

Voluntary work workshop

Polish-Georgian transfer
of experience in collaboration
with youth through the volunteering



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Centrum Wolontariatu

INTRODUCTION

Notes on good practices you are reading now are the effect of work of the three representatives of Georgian social organization that belongs to the volunteering network in Georgia. Thanks to job shadowing, those ladies could observe activities of Volunteering Center in Lublin. Therefore, they were examining its organization structure and functioning, as well as methods of working with youth leaders; they were familiarized with 11 constant volunteering programmes carried out by the SCW (The Volunteer Center Association) that are based on the efforts of young volunteers, and they joined their routine. The Georgian guests have also co-organized workshops on intercultural education for high school students and cyclic event organized The Volunteer Center – Multicultural Cafeteria - whose theme was Georgia. Observed good practices, considered collectively as worth being presented to the wider group of non-governmental organizations, are the contents of this publication.

Log-term policy for the development of volunteering work in Poland is based on the principle and observation that volunteering is an opportunity for personal growth of an individual; it gives possibility to acquire personal, social, and professional competence. Moreover, the knowledge and experience obtained through volunteering considerably enhances creative, intellectual, and cultural potential of an individual. Especially among kids and adolescents, volunteering service assists development of altruistic behavior. However, volunteering is not only about acquiring all the abovementioned competences, it is also a way of building self-confidence in the volunteers, giving them satisfaction from the efforts aimed at helping other people, as well as a sense of achievement in the social sphere.

In Georgia, volunteering work has been developing for years without being determined by any legal regulations. In a sense, this state of affairs is giving a sense freedom to the organizations, especially those which have just started their activities in this area; however, in the context of regulating volunteering service and its development, it might be a problem. Entities that cooperate with volunteers often lack knowledge how to coordinate volunteers' work with the functioning of organizations, and how to organize collaboration of regular workers with volunteers to obtain the best results. Above all, they lack an awareness of what a volunteering work is, and what advantages can come out of it. What is more, volunteering lacks social prestige. Consequently, on the basis of this diagnosis we have decided to try to make transfer of good practices concerning collaboration with youth through volunteering between Polish and Georgian non-governmental organizations.

About us

The Volunteer Center Association was established in 1999. For more than 16 years, the organization has connected those who need help and those who could and wanted to provide it to others, in Lublin region as well as far behind the borders of our region and country. Each of the initiatives described below was started in the face of a concrete human need and a situation posing a threat to human dignity, when sensitive people wanted to help selflessly.

Volunteering, in a nutshell, is a free, voluntary, conscious work for others, exceeding family and friendship ties. And volunteers? They are students of different majors and people working in various professions, elderly, as well as pupils of post-primary schools. They meet not only for the volunteer activities, but also on joint celebrations or trips outside the city. Volunteers are a community of people who, despite different paths in life and experiences, speak the same language.



The rules of cooperation with volunteers

Everyone has their place here, and feels at ease with what they are doing.

Before we start collaborating with volunteers, we need to be aware that volunteering would function well and bring the desired effects if we earnestly take care of the organization of the voluntary work itself.

In The Volunteer Center in Lublin, to plan volunteers' work best, we put an emphasis on engagement and cooperation of the whole team; both in defining the tasks for volunteers, as well as putting them to work and coordinating it.

Defining your needs

In the stage previous to the search for volunteers, it is recommended to specifically define tasks and activities that would require their help, which will enable you to find the competent people who would suit your needs.

A volunteer in an organization

Volunteers within an organization form a group with clear assignment of responsibilities. It is a coordinator's role to make their collaboration work.

Organization cooperating with volunteers should assign a coordinator whose tasks should include introducing volunteers to the character of work in a company, their basic duties and what is expected of them. Coordinator should be present in the process of forming and consolidation of a group and assist volunteers in any difficulties, so that they do not get discouraged and leave when they encounter problems. To prevent that, coordinator along with other employees of an organization should provide good work atmosphere for volunteers.

Ready?

Volunteers not only have satisfaction from the fact that they help others, they also acquire and develop their competences and grow.

The issue that should not be overlooked when starting cooperation with volunteers is appropriate training and preparation for work, which is always depending on the character of work – sometimes one needs special training, like with psychologist or pedagogue; sometimes conversation with an organization's employee who can introduce volunteer to the specifics of work is enough.





We learn our whole life...

Every volunteer has unique personality, there are people with different experiences and level of knowledge among them. That is why in the beginning of their volunteering path, it is worth to invite them to work on themselves and to expand their knowledge.

