action route 4: School and the education system

FIELD OVERVIEW

A young person spends a majority of his or her time in school that is like a second home. Meaning the school system is at a unique place to create a value system required for volunteering and advancing active youth and through that the habit of volunteer work.

One opportunity for that is citizen education. 2001 study (Tomey-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, Schultz) showed, that 60% of citizen education program is devoted to acquiring knowledge, and only 20% to advancing participation and values. 2006 study by Anu Toots, Tõnu Idnurm and Maria Sveljova on youth citizen culture showed that the effect of formal citizen studies on raising an active citizen is minimal. Only 1/3 of teenagers are ready to participate in charity action.

Most, although not all, schools have student councils, one of the best tools for promoting being active. Estonian Union for Student Council has 204 members as of 12.06.2011. It is the largest student advocacy organisation in Estonia, representing about 100000 students.

FIELD OVERVIEW:

School as a place that advances and supports young person acting as a volunteer and becoming a active citizen.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

- **The education system that is open to nonformal education.** The curriculum is still very subject-centred and doesn't involve enough values and attitudes. Schools however have an option for individual curriculum that can be used for advancing volunteering.
- **Integrating to citizen studies volunteer work and valuing volunteer work.**
- **Maximising schools own resources for advancing young people's citizen culture.** Schools have the space and the people.
- **A school that is open to young volunteer activities.** This would enable young people to meet on school property after classes or local NGOs to carry out projects in schools and involve young people in different activities.
- **Strengthening school student councils and supporting and advancing their work.**

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES:

The last chapter aims to suggest the steps and concrete activities actors working in this field should take to achieve the purposes of their field and the strategy in general.

- **Kasutada noorte abi kooliürituste läbiviimisel.**
- **Luua ja toetada koolides aktiivsuse arendamise võimalusi nagu näiteks kooliraadio ja kooliajaleht**
- **Recognize active students in schools.**
- **Implement in schools feedback boxes that would enable students to present opinions and suggestions**
- **Realize youth ideas according to opportunities.**
- **Bring into schools NGO or local government-led projects and enable school youth to take part actively**

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