

VOLUNTEERING

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as a Way to Employment

Summary of main outcomes and results
of the VOLWEM Project

Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová – Alžbeta Mračková
– Jana Matejzelová – Jana Vlašičová

D-ZRUČNOSTI



Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica

and

Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations

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2014

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1. VOLWEM Project and Its Goals

The recognition of benefits and importance of volunteering grows worldwide and it becomes a political topic. In April 2008 the European Parliament adopted the report on the *Role of Volunteering in Contributing to Economic and Social Cohesion*. Through this report, the European Parliament appeals to all member states and both regional and local authorities to recognize the value of volunteering in the support of social and economic cohesion. In addition to that, it calls for partner cooperation with volunteer organizations in order to carry out consultation with the volunteer centers with the main goal to develop plans and strategies for recognition, appreciation, support, facilitation, and encouraging volunteering and creation of a stable institutional framework for the development of volunteering.

While volunteering, a person acquires new skills and experience, meets with new people, places and/or cultures; he/she is often confronted with social issues and challenges but also with the diversity, differences, and other life conditions or life styles. Volunteering strengthens self-confidence, brings new stimuli and motivation into life, it can engage even vulnerable or marginalized groups into activity. Volunteers gain a feeling of importance, meaningfulness, and the value of their own activity, donated time, and effort. All these aspects of volunteering are very important benefits for professional but also personal development of a volunteer. In many countries, there are systems for recognition of these benefits for the world of work. In Slovakia, the situation is different. Even though there are several initiatives in Slovakia with the aim to draw attention of various sectors of the society to the recognition of benefits of non-formal education (such as the National Programme KOMPRAX implemented by the Slovak Youth Institute – Iuventa) we lack a legal framework that would enable recognition of non-formal education and thus also the skills acquired through volunteering as well as the systems for validation of these skills and the interest of formal education institutions and employers.

According the latest research on volunteering in Slovakia¹ among all socio-economic groups, unemployed people showed the lowest level of participation in formal volunteering (only 13.3 % while the average participation for adult population reached 27.5 %). The research also showed that the low engagement of unemployed people in volunteering is not related only with their lack of interest but also with

¹ Brozmanová Gregorová, et. al.: Dobrovoľníctvo na Slovensku – výskumné reflexie. Bratislava : Iuventa, 2012. (only in Slovak language)

barriers related to suitable working methods that would enable awareness about volunteering and involvement of these groups of people into volunteering.

These facts inspired partners from three countries to design and implement the VOLWEM Project. This project started in October 2012 and ended in September 2014. VOLWEM Project wanted to contribute to the creation of the following conditions in Slovakia:

- job centers (labor offices) are aware and accept volunteer opportunities as a way to gain experience and motivate unemployed people for such activity;
- volunteer centers educate organizations involving volunteers in specifics of work with unemployed volunteers and NGOs are actively cooperating with unemployed volunteers;
- institutions of formal education are aware about opportunities and existing systems of recognition of non-formal education gained through volunteering;
- employers are aware about benefits of volunteering and consider the information on active engagement in volunteering of a job seeker as important.

Despite all the benefits mentioned above, we need to emphasize that although one can grow, learn, and acquire new experience through volunteering, it is not a 100% recipe for a successful job search. We see it more as a tool to increase the possibility to get employed.

In this publication, we would like to briefly introduce you the main results and outcomes of the VOLWEM Project. In addition to those mentioned here, we were able to reach many partial outcomes that contribute to the successes of the project. In case you would like to know more about it, contact the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations or any of the involved volunteer centers.