The role of the organizer of volunteering work includes also conducting various trainings for volunteers. First of them include those run for the candidates for volunteers: this way they learn what is volunteering service and what they will be expected of. Second type are specialist trainings, depending on the character of work and conducted regularly throughout the whole time of volunteer's activity (e.g. trainings on methods of work with kids).

Atmosphere at work

Issue that should be taken care of is creating nice and friendly work atmosphere. Every new volunteer should be introduced to the volunteers who work longer, to organization's employees, and to its protégées; and they all should be fully aware of the scope of duties of a volunteer.

Optimum volunteers' work is fostered by the creation of a sort of support group for them, whose meetings would enable them to get to know each other better and talk about problems concerning working for a given organization. Regular meetings are an opportunity to solve difficult situations, as well as to express acknowledgement and gratitude for their commitment. They provide also a possibility to work on volunteers' motivation – as we all know never-ending struggle, because our motivations change, grow, and weaken. The role of coordinator of the group is to encourage volunteers to make themselves aware of their motivations and to work on them.

We are grateful!

As we all know, volunteering is an unpaid activity, so what drives volunteers' actions is not remuneration – thus, one should take care of various forms of expressing gratitude and acknowledgement of their work.

Team

It is hard to imagine volunteering as a movement of individuals who want to single-handedly change themselves and the world. Multitude of volunteers makes it necessary to define their roles and (whenever possible) to join them in groups – few, or a few dozen teams. It is the only way to effectively manage volunteers' capital and possibilities. To build a team, one has to first get to know people and their talents, abilities, and possibilities; and on that basis determine place for every group member. Every volunteer should find space for themselves to work effectively and to grow as person – it is really crucial. An opportunity to meet people, find out about their skills and expectations are meetings of volunteers with coordinator held every week or offsite trainings.



Being part of a group that knows each other very well and is integrated in one, common goal is a fantastic way to learn responsibility; as it is more difficult to avoid duties or explain yourself that you “forgot” to do something.

Sharing responsibility

If a voluntary programme is large and runs few days a week, it is worth to create a specific board responsible for certain “stages” of work from the experienced and tested volunteers. Board would assist coordinator in managing the whole programme, it would also participate in making vital decisions concerning programme's activities.

Fundraising for working with youth

Within different types of their activities, organizations working with volunteers can act thanks to volunteers' engagement and free work within charitable initiatives. It can be very helpful and satisfactory to both sides. Those organizations also often depend on social work of their members. Many organizations manage to acquire "material gifts" – that is goods and food for which they do not have to pay shops, companies, private people or other organizations.

