



MOVEfwd

VOLUNTEERING
GUIDE
LESSONS-LEARNT

*Thank you
volunteers*

PROJECT SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND TO THIS DOCUMENT

The project “MOVEfwd – Moving Forward in Europe with Volunteering” is co-funded by the European Union via the Europe for Citizens Programme; Strand 2: Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation; Action 2.3. Civil Society Projects. The project started in March 2021 and has a duration of 18 months. It has been approved for a EU grant worth €95,760.00 EUR.

The lead partner is **POU Varaždin (Pučko otvoreno učilište Varaždin)**: a prominent education institution of the City of Varaždin, Croatia. The action covers 5 European countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Italy and Bulgaria). The project partners include:

- *The Red Cross of Varaždin County, Croatia*
- *Ljudska Univerza Ptuj, Slovenia*
- *Regional Development Agency of Srem Ltd Ruma, Serbia*
- *Tourist Organisation of the City of Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia*
- *Progeu-Progress in European Union - Istituto Per Lo Sviluppo, Italy*
- *Institute for Sustainable Business Development and Education, Bulgaria*

The project focuses on volunteering during the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without a doubt, the pandemic has had an impact on every citizen in Europe and beyond. As a result of COVID-19, civil society organisations (CSOs), public bodies/authorities, educators and citizens have had to reinvent themselves. Promoting active citizenship and volunteering during these times has been especially challenging due to new restrictions on physical contact and movement. Due to too many unknowns (i.e. infection, spreading the virus, etc.), many citizens (incl. younger persons) have been thinking twice about volunteering. With this in mind, the project aims to **enhance citizen engagement in volunteer-based actions relating to civil protection, social inclusion, culture, education and employment**.

The project is organized as one preparatory meeting (in Varaždin, HR) and 5 3-day events in the partner countries (in Croatia, Italy, Serbia, Slovenia and Bulgaria). Each event has been organized so that it showcases best practices where citizens (esp. youth) engage as volunteers in actions that address issues impacting local development. The project activities are also designed so that the partners can gather opinions/inputs from citizens regarding the Europe they want. Particular focus per event has been be on how the concept of solidarity functions; and how the new agenda for 2021-27 supports communities in overcoming COVID-19 (& other crises). Workshops, panel discussions, presentations, site visits, group work, and other methods have been used to encourage volunteering and enhance understanding about how solidarity in an EU context contributes to sustainable growth. As a result of the project, citizens have been able to gain competencies to plan/manage & volunteer in actions during COVID-19 (& other crises), and better understand how the EU agenda & values function in practice.

One way in which the partnership has planned to disseminate best practices and lessons-learned in volunteering during these difficult times is by creating this **volunteering guide**. It describes specific volunteer-based actions that have been organized in the partner countries. In each chapter, we aim to show you, the reader, how volunteering benefits the community in times of crisis, how citizens at the grassroots level play an essential role in development, and it provides the lessons-learned from such actions. We, the partnership, hope that you can use this guide to enhance volunteer-based actions in your region, and engage citizens in a better way in locally-based actions.

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BULGARIA

Volunteer actions are very important, especially in times of crisis (i.e. during times of natural disasters and emergency situations). They also play an important role in addressing social exclusion in the wider community and contribute to making cities and municipalities more vibrant. The active participation of volunteers and training them in relevant fields contributes to ensuring that whatever the situation, their work is relevant and important to the wider community. The following describes best practices in volunteering in the vicinity of Plovdiv, and the Lucky Municipality in Bulgaria.

Over the years it has been found that building trust among key stakeholders involved in formal and informal education is essential to creating inclusive and prosperous communities.

