

GUIDE ON INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL VOLUNTARY WORK

SENIOR
PLUS

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DEVELOPED BY



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pistes solidaires



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INTRODUCTION

The Aim of the following handbook is to prepare and support organizations and volunteers in conducting more efficient and successful Senior Volunteer service projects. It consists of a handbook available in five different languages (English, Italian, French, Portuguese, and Latvian) and divided in two different sections: the 1st section is directed to the workers and the 2nd one to the volunteers..

The Handbook is developed within the framework of the project Senior Plus. It is a 2 year strategic partnership project, supported by Erasmus+ KA2 Adult Education, involving 6 organizations from 5 different European countries:

Cemea del Mezzogiorno (ITALY)
as applicant and coordinator

**Pistes Solidaires
(FRANCE)**
partner

**Associação Mais Cidadania
(PORTUGAL)**
partner

**Community Action Dacorum
(UNITED KINGDOM)**
partner

**Gulbene Municipality
(LATVIA)**
partner

View from Here (UNITED KINGDOM)
knowledge partner

Senior Plus deals with adults over 50 years of age, unemployed or inactive, in need of enhancing their employability through non-formal education and volunteer service. The project involves 20 seniors for each partner in a total of 100 direct beneficiaries and around 2500 indirect beneficiaries. The handbook has been developed by Associação Mais Cidadania (PORTUGAL) in collaboration with the consortium.

The strength of the project partnership lies in the wealth of experience of all partners in co-ordinating and participating as a host and sending organisation in relation to the exchange of volunteers. This experience covers young people (Youth in Action) and older people (Grundtvig Senior Volunteers). This expertise has been brought together in this manual.

Volunteer work, as a learning experience and an opportunity for the reactivation of seniors, is one of the pillars of the Senior Plus project. It is based on the assumption that every experience can contribute to learning, if there is reflection on that experience.