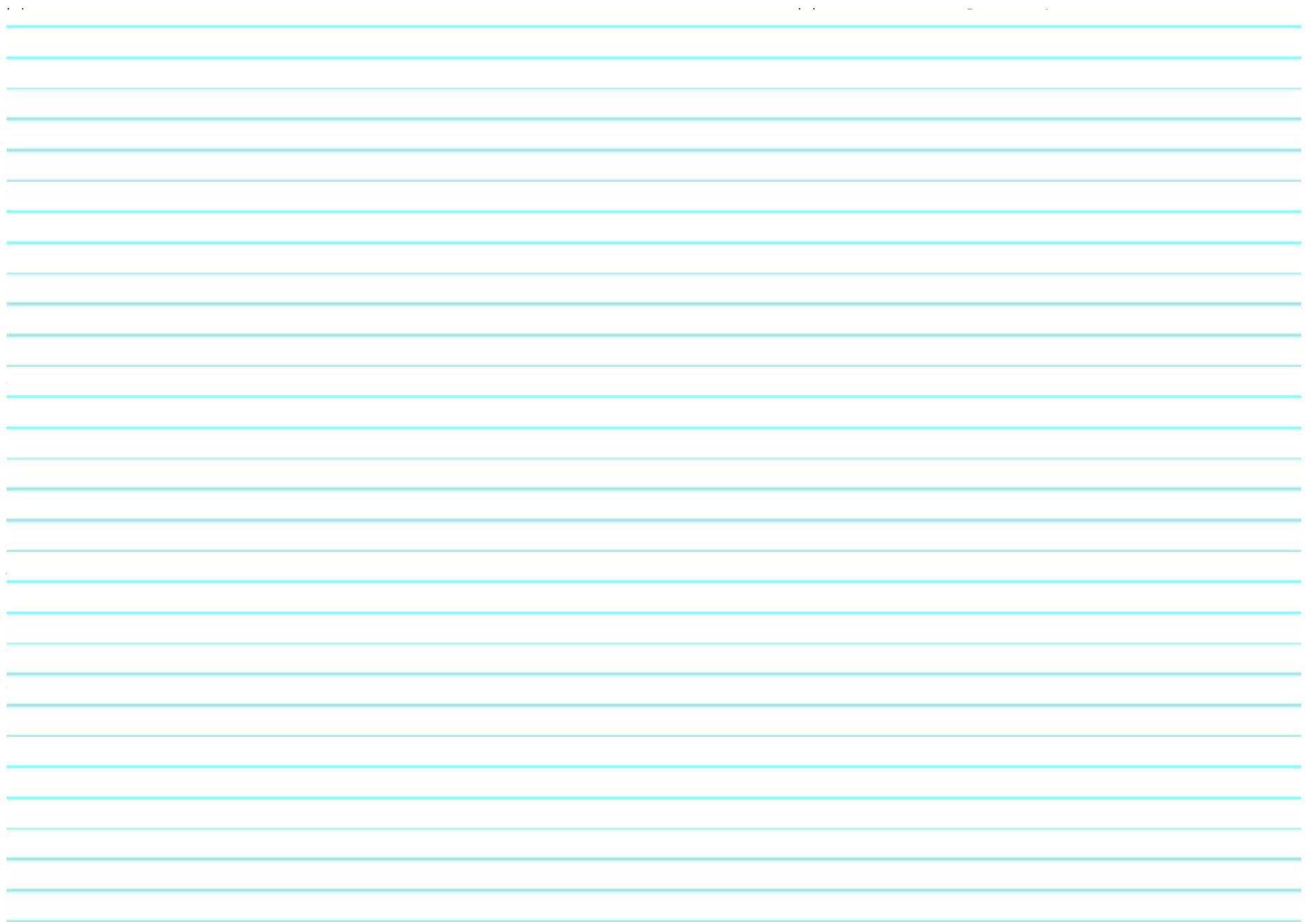
For the sake of fulfillment of larger initiatives, organizations apply for subsidies and grants from public funds (e.g. government or self-government administration, cities' administration and various institutions) or European funds (granted by e.g. the European Commission by diverse institutions).

Furthermore, one can receive a subsidy from a country or foreign foundation.

While preparing volunteers for long-term engagement in the activities of an organization, it is worth to offer them training concerning work with the use of project method. As a result, a group of volunteers would be able to take over small initiatives aimed at gathering funds, e.g. raffles, profit out of which would be allocated to sponsor vacations for underprivileged children, or collecting board games or toys for community day-care centre.

Let us remember that to put our ideas into action we do not always need money. Oftentimes, it is easier to cooperate with entities than can share their resources; like car, sound system, or give food with short expiring date; for which normally we would have to pay.





The practice of collaborating with youth on the basis of programmes in The Volunteer Center Association – volunteers and protégées

BRIDGE (MOST)

We work with children from neglected districts and streets of Lublin, mainly from Bronowice Stare district (since 2003). Within the framework of the programme we meet children in the streets, run a common room, organize their free time and try to make their childhood a time of opportunities and development instead of sadness and hopelessness.

Large-scale unemployment, poverty, addictions, and life hopelessness are only a few of the problems that the inhabitants face. Very bad living conditions and dysfunctional families definitely do not contribute to the health growth of children.

Young people, often left without any supervision or interest from parents or guardians, come through specific upbringing and socialization process on the street. Here, they learn really fast the behavior unacceptable in a society, they become members of informal adolescent groups, and as a result break the law. Those teenagers are called “difficult” or “pathological”, they are branded and marked by “normal” society.



You do not need much!

First and basic aim of voluntary work is to animate classes for kids and adolescents on the streets and yards. Therefore, young people have possibility to develop their talents, learn new skills and interesting ways of spending their free time, integrate with their peers. Through all their work methods volunteers transfer, indirectly, positive values and attitudes that those children are not acquainted with and do not see in their environment.

Games, plays, or contests teach group work, communication, interpersonal skills, or behavior in specific situations. Thus, even simple game can become a very important life lesson for a young person.

Responsibility

We need to remember that establishing connection with a kid or teenager, we as adults are responsible for that bond. Therefore, to gain child's trust, and that is to have better educational influence, we need to be systematic. It helps raising in young people the feeling of safety and constancy, which they lack in their families. That is why volunteers work at least once a week, always the same day, during established hours.

DOMINÓW

In the Juvenile Centre in Dominów, volunteers conduct activities for teenagers that have committed delinquent acts. We want to show them a different, alternative world and its values, help to develop their interests and encourage them to participate in volunteer actions.