The "**MOBILE SCHOOL STOLIPINOVO**" project has been running since 2018. It is based on the engagement of teachers as volunteers and the main activities are conducting classes outside the school for children from the **STOLIPINOVO** area, a neighborhood in the city of Plovdiv. The purpose of the project is to include children into the education system who have been excluded or dropped out of school for any reason: most often those with poor living conditions. (ref: <https://discovered-spaces.org/stolipinovo-mobile-school/>)

In order to reach all children in the Plovdiv area,

children living in the peripheral parts of the city) the chance to participate, **ISBDE** and the **TRANSFORMER ASSOCIATION** planned to create a mobile educational module within the project - an art bus that "delivers" creative educational workshops in their neighbourhood. The design and transformation of the bus into a mobile school will take place in the neighbourhood in cooperation with local craftsmen and artists volunteering their time and resources.

In order to improve the connection between the school and the neighbourhood, bring the children back to class and to offer them an alternative to static theoretical activities in the classroom, the project includes schools as an important stop on the route of the mobile school. In the winter, the bus will stop in the school yard, and classes will be held in a separate place in the school "Dimcho Debelyanov", which will be turned into a creative space by the association "TRANSFORMERS" together with children. It will involve local citizens in the partnership's work to integrate the priorities and needs of the community, as well as disseminate best practices and knowledge to future trainers from the community. By reaching out to the community in this way (before and during the pandemic), the most vulnerable children of the Plovdiv region have been able to gain access to education, which contributes to improving their quality of life.



Stolipinovo, workshop with children

including those who have dropped out of school, the program needed to be adapted to their needs and the conditions in which they live. Observations of neighborhood processes indicate that many children would not have access to the proposed educational formats if activities were not located directly in the area in which they live. Therefore, in order to give children who need access to education (school dropouts and

Apart from participation in projects addressing the needs of marginalized persons, volunteers are also integral to civil protection actions. Groups of local volunteers, in cooperation with the Municipal Council of Lakovo city and the Fire Department of Asenovgrad, have prepared the project "**ACTION MODEL FOR**

FIGHTING NATURAL DISASTERS” concerning natural disasters. This action is based on the experience gained from fighting forest fires in the village of **YUGOVO**, Lucky Municipality, in the region of Rhodopes in 2021 (during the lockdown caused by COVID-19). The village is mostly inhabited by elderly persons who are not able to organize evacuation and forest fire protection measures on their own. Among the volunteers trained in the project were, among others, their descendants (mostly grandchildren) and in this way communication and trust were much easier to establish.

The goal of the project was the preparation of an action model for organizing and managing volunteer activities in the fight against natural disasters in complex conditions. Undoubtedly, the fight against natural disasters of differing natures requires professionalism, the use of various technical means, as well as specialized training. Especially today considering significant climate and geophysical changes, as well as in complex situations that can last indefinitely (e.g. The lockdown caused by COVID-19), the active involvement of volunteers is one of the factors for effectively dealing with negative natural impacts - fires, earthquakes, floods, landslides and similar events; and preventing



Yugovo village

their most destructive impacts.

The project activities included: 1) studying the practical experience of forest firefighting in the village of **YUGOVO, RHODOPES** in 2021 during the lockdown caused by COVID-19 and developing a SWOT analysis based on the research results; 2) creating an action model for fighting natural disasters with the support of volunteers; 3) organization of structures for voluntary activities - teams and election of leaders of these teams (on the basis of the action model and action plan); 4) preparation of a communication network to connect professionals and volunteers in the following ways:

- Between the members of the volunteer teams and their leaders;
 - Between the leaders of the volunteer teams and the relevant local government structures;
 - Between the leaders of the volunteer teams and the specialized bodies responding to natural disasters;
- 5) conducting training for the members of the volunteer teams on the specific actions responding to natural disasters; and carrying out disaster-simulation training with the members of the volunteer teams; 6)

Forming levels of readiness for actions of the volunteer teams depending on the state of the natural conditions; 7) putting volunteer teams in a state of "waiting for action" depending on the specific situation and initiating actions of volunteer teams in case of necessity.