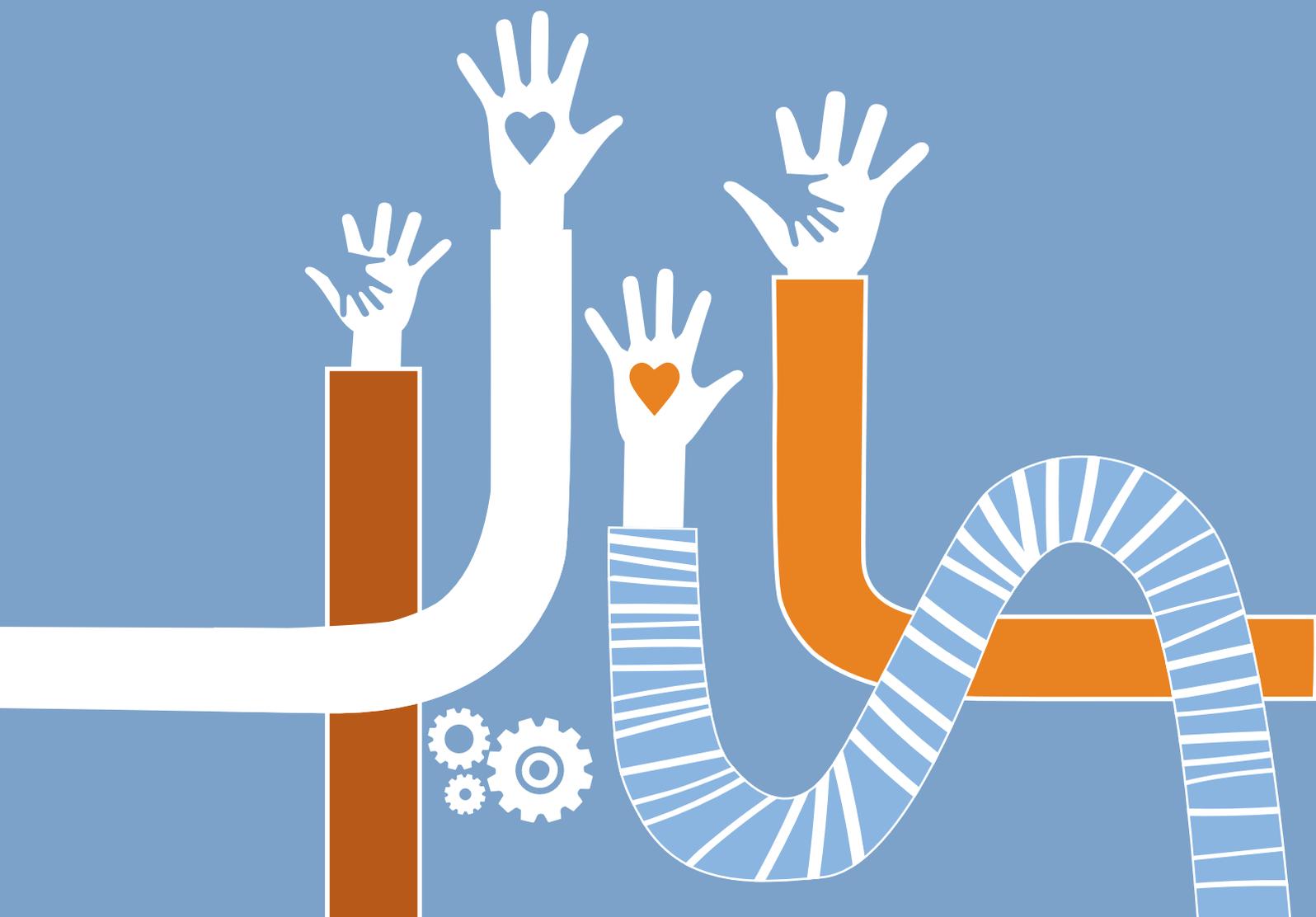


The objectives of the first section are to give the workers and the organizations a deeper understanding of the general concept of volunteering and its dimensions, to strengthen them with a clear idea of the volunteer service project cycle, to equip them with some necessary practical skills and, in general, to promote an understanding of why volunteer service is a key step to enhance Seniors' Employability.

The second section of the handbook focuses on explaining to the volunteers the reason for volunteer service in Senior Plus and why volunteering can be a key step in their Employability according to the Senior Plus Method.

SECTION I

For Workers



WHY VOLUNTARY WORK IN SENIOR PLUS?

CONCEPT OF VOLUNTEERING

MEANING

The word “volunteering” is derived from the Latin word “voluntas”, which means free will, personal choice or option. Volunteering signifies an intention to offer time, effort, skills and goodwill for the accomplishment of different tasks, activities and missions. In terms of organization, two types of volunteering are distinguished: non-structured and structured. The first one refers to volunteer activities performed on an individual or non-structured basis. The structured type, which is also called volunteer service, is a structured activity during a certain period of time, based on an agreement with defined objectives and means, rules and procedures, duties and rights for all the parties and partners involved. In this case, to fulfil their wish to volunteer people join specialized organizations, which implement a structured service. It is based on individual free will and is unpaid (although, sometimes, some form of financial compensation may be offered for costs incurred).



REASONS

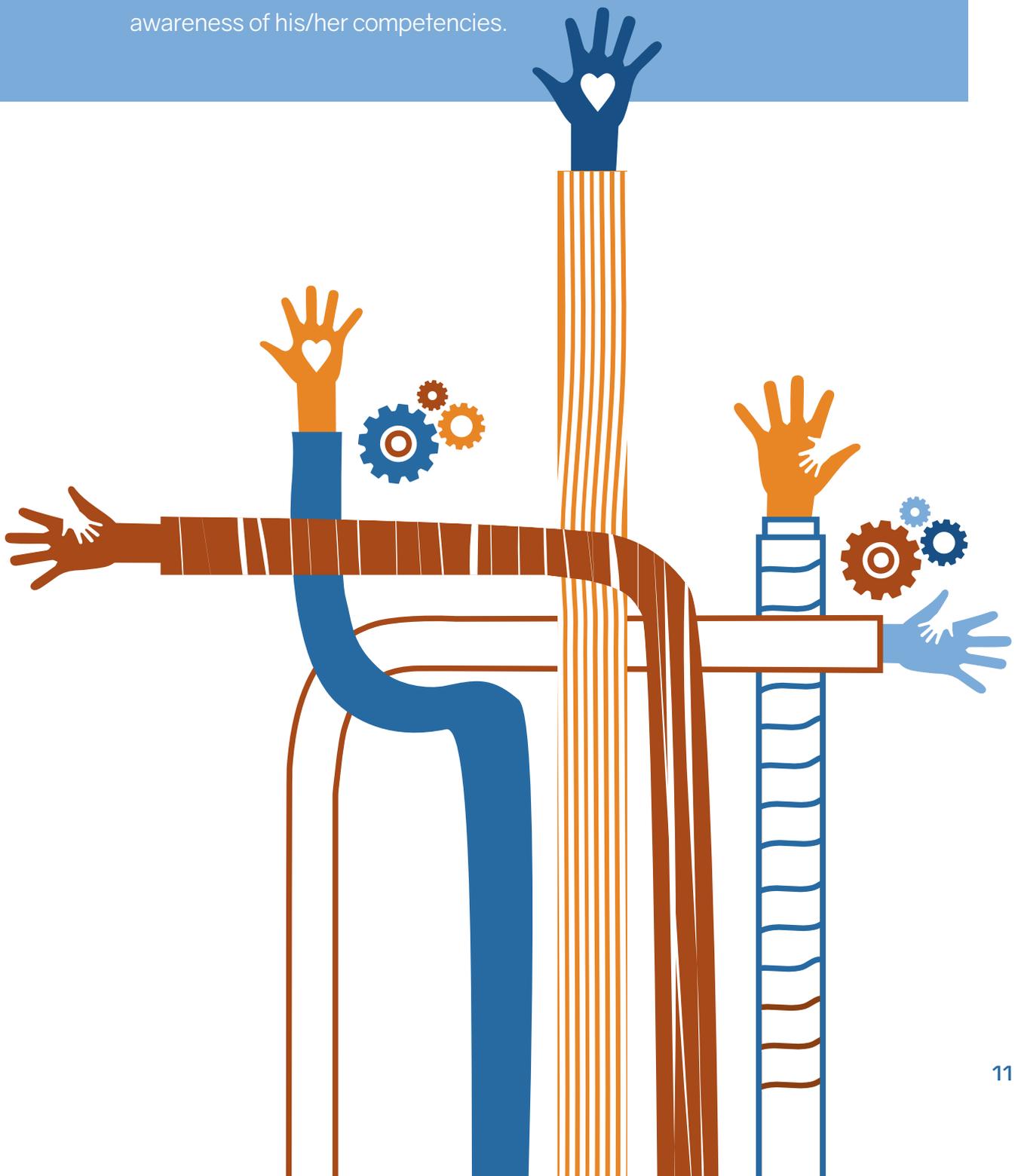
Among the many reasons for running volunteering projects, two extremes can be distinguished: the idealist and the pragmatist. The idealist organizations see volunteer service as a way of fostering tolerance, intercultural learning, social and cultural progress and the overall development of local communities. Idealist organizations put the accent on citizenship, active participation of individuals in society with commitment and, more specifically, an altruistic point of view. They prioritize the content and outcomes of their activities, expecting people to give their free time for the benefit of other individuals, organizations, communities and society in general. In fact, volunteers - including senior volunteers - bring a great benefit to the host organisation and the community and their work can influence various aspects of the social life. In the case of international projects, volunteers create intercultural learning and contribute to the dissemination of ideas and approaches in their home countries, bringing back a different and fresh look.

