



ActiveAdvice Guidelines VOLUNTEERING

HOW CAN AAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES CONTRIBUTE TO
STAYING ACTIVE AND STRENGTHEN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Volunteering time and energy contributes to strengthen a community, no matter what age or professional background a person has. Volunteering has a positive impact on health and well-being of communities – and on the volunteers [1]. Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. Volunteering is part of a cluster of helping behaviours, entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends [2].

As volunteering has a very positive impact, it contributes to improve the quality of life and health including longevity of those who donate their time [3] and research has found that especially older adults will benefit the most from volunteering. By simply helping others and being part of a group, both physical and mental problems of older adults are often improving. However, the motivation behind volunteering changes everything: one must be performing the good deed from a selfless nature. In line with this argument why to reinforce the status of volunteering, costs for health care, environmental protection, education, social services, etc. can be lowered while giving more satisfaction to older adults.

There are barriers that can prevent older adults from participating in volunteer work, such as socio-economic status, opinions held by others, and even current health is-

sues. However, these barriers can be overcome so that if one would like to be involved in volunteer work they can do so. Governments can help here to change the image of volunteering by including the importance of the topic in its communication activities and by actively promoting projects in the field as well as engagement activities to recruit volunteers. Volunteering improves not only the communities in which one serves, but also the life of the individual who is providing help to the community.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering for older adults is not limited to a field, although it is more common in health care and education than in other domains. But basically, all municipalities, (non-for-profit) organisations and service providers are depending on being supported and strengthened by volunteers through their skills and commitment. There are different ways of engaging older adults and for them to get active:

- Volunteering in the community (e.g. improve their local community, support local initiatives)
- Volunteering for an NGO (e.g. weekly collecting food leftovers, giving class to students, etc.)
- Volunteering in an emergency (e.g. after flooding, earth quake, natural disasters, etc.)

VOLUNTEERING IN COMMUNITIES

Volunteering has a number of benefits for all volunteers and especially for older adults. Below we outline some challenges, benefits and motivations for volunteering.

CHALLENGES & RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

Two important aspects a community has to plan thoroughly around is (a) the recruiting of volunteers and (b) possible governmental incentives and related frameworks to facilitate volunteering through the right policies. From a policy perspective, formal volunteering is still one of the most prominent indicators of active citizenship but increasing pressures towards formalization in volunteering deter some older people who would prefer to volunteer in a more informal, less workplace-like setting. When it comes to recruiting, organisations need to consider the different motives that drive older adults to volunteer. In creating meaningful opportunities to meet the individual needs, all involved actors are able to benefit [4]. Certain barriers hinder, and sometimes even prevent volunteering. These barriers are either imposed by practical restrictions from institutions, or obstacles embedded in society's value system. Furthermore, insurance arrangements, lack of access for disabled volunteers, legislation on health and safety, lack of resources to create opportunities and the health of volunteers can prevent them from volunteering [5, 6, 7]. Furthermore, the image of volunteering might be the biggest challenge to overcome, as well as lack of awareness. Meaningful marketing and promotion of volunteering, therefore, are the most important counter-strategies for communities and NGOs. While volunteering may have distinct benefits on the volunteer, as well as on the community, it is important to think

about the expertise, knowledge and skills different ways of volunteering might require. For both recruiters and volunteers, therefore, well thought-through guidelines and requirements for each field of volunteering needs to be elaborated to ensure that both the knowledge and experience of older adults are put to use, and the volunteers are not overwhelmed by tasks they don't feel comfortable with.

MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING AMONG SENIOR CITIZENS: WHY VOLUNTEERING?

A study investigated the most important factors that motivate members of the 50+ cohort to volunteer. Some were not very different from those applicable across the age range: the desire to help others, a need to feel useful and valued, the desire to make new friends, and enjoyment of the activity itself. However, there are more age-specific factors: Volunteering allows to put a structure on free time, it provides a way of continuing to use skills built up over a working life, and a route to learn and explore new avenues previously blocked by the demands of their careers or jobs [8]. In general, volunteering can offer fulfilment and ease the transition from employment to retirement in giving older adults to the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to society and for many it seems like a natural progression from paid work. Furthermore, people might develop new interests in their retirement, and volunteering could be an engaging new activity [4].

