



## Module IV

# VOLUNTEERING FOR SENIORS DEVELOPMENT OF INTERESTS IN THE ELDERLY MATERIAL FOR TEACHERS



**EDUCATION – THE CHALLENGE OF THE LATER YEARS**

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## Introduction

This module has been specifically designed for tutors, facilitators, teachers, staff who want to know more about how they can impact seniors' quality of life through education. From a broader perspective, their main aim is to increase senior learners' well-being and quality of life (QoL).

One of such activities that could be taken up in a broader way is volunteering that brings wide range of possibilities and positive outcomes when related to the oldest members of the society.

The aim of the course is to raise awareness of volunteer opportunities for seniors.

The Modul IV is based on the issues: promoting a positive image of volunteering among seniors and raising the level of knowledge and skills of older people in volunteering.

We think about what are the benefits of older people for volunteering. We assume that the outcome will be improving the image of the break and many elderly stereotypes.

***“The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life.”***

*Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, Art 25*

## PROMOTING A POSITIVE IMAGE OF VOLUNTEERING AS AN EXPRESSION OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG SENIORS

A longer active life allows for productive retirement through volunteering and general engagement in the civil society.

Being retired from labour market does not mean that they are not active. Their status in relation with income, education, families, role, can affect their quality of life and also must be understood clearly when designing educational programs focused to their social facts.

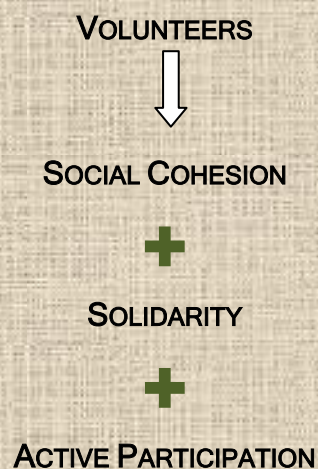
A cross-European research conducted in 2009 (Haski-Leventhal 2009) show that there is an overall positive correlation between volunteering and perceived health, life satisfaction, and self-life expectancy, and a negative correlation to depression.

Volunteering is a great way of contributing to local communities at home, while developing new skills and making friends.

The ageing process can be critical in any individual because it involves major changes. These changes and the loss of control are the main factors that jeopardise individuals' QoL, particularly when they are unpredictable and people are unprepared for them. There are changes in work (retirement), family, society, our bodies, and health related problems that require adjustments to the perceptions and structures of our lives. All of these are psychological, physical and social challenges that can lead to a decline in QoL if the individual does not deal with them in the right way. On the other hand, this stage of life offers the chance to grasp new opportunities because people generally have more time to participate in social activities. Senior citizens also have a wealth of life experience that should not be lost or wasted. Society can benefit from seniors with good QoL, not only because of their increased social participation, but also through lower social and health service expenditure.

**Quality of life (QOL) is the general well-being of individuals and societies. QOL has a wide range of contexts, including the fields of international development, healthcare, politics and employment.**

Following the demographic trend and the increasing share of elderly people in the population, it gets more and more important to create opportunities for the active participation of seniors in society. The contribution of volunteering as a strategy for active ageing and competence development of senior learners is the focus of the moduls.



## SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

By social participation we mean the 'significant social participation', the personal interaction process that involves taking part in an active and engaged way in a joint activity, which the person perceives as beneficial. Social participation refers to support systems or psychosocial resources as unions between individuals, characterised by material aid, physical assistance, shared thoughts, feelings and experiences, and positive social contacts. Significant social participation essentially consists of four areas: education, occupation, physical activity and group recreation, and social relations where the aim is mutual interaction and social integration.



According to a European research project SHARE (survey on health, aging and retirement), volunteering is 10% of the European population over 65 years of age. Differences in the level of involvement in individual countries, however, are considerable.

Promoting volunteering among seniors it is motivated by very practical. On the one hand, it activates people at the beginning of the end of their careers and remain retired. On the other hand, it is a concrete help.

### Promote positive images and active aging by:

- Challenging negative stereotypes and images of seniors,
- Promoting positive images of aging,
- Providing examples of positive aging,
- Promoting seniors' contributions to society,
- Creating a culture that respects older peoples.

## WHAT IS VOLUNTEER WORK

VOLUNTEERING IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED AN ALTRUISTIC ACTIVITY WHERE AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP PROVIDES SERVICES FOR NO FINANCIAL GAIN.

VOLUNTEERING IS ALSO RENOWNED FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND IS OFTEN INTENDED TO PROMOTE GOODNESS OR TO IMPROVE HUMAN QUALITY OF LIFE.