Similar future actions (regarding civil protection) should seek to also include not only volunteers, but also leaders from the local community in order to have a long-term impact. The key lessons, which are very important and valuable, are the following:

1. There is always the need to conduct the advance preparation of volunteers;
2. Preparation has to be based on a systematic platform, i.e. an action model and concrete action plans in basic areas;
3. Preparation of volunteers must include concrete training that focuses on developing the necessary skills;
4. By continuously watching the changes of the natural conditions, volunteers will be ready to act in case of necessity.

CROATIA

Volunteering has proven to be extremely important since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Croatia, and volunteers have greatly alleviated the crisis situation with their activities. In the middle of the pandemic, two devastating earthquakes occurred in Croatia, which along with Zagreb and its surroundings, hit Sisak-Moslavina County the hardest. The epicentre of the strongest earthquake (in December 2020) was in the vicinity of the City of Petrinja. The following describes volunteer-based actions that have taken place in Varazdin (the target area of the project) and other cities in Croatia.

OUT OF THESE CRISES, NEW APPROACHES TO VOLUNTEERING AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT HAVE EMERGED

In this challenging period, volunteers from the **ASSOCIATION UZ TEBE SAM** (I'm with you) from Varazdin were initiators of activities. They brought cheerfulness, positive energy, gained new experience and enriched themselves as persons by taking part in the lives of children and young people with disabilities. Isolation is a constant barrier to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. The pandemic only made matters worse. The association's users were even more isolated because of their primary difficulties. During the pandemic, a group of volunteers launched monthly workshops for young people with disabilities (themes: art, music, dance, literature, etc.) and showed them that they are not alone. In this way, they strengthened the mental health of the community and

other non-profits in Varazdin. In order to mark the World Day of Good Deeds and recruit new volunteers, the Association organized the event "**ŠPANCIRAJ SA MNOM VARAŽDINOM**" (Stroll with me through Varazdin). New volunteers had the opportunity to get to know the association and users, and how to work with them at the event. By walking through Varazdin and exercising appropriately in the town squares, "Uz tebe sam" contributed to improving the mental health of the community.

THE CROATIAN YOUTH NETWORK is a youth organization that organized quickly. At the beginning of the pandemic, they had many young people participating in international solidarity activities within

the European Solidarity Force. In cooperation with the **AGENCY FOR MOBILITY**, they have established a new system of support and assistance targeting volunteers. The agency recognized the need for additional psychosocial support, due to the unusual and demanding situation in which the volunteers found themselves, and for that reason they introduced two new measures. First, they opened an online service



Volunteers and users of the association **I am with you**

learned how small things actually mean a lot.

In the late phases of the pandemic, enrolling new volunteers became a priority for the Association and

where all volunteers could contact experts with any questions; and secondly, they transferred the necessary

training for international and domestic volunteers to online formats. As part of the training, volunteers were provided with additional help and support through various tools and methods.

One of the main existing measures, which proved to be



Graffiti on the wall, Petrinja

the most useful, was mentoring support. Volunteers said that mentors greatly helped volunteers to adapt to the new situation.

Another important element that the Youth Network emphasizes is the importance of mutual solidarity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made us aware of how interconnected we all are and how the consequences affect us all. Therefore, it is very important that there is mutual solidarity, trust between the actors and the desire to help in order to successfully resolve such crises.

Another great example of volunteer activity is telephone support lines, such as the *NATIONAL CALL CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME AND MISDEMEANOURS*, the *TESA PSYCHOLOGICAL CENTRE* (Psychological Assistance Centre), the *BLUE PHONE* and many other local centres organized after the pandemic began.

FIREFIGHTERS in Croatia are organized into *VOLUNTARY FIRE BRIGADES*, who with their selfless engagement have already shown countless times that humanity and help to others cannot be paid for. Firefighters were involved in rescuing the victims of the earthquakes and they delivered supplies and construction materials to people who were left homeless after the earthquake in Petrinja.

RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS who are the oldest and most numerous associations of volunteers in Croatia also played an important role during these times of crisis. In addition to delivering food and supplies to the elderly and infected, they also organized a call centre for psychological help. In collaboration with the International Red Cross, a handbook "Providing Support and Care for the Welfare of Volunteers" was published. Extreme importance is put on sustaining the well-being of volunteers who are endangered in crisis situations, both physically and mentally.

The pandemic has made it clear to all of us that we are social beings and that we need other people to feel safe and accepted. But at the moment, our social life is significantly more limited despite the fact that we have all become accustomed to the "new normal". It is clear that we all need to take care of our mental health.

From our lessons-learned, we want to emphasize that we need to take care of ourselves so that we can still function successfully in our new realities. In that way, we can be more effective in helping others around us.

ITALY

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been essential to maintain and upgrade the skills and knowledge of volunteers in the field. In Italy, volunteers have adopted inclusive planning techniques to support the most vulnerable groups. They have had to develop creative methodologies to meet the needs of such groups. As well, they have been cooperating with volunteers from civil society organizations (CSOs) throughout Europe in order to contribute to alleviating the pandemic at the European level. The following describes projects that have applied a volunteer-based approach to development in order to meet the needs of citizens in these difficult times.

The **GROOVEUROPE** project aims at training adult education staff through a mix of structured training experiences, study visits and job shadowing at specialized entities in the following sectors: volunteering, educational planning and inclusive education for migrants. The lead partner of the project is **CSVNET**, the Italian Association of Volunteer Support Centres, and the other partners are **THE CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING** in Brussels, **MEP EUROPROJECTS** in Granada, Idec in Athens and **ASSOCIAÇÃO PARA A EDUCAÇÃO DE SEGUNDA OPORTUNIDADE** in Porto, Portugal.

The main project activities were 5-day visits to the main European institutions and civil society networks in

- Raised competences in European Law and European institutions for participants of the project
- Raised awareness on people excluded from society (immigrants and other excluded groups) in Spain;
- Improvement of citizen consciousness and knowledge of the handling of refugees (based on the Greek example);
- Proposal of new creative methods for social education in Portugal.

KEY LESSONS learned/recommendations for future similar actions:

The educational staff involved in the project were educated to express tolerance and support diversity. They were provided specific skills allowing them to work with migrants and refugees. Participants discussed the European context (adult education policies, opportunities, main actors) and certain arguments proposed were deemed useful for further projects. During some of the activities, the participants came up with innovative work tools for social inclusion, which could become instruments that everyone can use over the long-term in order to produce an impact among the target population (persons in migrant populations).



Training workshop on inclusive education for migrants and refugees

Brussels; social planning programs, theoretical insights and visits to local organisations in Granada, ES; a training workshop on inclusive education for migrants and refugees in Athens; workshop on creative methods for social education and work in Porto, Portugal.

The impact of the volunteer action regarding its contribution to raising the quality of life in the local community can be summed up with the following:

Another project that has contributed to community development is **"YES VOLUNTEERING."** The Lead partner in this project is **AURIVE SOCIETA' COOPERATIVA SOCIALE**, and the other partners are from Turkey, **YASAM BOYU EGITIM DERNEGI**, from Portugal, **RIGHTCHALLENGE - ASSOCIAÇÃO**, from Austria **INTERAKTION** - Verein für ein interkulturelles

Zusammenleben, from Slovenia *DRUŠTVO ZA RAZVIJANJE PROSTOVOLJNEGA* dela Novo Mesto, and from Spain *ASOCIACION DESES 3*. The project was implemented from 2019 to 2021.

The aim of the project was the improvement of models and methods focusing on social and cultural volunteering. Ultimately, the project goal was the creation of a tool for training excluded people to become active citizens. By achieving these aims, the project contributes to personal and community empowerment in the times of the pandemic. Partners from 6 countries confronted differences in volunteering systems, tools and perceptions in their countries. The project supported the transferability of lessons-learned gained through volunteering experiences to other dimensions of people's lives.