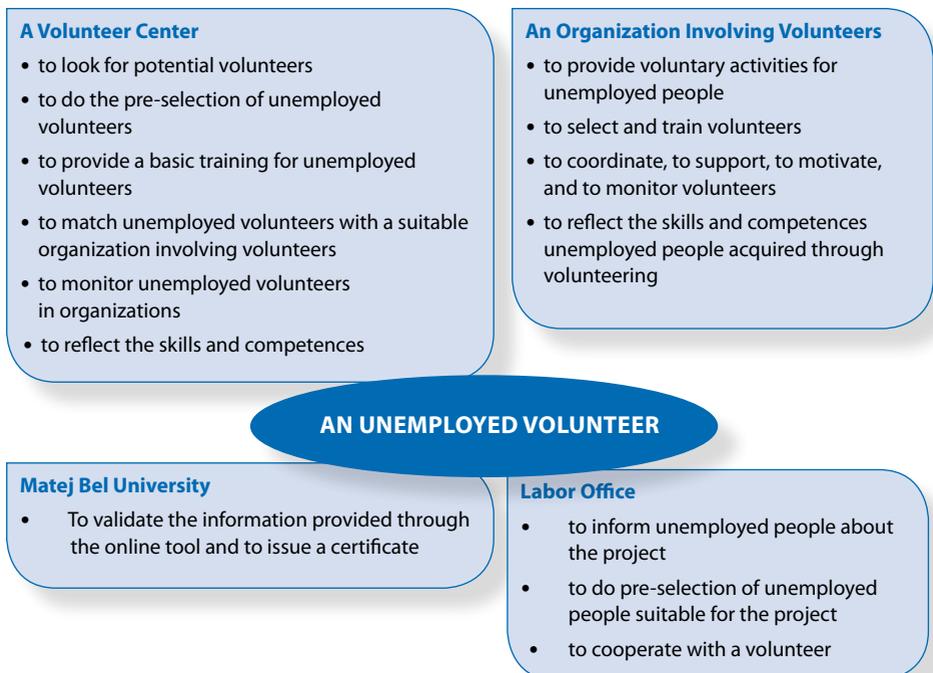
For more information visit: <http://volwem.dobrovolnickecentra.sk/>.

2. Try It Another Way - Methodology for Volunteer Centers and Organizations Involving Volunteers on How to Engage Unemployed Volunteers

The first of the VOLWEM Project outcomes is a methodology for volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers on how to engage unemployed volunteers called Try It Another Way. This methodology is based on the experience gained through a volunteer program for unemployed people carried by the Volunteer Center in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic (partner in the VOLWEM Project) in 2011 and also on practical experience of volunteer centers in Banská Bystrica, Košice, Nitra, and Prešov which were implementing the VOLWEM Project in their regions.

The methodology is based on mutual cooperation of volunteer centers, organizations involving volunteers, labor offices (job centers), and Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. For a better picture, you can see the tasks of individual partners below.

Picture 1: Tasks of individual partners within the work with unemployed volunteers according the methodology Try It Another Way



In this publication, you can find a brief content and individual steps for training of unemployed people interested in volunteering, for training for volunteer coordinators, and for an introduction meeting for representatives of labor offices (job centers) related to volunteering of unemployed people.

It has the form of a guide for organizations that would like to open doors to unemployed volunteers. It's goal is to explain what are the specifics of the volunteer management of unemployed volunteers and to motivate volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers to engage this target group into volunteering. Readers can find there all the relevant terminology, specifics, and processes of the cooperation with unemployed volunteers as well as the roles of individual partners – labor offices, volunteer centers, organizations involving volunteers, and Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica.

For more information, see these publications:

Brozmanová Gregorová, A., Matejzelová, J., Mračková, A., Vlašičová, J.: Try it another way: Methodology for work with unemployed volunteers for volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers. Banska Bystrica: Matej Bel University in Banska

Bystrica and the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, 2013. ISBN 978-80-557-0680-1 (printed version), ISBN 978-80-557-681-8 (electronic version)

3. How to Work with Unemployed Volunteers – Training for Volunteer Centers and Organizations Involving Volunteers

Training for volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers on how to work with unemployed volunteers is another outcome of the VOLWEM Project. The objectives of the training were defined in the form of a profile of a person that goes through this training. Such a person should:

- know the basic terminology used in volunteer management of unemployed people,
- know the legal framework related to the volunteering of unemployed people in Slovakia,
- be aware of specifics of unemployed people in the role of volunteers and be able to reflect on these specifics while working with this target group,
- be able to define strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities of the work with unemployed volunteers in their own organization and to set up a suitable strategy for the work with this target group,
- be able to define process and tasks for individual stakeholders within the work with unemployed volunteers and to analyze them in the relationship to his/her own work with unemployed volunteers,
- know individual parts of volunteer management related to unemployed volunteers, be able to plan it for his/her own organization and apply into practice,
- know the online tool D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie, its benefits for the work with unemployed volunteers and be able to use this tool for the validation of competences acquired through volunteering.

The training took eight hours and was focused on volunteer coordinators in NGOs, church organizations, but also public administration organizations willing to work with unemployed volunteers who went through the training in volunteer management or for those with a minimum of three-year experience working with volunteers.

