



Sub-group Older Volunteers as Learners

Open VALUE Workshop

Volunteering and ULLL – Exploring Themes: Older Volunteers as Learners

EUCEN Conference, Jönköping, Sweden
Friday 6 November 2009

Moderator: Sue Cross, University College London
External Expert (comments and contributions to discussion): Prof. Raymond Thomson,
University of Strathclyde, Scotland

N o t e s

(by Andrea Waxenegger, Alzbeta Mrackova, Ramona Dragomir)
Handout for Participants attached.

1. The sub-group Older Volunteers as Learners

First, Andrea Waxenegger (University of Graz, Austria), leader of the sub-group Older Volunteers as Learners, briefly introduced the members of the sub-group to the audience bringing together a mix of representatives of the volunteering sector and universities: C.A.R.D.O., SK; Pro Vobis National Volunteer Center, RO; University of Hamburg, DE; University of Graz, AT. The sub-group has the following tasks: The basic underlying assumption is that volunteer work goes along with learning experiences which could be the first step on a learning ladder. Therefore the group is reviewing

- existing general provision of learning opportunities for older volunteers at universities and in the volunteering sector;
- specific models of access for older volunteers as learners to University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) including systems of accreditation;
- examples of collaboration of institutions in both sectors in developing/providing learning opportunities for older volunteers;
- specific collaboration projects in more detail to learn from them as “case studies”; and
- barriers and potential for building cross-sectoral relationships and collaboration in the field of ULLL.

C.A.R.D.O.’s experiences in the project:

Alzbeta Mrackova from C.A.R.D.O. also worked in the first project year – as all partners in the sub-group – on an “Institutional case study” (at institutional level; structure see handout attached) and researched the specific national and sectoral contexts. She reported that there are very few senior volunteers in Slovakia. However, her experience with a European project especially targeted for senior volunteers has enabled her to give input for the sub-group work. Researching the

topic in Slovakia led to a very fruitful contact with University of Third Age and since then they have been exploring the possibility that the university could become a relay point for older learners as potential volunteers.

Feedback from External Expert (summary):

- Older people (after retiring) have to “reinvent” themselves and they need to ask “what are the things I need as an older person?”. And these are the things an older learner and an older volunteer will need.
- 3 things: health and well-being / social activity / a purpose (Why should I get out of my bed every morning?) How can I make my life useful?
- If I am useful, I have self esteem; other people give me esteem; I get to meet other people; and from that social activity comes along - then the well being follows...
- The existential need is very closely connected to being an older person
- It is important to stress that all activities are based on free will and when we work with volunteers, we are working with people who want to be free = this influences the way we work with volunteers, especially with older ones.

These thoughts were very much welcomed by the participants, who thanked Prof. Thomson for sharing them.

Then discussion in small groups was encouraged.

Feedback from other workshop participants (summary) after group discussion:

- Development work should be focusing more on individual motivation – older people are not a homogeneous group and it is problematic to generalise.
- Older volunteers are looking for learning opportunities; we should not assume that older people don't want to learn.
- Volunteering opportunities should be explained to older learners – and if we want to develop lifelong learning opportunities at university level together, Volunteering Organisations should be actively approached.
- Volunteer work should be seen as excellent opportunity for intergenerational cooperation and lifelong learning offers should take this into consideration.
- Funding of lifelong learning of volunteers is unclear.
- Older people have lived longer; this is the only generalization we can make about older people; the lifetime of experiences means that they have accumulated happiness and sadness; we have to learn how to build on their experiences.



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HANDOUT FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

1. The sub-group Older Volunteers as Learners

1.1 Who we are and what our tasks are

Members: This sub-group brings together representatives of the volunteering sector and universities and looks at the theme of older volunteers as learners. The partners involved in this subgroup are:

C.A.R.D.O., SK; Pro Vobis National Volunteer Center, RO;
University of Hamburg, DE; University of Graz, AT

Tasks: The basic underlying assumption is that volunteer work goes along with learning experiences which could be the first step on a learning ladder. Therefore we are reviewing

- existing general provision of learning opportunities for older volunteers at universities and in the volunteering sector
- specific models of access for older volunteers as learners to University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) including systems of accreditation
- examples of collaboration of institutions in both sectors in developing/providing learning opportunities for older volunteers
- specific collaboration projects in more detail, so we can learn from them as “case studies”
- barriers and potential for building cross-sectoral relationships and collaboration in the field of ULLL

Resources to be expected: Glossary of relevant terms, bibliography of specific articles/papers and websites that relate to the sub-group theme.

A report on the sub-group activities and findings will also be available.

1.2 Discussions and investigations undertaken in year 1: findings

Manchester Meeting October 2008; 1st Sub-group meeting June 2009, Bratislava

Institutional case studies (at institutional level) / research in our national and sectoral contexts

1. Brief profile of own institution incl. state of the art of cooperation with volunteer/university sector

- mission, strategy, targets, tasks, organisational structure, staff, provision, etc.
- if applicable: learning opportunities for seniors and more specifically senior volunteers as learners; learning opportunities for staff in the volunteer sector managing older volunteers
- own experiences of collaboration between university/volunteer sector at institutional level and at the level of individual older volunteers as learners

2. Potential of the development of collaboration between universities and volunteering sector in the delivery of University Lifelong Learning

- seen from own institution
- potential content and models of cooperation

3. Relevance for the VALUE Project

- how to feed these experiences and knowledge into VALUE

2. Issues and questions related to the theme of the workshop within the context of University/Volunteering interaction

2.1 For “employability” and “older volunteers as learners”

How can university experience of working with older learners contribute to the development of ULLL for the volunteering sector?

Are there cross-over issues between employability and older learners as volunteers? What might these be and how can the 2 sectors respond?

What are the roles of other stakeholders – e.g. employers, the state – in facilitating the development of ULLL to volunteers?

2.2 Older volunteers as learners

- Do older volunteers themselves see their volunteering as a learning opportunity? If yes, do volunteering organisations respond to this? Do universities respond to it? In what ways?
- Is there any evidence of what older volunteers expect from ULLL? Access to ULLL and accreditation: Can the learning that arises from the experience of volunteering in the institutions represented be used to access and participate in University Continuing Education or Lifelong Learning, e.g. through APEL? And if yes, is it used?
- Are there any good practice examples of institutional collaboration (from close collaboration, e.g. providing courses – to less formal collaboration) between ULLL and the Volunteering Sector to provide learning opportunities for older volunteers as learners and what can we learn from them?

Open invitation to workshop participants to contribute own experiences and resources