The main project activities were:

- mapping and surveying (gathering statistics, examining challenges, identifying good practices);
- local events and actions in each partner country to inform citizens about how they can improve their volunteer actions via the project approach.

The impact of the volunteer action included:

- at the end of the project more than 120 adult educators acquired skills and knowledge about

volunteer coaching. Specifically, the participants have gained skills allowing them to work with less-qualified adults, (i.e. know-how on how to conduct tutoring and applying new teaching skills, modelling skills, problem solving skills, active and non-judgmental listening skills, conflict resolution skills, etc.);

- Participants developed a stronger sense of



Training: active and non-judgmental listening skills

social responsibility and feel further committed to volunteering;

- The participant organisations have developed their capacity to implement social and cultural volunteering actions and mentoring programs.
- Public authorities have an increased understanding of the problems and needs of the lesser-qualified adults with regards to their integration into the labour market.

THE KEY LESSONS LEARNED/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SIMILAR ACTIONS:

- In order to make new models of volunteer training functional and ensure their relevance over the long-term, public authorities need to be included in the development and implementation of new training models so they can be matched to the strategic goals of the community;
- Guidelines, tools and other materials that contribute to enhancing the capacity of volunteers must be available to the wider public. In that way, new materials and tools can be used by all citizens wishing to make a difference in their community;
- It is always necessary to see what is being done elsewhere. By collecting best practices and learning about the other training approaches used in other European countries, we have been able to avoid repeating mistakes and make the best use of existing resources for community development.

The Children's Department of the Ruma City Library „Atanasije Stojković“ is a warm children's spot in which they can interact with each other on a daily basis. In this place, every week the library holds children's workshops, exhibitions, reading sessions for kids, and all kinds of social activities which are enjoyable for children. Every meeting ends with songs, hugs, and their message that they will visit the library again. During the pandemic, the efforts of volunteers kept this initiative alive, and also ensured that the community could continue on during these hard times.

Employees have always tried to spend time with the children in a quality and fun manner, and to provide them with a warm welcome and friendly support,



making them realize that this library spot is their little empire.

The COVID-19 Pandemic caught everybody unprepared, including the librarians of the institution. It has disabled every regular form of communication with the users. Library contents suddenly became unavailable, and the socialization with children completely disappeared. In that moment, it was understood what the circumstances were. The library closed all the doors to further cooperation and the Children's Department of the institution lost all its meaning without children visiting. In a matter of one day, everything that had been built together with children was not possible, and the emptiness which was left behind was large and uncertain ... How long would this situation remain? Every person had a need for comfort and support, especially parents who were in closed homes with their children; without the possibility to provide them with any kind of entertainment. There was a worrying level of confusion and anxiety because the uncertainty. To **MIRJANA BELOŠEVIĆ**, a librarian from the „Atanasije Stojković“

library, this was a great challenge. “In all those circumstances, my first decision was to provide any kind of support. We had an idea to make a story about COVID-19 and explain it to the children in the simplest way possible. This just came to my mind. After this decision, a variety of new ideas came up, and the final one was to start an audio recording: AUDIO FAIRYTALES for children. This job required a lot of effort in order to make this into something children would enjoy.”

The first phase was to collect materials, selecting the most beautiful and most famous fairy tales to be recorded. The second and the most demanding phase was to select photos to match the content being recorded. The third phase was to make recordings (fairy tales were recorded in a cheerful tone, and were short in content to keep children's attention. It was followed-up with fun music and the narrator's voice).

Hours were spent in recordings. Fairy tales were published daily on the social networks of the library, then Mirjana came up with an idea to make them available all the time. With this in mind, she created the YouTube Channel „Zlatna kočija“, where all the links could be accessed.

To the local cultural community, this initiative was definitely of high importance. With this channel, it became possible to visit the library without having to go physically there; meaning that library services could be used without physical restrictions. This initiative becomes even more important because it has promoted accessibility to persons with disabilities; more specifically, for those with visual impairment.