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Actually I didn't expect anything for myself, all I wanted was to give something back. I mean my husband died of cancer, me mum she died of old age, but in the last few months of both their lives, they needed hospital care and that's what they got, and it's my way of giving a little bit back, that's just my way. I couldn't afford to go out and give them a couple of thousand pounds, I haven't got it, but I can give them a little bit of help
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In different sectors such as healthcare or education, volunteers are always needed and it can be very enriching and fulfilling for senior citizens to keep on working.

TOP FIVE REASONS RETIRED ADULTS SHOULD VOLUNTEER

Volunteering can benefit retired adults and communities – here are the top five reasons [9, 10].

1. Helps bridging generation gap.

By interacting with younger generations, seniors are able to share important life lessons. On the flip side, younger generations are able to teach seniors new ways of looking at life. By building a connection with each other, both generations are able to offer the respect and affirmation that humans crave.

2. Volunteering time makes you feel like you have more time.

Giving others your time can make your time feel more affluent. A study done at Wharton College found that people who give their time felt more capable, confident and useful. Since they were able to accomplish one thing, they feel they will easily accomplish tasks in the future. So, even though realistically they have less time, they feel as though they have more time. Similarly, those who donate their money feel like they are wealthier.

3. It's good for mental health.

Volunteering keeps the brain active, which contributes to a person's cognitive health. The National Institute on Aging reported that participating in activities that are meaningful and productive may lower the risk of dementia and other health problems in seniors.

4. Helps prevent senior isolation and depression.

While getting out of the house is important at any age, research found that volunteering can have positive effects on a person's psychological health. In a study done by the Corporation for National and Community Service, researchers found that individuals who engaged in volunteering activities experienced a shorter course of depression than those who did not volunteer. Volunteering provides the senior a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

5. It promotes physical activity.

Physical activity remains an important role in positive health outcomes through the oldest ages. Whether that activity is helping with a local sports team or walking around your neighbourhood while volunteering as a companion, maintaining a healthy level of fitness helps fend off diseases as you age. Volunteering provides the senior a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

ACTIVE ADVICE WILL ASSIST YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY

Sustainable Learning in the Community (SLIC) empowers older people to become active citizens, encouraging the development of skills and competences through formal and informal learning opportunities and directly linking the concepts of lifelong learning and community involvement, valuing the skills and experiences of older adults. – <https://slic-project.eu/>

Retired and senior volunteer programme – Retire into Action (UK programme) was established in 1988 and encourages people aged 50+ to get involved in local concerns. The programme uses the wide range of skills and experience of older people to benefit people in the community. Apart from a few permanent paid workers, it is staffed by volunteers who are provided with training and support. Projects operate in health, environment, cultural heritage

and other sectors, in around 20 regions. Activities include “grandmentors” working with teenagers, a programme to help isolated retired seafarers, and organisation of meals for the homeless. – www.csv-rsvp.org.uk

ActiveAdvice and volunteering – how to become an Authorised Active Advisor. The ActiveAdvice project offers a possibility for volunteering for different actors - from older adults to businesses. In becoming an Authorised Active Advisor, volunteers will help guiding users through the ActiveAdvice platform and bring a human addition to the ICT platform. Main focus of the Authorised Active Advisor is to provide decision support and general information about AAL – to all relevant target groups of the ActiveAdvice project (consumers, businesses, governments). – <https://www.activeadvice.eu/>

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

The ActiveAdvice Information Hub provides up-to-date information about the AAL community, insights in the AAL market, practices and stories, products and services, and concepts and projects. Visit us on <https://www.activeadvice.eu/>



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Sources

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