Activities that volunteers do in the Juvenile Centre are aimed at the broadening horizons of its inhabitants. Consequently, volunteers want to familiarize them with reality and phenomena they have never experienced before, and maybe never will. They want to increase their interpersonal competences, make them more open towards other human beings, break their stereotypical thinking



about people and the world, and show them many possibilities and ideas on how to live their life. Meetings with guests and discussions, cooking and sport lessons – volunteers visiting the inhabitants of the Juvenile Centre in Dominów try to discover and develop their interests in a variety of ways.

Good models

Boys in the Juvenile Centre do not make the impression of juvenile offenders. One can easily see the difference between the new inhabitants of the Centre that are withdrawn and miserable, and those who have worked with teachers and volunteers for some time and are more open and friendly. This clearly shows how much the change of environment and effort of teachers and volunteers can do.

Youth that broke the law in Georgia is almost a lost cause. There is a need for a change in the society's awareness and for work with adolescents when there is still time to influence their behavior and their future.

PROGRAMME IN AID OF REFUGEES



The programme aims at helping people that try to find their place in Poland and live properly in the new reality. It includes teaching Polish language, showing cultural differences, supporting in everyday situations – from a medical visit to a search for a flat. Volunteers work with the residents of 3 Refugee Centres in Lublin voivodeship, and support regularized migrants that live in Lublin outside the Centre. Volunteers are working with children in recreation rooms in the Centres or with adults (after a proper preparation – Polish language lessons and cultural education for foreigners). What's more, they provide cultural education lessons for foreign children in Polish schools or help to organize integration parties or the Refugee Day.

It is all about a concrete person

It seems that one of the most crucial elements of volunteers' work with refugees is their personal approach. Volunteers know their protégées, they have friendly relations, therefore they do not limit themselves to material help or linguistic support, which is visible during meetings and classes. Thanks to this, volunteers are able to recognize the causes of refugees' problems and can respond to them more adequately.

Accordingly, to build trust, break barriers and stereotypes it is really important to organize meetings in an informal atmosphere, aimed at just being together and relaxed conversations. Those situations are the ones that assist getting to know each other, understanding and making friends.

OMNES GENTES

This is a proposition for foreigners living in Lublin that would like to involve themselves in volunteer activities, and for Poles that are not afraid of challenges caused by language, cultural, and traditional differences. The group Omnes Gentes (from Latin 'all nations') is open both for students and employees. The idea of creating the group was proposed by foreigners living in Lublin that wanted to become a part of the Volunteer Centre. Volunteers help local society, conduct activities for children, as well as cultural education classes in schools and in a specially-equipped Integration Room.

Tame your fears

International group of volunteers is a true crucible of cultures. It is inspiring how youth from different cultures willingly engage in helping people in need in the country they found themselves in the specific moment of their lives. The role of coordinator in this multicultural environment is an essential one; as he or she not only has to take care of volunteers' work, but also explain to them cultural contexts and reality of the people they work with.



Intercultural education

Open borders and free flow of people within the European Union contribute to us meeting more representatives of other cultures and countries. Thus, it is important to prepare kids and teenagers at schools to function in this reality from the early age; to build their tolerance for different cultures and religions, form the attitude of openness to others and to what is unusual for our culture, as well as fight manifestations of discriminative behavior among young Polish people.

Georgia is on its way to the integration with the European Union, so it is worth to think beforehand about educating young people on multiculturalism.

PROJECT'S PARTNER

The Association ATINATI has been successful in organizing and conducting activities aimed at actively incorporating young people in the process of building democracy in our country. Within the carried out projects and programmes, it engages young volunteers, as well as launches initiatives whose goal is promoting the idea of volunteering work and building its positive image.

The Association focuses on involving young people from the environments threatened with social exclusion, e.g. works with families that were affected by domestic violence, it also reaches out to the young people from rural areas and gives them new opportunities of growth.

Moreover, Atinati is running non-formal education programmes for kids, youth, and teachers. Throughout the yearly intensive cooperation with Polish non-governmental organizations, the Association created within its structures voluntary service point, in which it concentrates young people that engage permanently or for specific actions in its initiatives, and which cooperates with similar points built in 3 other towns in Georgia.





WORKSHOP



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Voluntary work workshop

Polish-Georgian transfer of experience in collaboration with youth through the volunteering

Notes on good practices concerning collaboration with youth through volunteering, prepared on the basis of opinions of practitioners and experts on working with youth through voluntary work and reflections and observations of project's participants – representatives of Georgian youth workers.

THROUGH

THE

VOLUNTEERING

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