In the future, volunteers and change-makers, should be trained on how to get funding for their innovative, and above all, humane ideas. It wouldn't be the first time that an idea which was strictly volunteer-based (i.e. the

effort of a person who just wants to do something good for the community) has grown to be a national or even an international project. Still, these initiatives sometimes go unnoticed and their purpose fades away after some time. For this reason, these persons need constant capacity building and motivation.

Apart from the Library, other volunteer actions have been taking place to contribute to the quality of life at the local and regional levels in Serbia. One such project is **“BOARDS WITHOUT BORDERS - IMPROVING LIFE QUALITY FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS THROUGH PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE APPROACH.”** It was an international project in Serbia and Croatia on the cross-border level led by the Association „Bubamara“ in Vinkovci, Croatia; in cooperation with the partners: Centre for Social Welfare-Vinkovci, Croatia; Centre for Social Welfare-Šid, Serbia; the Red Cross of Sremska Mitrovica- Serbia. The project had the general goal of supporting recovery efforts in the flooded areas in order to increase the technical capacity of the cross-border counties' entities to respond promptly and effectively to an emerging crisis or emergency.

The project was created after terrible floods hit Serbia and Croatia (and other surrounding countries) in 2014. The main target group of the project were persons with disabilities and the persons who are directly involved in working with them: carers, social welfare workers, nurses, families etc. as well as life-guards and volunteers engaged in the Red Cross and other NGOs across the targeted regions. These stakeholders were directly involved in specifically designed training for reaching out to persons with disabilities, especially in emergency situations (in this case floods). One of the most interesting and purposeful training actions was for persons managing

the boat accessible to persons with disabilities and for the life guards, who are volunteers of the Red Cross of Sremska Mitrovica.

In order to overcome the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities during floods and other emergency situations, both countries obtained specially designed vehicles for road and river traffic; i.e. specially designed boats and vans for persons with disabilities.

Participants in the project and other stakeholders were made aware of the difficulties and challenges persons with disabilities are facing, especially during emergency situations, via a specially designed promotional and awareness raising campaign.

The final result of the project - integrated social services – accessible transport for persons with disabilities as well as therapeutic and rehabilitation services, were successfully designed and made available in the community.

Project activities mostly related to capacity building and the training of volunteers so that they could address the needs of vulnerable groups during floods in terms of performing rescues on water. For the purpose of the project, specially adapted boats were purchased, boat skippers were trained and other relevant conditions for rescues on water were provided. Most importantly, a network of volunteers in the CBC region was created

to ensure the provision of specialized volunteers in crisis situations.

Volunteers of the Red Cross of Sremska Mitrovica were trained in saving persons with disabilities during floods which directly contributes to increasing the quality of life in the local community; i.e. that these persons and their families now feel much safer living in

the local community. At the same time, boats that were purchased are now used for tourism purposes.



From this project experience, it was concluded that volunteer actions should not have any borders. When crisis happens, they have impacts at the international level. From 2014, when the floods happened, up until now, we believe a lot has changed regarding the perception of volunteers in the community. Overall, they have gained a level of high significance in the last couple of years due to COVID-19. We believe the best way of working with volunteers as a target group is to constantly motivate them, in terms of exchanging experience, organizing purposeful travels into neighbouring countries for specific training, and acquiring knowledge applicable to community development.

SLOVENIA

Špajza modrosti (The Pantry of Wisdom) is an intercultural family centre for all generations. It's almost like a public living room where different generations can meet and have a chat. It's financed by the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the Municipality of Ptuj and it's operated by Ljudska Univerza Ptuj. Even during the pandemic, the approach of this action (and others) has contributed to uniting the community in solidarity and helping Slovenians to overcome the worst effects of the pandemic.