There were two trainings implemented within the project. One was held in May 2014 in Banská Bystrica and the second one in June 2014 in Košice. There were 24 participants involved.

There is a training manual available for participants of the training:

Brozmannová Gregorová, A., Matejzelová, J., Mračková, A., Vlašičová, J.: Try it another way: Methodology for work with unemployed volunteers for volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers. Banská Bystrica : Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, 2013. ISBN 978-80-557-0680-1 (printed version), ISBN 978-80-557-681-8 (electronic version)

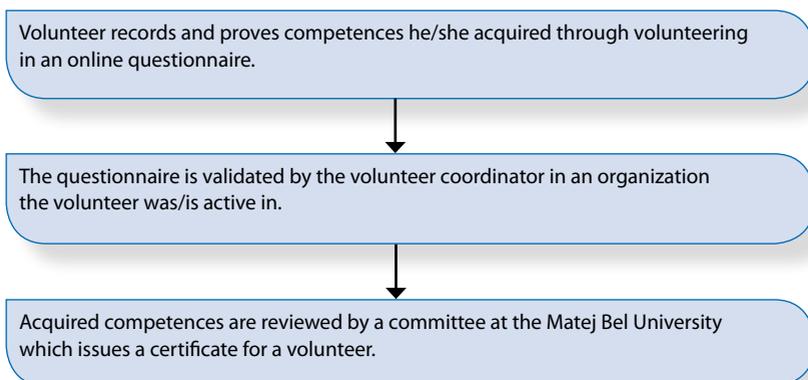
After the pilot testing and feed-back from participants and lecturers, the training was adjusted and submitted for the accreditation at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport in the Slovak Republic under the name Volunteer Management of Unemployed Volunteers.

4. D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie – Online Tool for Recognition of Skills Acquired through Volunteering

One of the main outcomes of the VOLWEM Project is the online tool called D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie. While working on it, we were inspired by several resources. The original idea was based on the V-skill for Employment tool developed by the project partner – Volunteer Development Scotland Ltd. from the United Kingdom. However, it was also inspired by the European Reference Framework and other foreign projects focused on the creation of similar tools in other countries.

D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie is an online tool thanks to which volunteers can recognize, name, record, and prove competences they have developed or improved through volunteering. The online tool helps them to support their self-evaluation with pictures, videos, documents or any other results or outcomes of their volunteer activity. The questionnaire is then approved by the volunteer coordinator in the organization the volunteer was volunteering for. Once the coordinator confirms the competencies of the volunteer, they are validated by a special committee at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The committee will issue a certificate with the competences listed on it. The volunteers can add the certificate to their CV while applying for a job or list the competences directly in their CVs – among working or volunteering experience. It can help the potential employers to select the suitable candidate for their companies.

Picture 2: D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie



The system, D-zručnosti not only provides an opportunity to prove competences acquired through volunteering but also a guide on how to plan, search for, select and get a suitable job. This special module is called “Preparation for Employment”.

D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie is a pilot tool in Slovakia. We expect its usage will have an impact on several target groups – on volunteers, volunteer organizations, employers, educational institutions, but also on the state and its support for the development of volunteer programs which can become one of the means for the development of employability.

D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie can be found in the Slovak language at <http://dzrucnosti.dobrovolnickecentra.sk>.

Also a manual was published with this tool. It is focused on volunteers, organizations involving volunteers, and volunteer centers and provides a description of the tool, the benefits it brings, and explains how to work with it.