## SENIORS AS A SOURCE OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

The generation of the aged is too often seen in the context of the need of various forms of aid and care. Very rarely is this generation seen as a section of a population with a significant political and economic importance, as an important element in culture, history, tradition. Older people have a wealth of skills and experiences, they have lived through situations others cannot even imagine.

Volunteering empowers people to take an active part in development, to take responsibility for the needs of others, and to make an impact in their own lives.



**Intergenerational work is a great way to break down barriers between groups of people. For young people to appreciate the experiences and skills of older people and vice versa so that we foster greater understanding between groups of people.**

## VOLUNTEERING PROVIDES MANY BENEFITS TO BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

**Volunteering increases self-confidence.** Volunteering can provide a healthy boost to your self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity.

**Volunteering provides a sense of purpose.** Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and purpose in their lives by helping others. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.

**Volunteering combats depression.** A key risk factor for depression is social isolation. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against stress and depression when you're going through challenging times.

**Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy.** The physical activity involved in certain forms of volunteering—such as environmental projects in parks, nature reserves, or beaches—can be good for your health at any age, but it's especially beneficial in older adults. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not, even when considering factors like the health of the participants.

## RAISING THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FROM VOLUNTEERING

The best way we can support people who are retiring or retired is to enable them to share skills, earn money, make new connections and stay active, physically and mental.

### Goods practice

A popular form of volunteering is to help disadvantaged children who find reading a challenge and are at risk of falling behind their peers. These children may also find it difficult to interact socially with adults and volunteers can help build their confidence as well as improving reading ability.

Many schools are now involved in schemes whereby adults from the local community assist with pupils' reading on a one-to-one basis, outside of the usual classroom environment.

Volunteers usually undergo a short period of training before committing to spending a set amount of time per week (usually an hour) with a child, for at least a term.

Volunteers are not expected to take the place of a teacher but are there to give one-to-one encouragement to children, helping them to relax, gain confidence and enjoy their reading.

For many organizations in the arts sector, volunteering is central to them being able to run effectively, with often limited resources. Volunteers can help with the management and running of the organization, assisting with events and activities, administration, and fund-raising.

Volunteers contribute to the work of the Museum in many different ways, from engaging with visitors in the galleries, to supporting the work of the Museum's curatorial, learning or administrative departments.



## THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING FOR OLDER PEOPLE

As people get older and enter their third-age they find volunteering a good substitute to the social roles they lost. Elderly volunteering can have a positive social impact, on society as well as on older volunteers, providing services otherwise unavailable or expensive. Volunteering by older people can help eliminate isolation, strengthen community participation, enhance volunteers' self-esteem, change stereotypes, and promote social and political consciousness.

By helping others, older volunteers can also help themselves and enhance their physical, mental and social well-being, protecting from the pitfalls of retirement, physical decline and inactivity. The social integration related to volunteer work can enhance one's well-being, since the reduction of social isolation can lead to less depression.

### Volunteer Opportunities for Seniors

- Volunteer seniors - may be a passion that has an impact on personal development, makes it possible to maintain high social activity and gives you the satisfaction of helping others.
- Volunteering enables the acquisition of knowledge, new friends and interesting experiences.

One of the better-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. A dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

### **Volunteering helps you make new friends and contact**

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. Volunteering also strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

### **Volunteering increases your social and relationship skills**

While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice and develop your social skills, since you are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests.

## 4. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SENIOR

| 5 REASONS SENIORS SHOULD VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME                        |   |
|--|---|
| <b>It helps bridge the generation gap</b>                            | Young people are often encouraged to volunteer as a way to broaden their horizons, improve their college prospects, build their resumes and help others while doing it. Seniors who volunteer have a unique opportunity to work with and assist younger generations — and learn from them, too.   |
| <b>It helps change the way people think about older adults</b>       | By using their talents and skills out in the world in a variety of ways, seniors demonstrate that they are active, involved and essential to a healthy community.   |
| <b>It is good for mental health and can help prevent Alzheimer's</b> | Participating in social leisure activities and meaningful, productive activities such as volunteering may lower the risk of health problems in seniors, including dementia, as well as improving longevity. Being a volunteer can help keep the brain and the body active, which contributes to continuing cognitive health, according to numerous studies. |
| <b>It helps prevent senior isolation and depression</b>              | In addition to getting seniors out of the house and into the community, volunteering has a positive effect on psychological wellness, those who volunteer experience greater life satisfaction, a sense of purpose and accomplishment, more stress resilience, and lower rates of depression.   |
| <b>It promotes healthy physical activity</b>                         | Volunteering can be good for keeping the body active. Maintaining a healthy level of physical fitness as we age helps ward off disease, injury and even dementia.   |