ŠPAJZA MODROSTI was established in 2017, and most importantly, all of its activities are free of charge. Every week it organizes numerous activities and workshops for all generations. Informal socialising activities include playing cards, pupils finishing their homework, hanging out after school ends, playing table tennis, using the Špajza's Internet access, playing board games, etc. All visitors have access to free coffee and other warm drinks. There are also a lot of educational workshops and lectures that occur every week. Lectures cover different topics, such as positive parenting, safe Internet use, how to communicate with your partners/family members, how to deal with divorce, talking about family situations, art, etc.

One of the most important activities is the summer program for children. It is organised in the form of all-day care with different creative workshops and activities, games, and outdoor activities where children learn through play, build social skills, etc. That way, the



Špajza modrosti, workshop with children

program ensures physical, personal, social and emotional development. The summer program and school holiday program are both organised with the

help of local volunteers, who can help with the organisation and implementation of activities. Volunteers can gain rich experiences by being involved in this project. On every school holiday, Špajza modrosti is full of children that get free meals every day, and all of the services are free of charge for their parents.

Volunteers play a key role in Špajza modrosti's activities. They are involved in most project activities, and they are especially involved in the summer program and school holidays program. In most cases, the volunteers are youth that have a desire to work with children. They devote their free time to get priceless experiences in organizing and implementing educational activities. Špajza modrosti is always welcoming new volunteers and it gives them the opportunity to participate in the family living centre for all generations. At the peak of the pandemic, Špajza modrosti had to shut down all of their activities. After a short period of time, one thing was certain: the local community needed Špajza modrosti and their activities, perhaps more than ever. Therefore, coordinators of the activities had to come up with a solution. The solution was to move activities into a virtual world. Of course, not all activities were applicable to that, but some of them were. They started addressing the needs of parents and children through some lectures and providing learning support in an online format.

Špajza modrosti is without a doubt a program that needs continuation. After years of implementation, the local community has responded very well to their presence in the old town centre of Ptuj. Many visitors are frequent. Many spend every afternoon in the Špajza modrosti. The contribution of volunteers to activities is very valuable; therefore, they wish to attract even more of them in the upcoming summer months.

ROTARACT CLUB PTUJ AND LEO CLUB PTUJ are other volunteer-based organizations that are making a difference. They are humanitarian organizations for

young people from 18 to 30 years of age. There are no barriers to joining. Young people can gain experience in management, new organizational skills, and learn about financial management. Networking with other young people and socializing are also very important aspects of being members in the clubs. The clubs are constantly looking for new members. One of the key volunteer actions held annually by the clubs is the **CHESTNUT PICNIC**. It is a 1-day event that occurs every year in October.

Volunteers in Rotaract, Leo Club and other humanitarian organizations go to the local woods and hand-pick chestnuts. As the COVID-19 prevention

measures were still in place in 2021, this event is one of the few that could be organized and implemented. This is because of one important factor - everything was organized outside in an open place, where people had enough space; therefore, chances of getting infected were minimized. While roasting chestnuts, citizens can make a symbolic donation in exchange for the pack of chestnuts. The event is carried out as a fundraiser for clubs to get financial support for their biggest project in December. That's when members of the club buy Christmas presents for more than 200 children (from vulnerable groups), and supply 80 families in need with food and hygiene packages.

The impact of clubs' activities is manifold. The actions are oriented towards making the local community a better place for all. By organizing events, citizens and other volunteers socialize with club members/volunteers, and they are surrounded by nature. The fundraising activities during these actions ensures that funds are gathered for larger humanitarian actions (e.g., gift giving and providing food packages to families). The events of clubs like Rotaract and Leo Club are well accepted by the community.



Valuable lesson:

Coordinators and volunteers became much more flexible, adaptable, and resourceful due to COVID-19. Nowadays, most of their activities are pre-planned as hybrid versions, which means that if something similar happens again, they won't have to shut down any activities or start re-inventing their usual operations.

CROATIA



PUČKO
OTVORENO
UČILIŠTE
VARAŽDIN

PUČKO OTVORENO UČILIŠTE VARAŽDIN

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