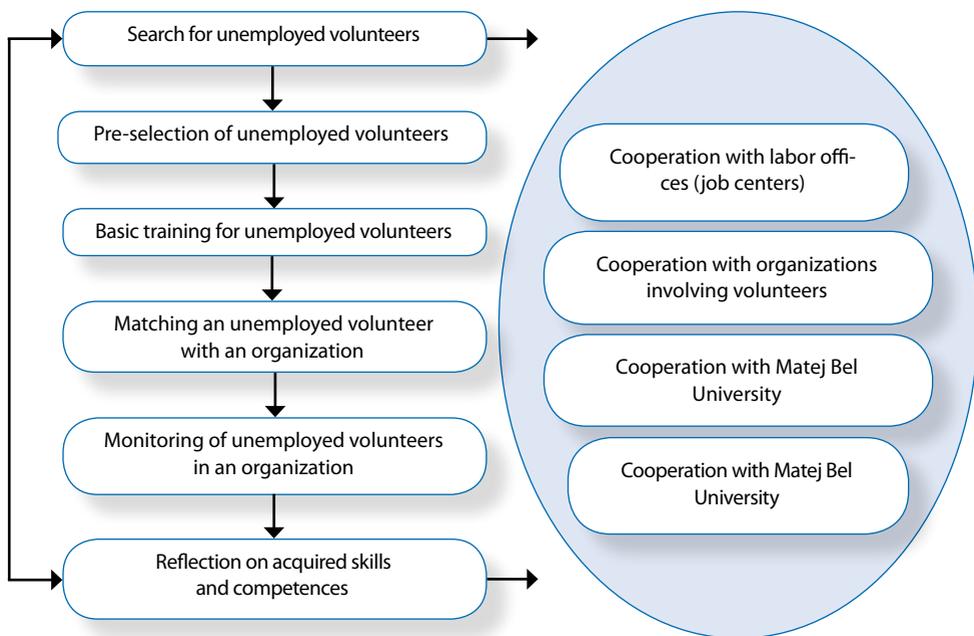
Brozmanová Gregorová, A., Mračková, A.: D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie. Manual for volunteers, organizations involving volunteers, and volunteer centers. Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, 2014. ISBN 978-80-557-0727-3 (printed version), ISBN 978-80-557-0728-0 (electronic version)

5. Work with Unemployed Volunteers in the VOLWEM Project

There were four volunteer centers involved into the VOLWEM Project (in Banska Bystrica, Košice, Nitra, and Prešov). Their role was to involve at least 15 unemployed people into volunteering. This part of the project was used for the validation of methodologies and tools produced within the partnership and we consider it to be the most important source of inspiration and experience.

Volunteer centers were key players for the work with unemployed volunteers. They were cooperating with all stakeholders: with unemployed volunteers, organizations involving volunteers, labor offices (job centers), and the university. The basic phases of the work with unemployed volunteers from the point of view of a volunteer center are described below:

Picture3: Basic phases of the work with unemployed volunteers from the perspective of a volunteer center and its roles in the VOLWEM Project



Cooperation of Volunteer Centers with Unemployed Volunteers

The work of volunteer centers with unemployed volunteers included the search, pre-selection, training of these volunteers and following referral to specific organizations involving volunteers for a specific volunteer position, monitoring of volunteers in organizations and reflection of competences acquired through volunteering. Volunteer coordinators in the project's volunteer centers had many important tasks to fulfill. They acted as a contact center, were responsible for interviews with volunteers, they were in direct contact with unemployed volunteers as they were monitoring these volunteers and providing them with the feedback (in cooperation with volunteer coordinators in organizations involving volunteers). They were also responsible for all the administrative tasks related to the project.

During the project period, these four volunteer centers were approaching and discussing the opportunity of volunteering with more than 150 unemployed people. There were 96 unemployed people actually involved into volunteering. They were helping in many types of NGOs such as mothers' center, community centre, NGOs providing social services but also in a museum or a university library. Their activities varied – some of them were involved into administrative tasks, others were providing technical assistance, carrying out leisure time activities for children or seniors, preparing and implementing creative workshops, participating in the preparation of awareness campaigns, taking care of environment, participating in a public money collection, etc.

The unemployed volunteers participating in the VOLWEM project had a chance to review their competences. Competences were divided into these areas:

- Communication competences
- Digital competences
- Problem solving
- Learning competences
- Social and personal competences
- Competences related to employment and entrepreneurship
- Civic and cultural competences
- Mathematical competence and competences in science

The review of competences was done by volunteers through the self-assessment at the beginning and at the end of their volunteering. Engaged volunteers confirmed a slight improvement almost in all competences. The major improvements were stated in the area of learning competences, problem solving, and in competences related to employment and entrepreneurship.

Analysis of benefits of volunteering for the unemployed people engaged in the VOLWEM Project can be found in this publication:

Brozmanová Gregorová, A.: Analysis of Benefits of Volunteering for Unemployed People within the VOLWEM Project. Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, 2014.