### **How to find the right volunteer opportunity**

There are numerous volunteer opportunities available. The key is to find a volunteer position that you would enjoy and are capable of doing. It's also important to make sure that your commitment matches the organization's needs. The following questions can help you narrow your options:

- **Would you like to work with adults, children, or animals, or remotely from home?**
- **Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?**
- **Are you better behind the scenes or do you prefer to take a more visible role?**
- **How much time are you willing to commit?**
- **How much responsibility are you ready to take on?**
- **What skills can you bring a volunteer job?**
- **What causes are important to you?**



## INCREASING THE MOTIVATION TO TAKE ACTION FOR THE BENEFIT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AMONG PEOPLE AGED 60+

The value of senior volunteers to the community is substantial. Most active and engaged volunteers, seniors play a critical role in making their communities stronger and more resilient places to live.



- Volunteering can play a significant role in people's lives as they move from work to retirement. Yet various barriers, both institutional and attitudinal, appear to be deterring people from taking up volunteering later in life.
- Older people's motivations for volunteering were mixed. For some older people volunteering was an opportunity to put something back into society; for others it provided a chance to continue learning new skills and tasting new experiences.
- For many older people volunteering had played an important role in the transition process, volunteering in helping to fill the void sometimes felt upon retirement.

### Why should senior volunteering be promoted?

The gap between potential and participant senior volunteers needs to be remedied. Volunteering adds to the individual's life satisfaction: it increases social contacts, promotes social awareness, encourages well-being, facilitates community involvement and develops key competences and skills that further active societal participation.

Senior volunteering forms a counterweight to the increasing isolation and egoism in modern societies. It also promotes greater understanding between generations when they support each other in a shared activity.

## THE DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICES, VOLUNTEER SENIORS

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|---|
| WHERE DO I FIND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES?                                |
| Community theaters, museums, and monuments                              |
| Libraries or senior centers   |
| Service organizations   |
| Local animal shelters, rescue organizations, or wildlife centers        |
| Youth organizations, sports teams, and after-school programs            |
| Historical restorations, national parks, and conservation organizations |
| Places of worship such as churches or synagogues                        |
| Online databases  |

Older people who participate in volunteer activities bring with them considerable skills, knowledge and commitment. They have distinct qualities to offer due to their social maturity, accumulated life experience and sense of societal obligation. They are often good at problem solving, possess a high degree of cultural understanding and can engage effectively with others. They can also offer their availability, confidence, patience and loyalty in any voluntary commitment.

### **You can be classified in three groups of volunteers**

- **I those who volunteer because they have always done so ('lifelong' volunteers);**
- **II those who have come back to volunteering later in life following a break for work and family responsibilities (serial' volunteers); And**
- **III those who are inspired by retirement to volunteer for the first time ('trigger' volunteers).**

## 5. IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF THE ELDERLY AND BREAK MANY STEREOTYPES.

Some of the common stereotypes associated with the elderly are:

- The elderly cannot learn new things
- The elderly do not face up to the changes of ageing
- The elderly are intolerant and strict
- The elderly are lonely and isolated
- The elderly have memory problems

**A STEREOTYPE IS USED TO CATERGORIZE A GROUP OF PEOPLE. PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT TYPE OF PERSON, SO THEY PUT THEM INTO CLASSIFICATIONS, THINKING THAT EVERYONE WHO IS THAT NEEDS TO BE LIKE THAT, OR ANYONE WHO ACTS LIKE THEIR CLASSIFICATIONS IS ONE.**

Older people often face disincentives to volunteer such as negative attitudes and stereotypes, cultural and practical barriers, and discriminatory policies and practices. An increasing demand for specific qualifications, the administrative burdens involved in the organisation of simple voluntary tasks and unjustified age limits imposed by insurance companies on volunteer activities all present obstacles that we should help overcome.

### Volunteering Among Seniors

- Recruitment of volunteers
- Support for seniors who volunteer
- Support for organizations using volunteers
- Building partnerships among key social players
- Research on volunteering
- Coordination of volunteers in the not-for-profit sector

## CREATING A CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERING

Entrench volunteering as a key element of civic participation, volunteerism needs to be promoted and encouraged both at a young age and throughout people's lifespan.

Volunteering as a tool to promote social inclusion in old age. EU policies give special attention to encouraging volunteering. The main objectives are the creation of suitable general conditions for voluntary work as an important part of civic participation as well as the empowerment of volunteer organisations. This is of particular importance for volunteering in old age.



Due to cultural and historical differences, volunteering (of all age groups) is deeply rooted in the countries of the EU. While some countries have a long tradition of volunteering and a strong voluntary sector, the sector is little developed or is still being set up in other countries.