Cooperation of Volunteer Centers with Organizations Involving Volunteers

Before a volunteer center referred a volunteer into an organization involving volunteers (before the specific volunteer position was assigned to the volunteer), the organization had to be prepared for the work with unemployed volunteers. The role of volunteer centers was to contact organizations including volunteers in their region and to find out which of them would be willing to work with unemployed volunteers. Not all of them had the capacity to do so. In the VOLWEM Project, we found out that organizations with good quality volunteer management and with a specific position for volunteer coordinator (this role is often not a separate position but a part of the role of project coordinators in some organizations) can work also with unemployed volunteers. It is also important for an organization to have a clear vision for the activities it can involve these volunteers into and to have justified rules and procedures related to volunteer management (principles of selection, training, motivation, evaluation of volunteers, etc.). In an ideal case, every organization involved into the project went through the accredited training in volunteer management. Volunteer centers offered a training in volunteer management of unemployed volunteers to all involved organizations.

The cooperation of volunteer centers with organizations involving volunteers was focused also on the regular contact and monitoring of work of unemployed volunteers, on the reflection of experience of volunteer coordinators and volunteers, and last but not least, on the assessment of the volunteer program.

Another form of cooperation was provided through group supervision meetings for coordinators of volunteer programs from organizations involved into the project. It was provided only by some of the volunteer centers.

Volunteers were working also in volunteer centers but more often they were involved into activities in organizations cooperating with the centers. There were 28 organizations involving volunteers participating in the project.

Cooperation of volunteer centers with labor offices (job centers)

The aim of the volunteer center is to identify long-term unemployed applicants that are interested in volunteering. The labor office is one of the best institutions to be able to acquire relevant contacts for unemployed volunteers. During the implementation of the VOLWEM project (Volunteering – way to employment), the platform of volunteer centers and organizations approached *the Central Office of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family* and received a green light for informal cooperation in all regions where volunteer centers operate. The task of the volunteer centers was to approach the directors of the individual labor offices in their regions and convince them to cooperate in the project. Volunteer centers offered and organized briefings for the employees of the labor offices that work directly with unemployed individuals.

The meetings took place, either during the regular scheduled meeting of the labor office employees or in another setting – based on their agreement. All participants of the briefing could receive a certificate for their participation in this meeting. Handouts, leaflets, and posters were distributed to all participants of the briefing. These materials were later distributed to their unemployed clients as a recommendation and alternative way for gaining new skills.

6. Cooperation with Employers

Another part of the VOLWEM Project was focused on employers. In the first phase, a survey was carried out with the goal of finding out how the employers perceive experience gained through volunteering.

Through the survey, we were looking for answers to several questions:

- Which factors are important for the selection of future employees and how do employers perceive volunteer experience in this context?
- Which skills and competences are important for employment and which of them job applicants usually miss?
- What are the opinions of employers and HR managers in the area of recognition of volunteer experience in the process of a job application?

The survey took the form of an on-line questionnaire and it was distributed to HR managers of companies through newsletters and contacts of web portal Kariéra.sk, the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, and the HR Club. The collection of data started in September 2013 and ended in January 2014. There were 165 respondents to the survey (HR managers working in various spheres of services, e.g. in consulting, trade, production, financial services, and other segments of the market with different number of employees).

Main results of the survey:

- only 4 % of employers take volunteering into consideration while looking for new employees (the information on volunteer experience is not important for 73,3 % employers),
- volunteer experience is important for employers in the NGO sector,
- the volunteer experience is perceived positively by companies that involve their employees in corporate volunteering,
- 79% of respondents stated they see the volunteer experience mentioned in a CV or during a job interview only rarely or almost never,
- the employers stated that social and communication competences and knowledge and skills demonstrated by job applicants during a job interview are the most important factors for the selection of future employees.

On one hand, the findings of the survey can contribute to looking for more effective cooperation with employers with the goal to support recognition of volunteer experience in the process of search for new employees. On the other hand, they can serve as an inspiration for the work with unemployed volunteers. The volunteers should also be encouraged to present their volunteer experience while applying for a job.

All the survey results are published on the project website.

During the project period, we also carried out individual consultations with employers during the pilot testing of the online tool D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie. We were able to start a successful cooperation with web portals (profesia.sk and kariera.sk) active in the field of career development. Representatives of the employers also participated at the final conference.

7. Partners Involved in the VOLWEM Project

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Published in: Banská Bystrica

Published by: Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica and Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations

Published: 2014



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

This publication was printed within the scope of the VOLWEM project funded by the European Commission. The published information represents the opinion of the authors solely, The Commission is not responsible for any use of the published information contained in this document.

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