On the other extreme of the spectrum there are the pragmatist organizations, who put the accent on employability (referring to the sum of qualifications and skills that people have and that make it possible for them to attain a certain career or job), personal gains and capacity building, training for skills and social reintegration. In this perspective, the focus is to increase the volunteers' skills, giving them some work experience and making it easier for them to find jobs. Being the centre of their attention, volunteers are exposed to new personal experiences that help them to expand their horizons, to learn more about themselves and to grow as human beings.



These opposite concepts are a continuum and all positions between the two extremes are possible and, in fact, only the combination of both makes a project potentially successful: the satisfaction of a volunteer about the experiences and skills acquired remains incomplete without the sense of having effectively contributed towards a useful project for the local community.

In **Senior Plus Pathway**, we look at the volunteering experience from an educational point of view, thus, we conceive the volunteer work for seniors as a personal experience that makes the senior grow and reach a greater self-awareness of his/her competencies.



LEARNING

Volunteers should learn a lot during their service. The learning path is based on non-formal education methods and informal learning. While formal education refers to the academic learning in kindergarten, schools, universities with a fixed state program, non-formal education is conducted outside the formal education system or parallel to it.



Non-formal education



Formal education

Its aim is to develop or increase a person's civic, political, social and cultural participation in social life, as well as his/her abilities, competencies (including knowledge, skills and attitudes) and values. In general, **non-formal education is described with the following characteristics:**

- ☞ The participants take part in a modelled process, which is subject to modifications depending on their wishes, interests and expectations;
- ☞ Voluntary participation;
- ☞ Holistic model of learning with equal emphasis on intellectual, emotional and physical aspects (in symbols: brain, heart, hand), referring approaches, behaviour models, value systems, stereotypes;
- ☞ Receiving knowledge and skills due to the direct participation in horizontal learning processes, without any hierarchy;
- ☞ The participants' self-assessment of their learning outcomes and their evaluation of the educational process or activity;
- ☞ Encouragement of mutual support and team spirit, excluding exams, tests and preventing competition;
- ☞ Participants receive a certificate for their participation (no grades).

There is also informal education, which is unplanned learning and takes place unintentionally from life experience. Volunteering, which is also experiential learning, meaning learning by doing, often helps to face current challenges, such as passive citizenship, demands of information society, international integration and solidarity, active globalization processes, the gap between economic transformation or changes and formal education. There has been a shift from seeing education as a transfer of knowledge towards a new vision that sees education as way to develop transferrable competencies that equip people for adult life and further learning. Competencies, generally speaking, are what we use in 'shaping our own future'.

A 'competency' is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to a situation. 'Key Competencies' are those that support our personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

With the volunteer service projects in Senior Plus Pathway, the organizations can follow and measure the volunteer's learning path, since the gaining of competencies and documenting them is an ongoing process requiring constant reflection during the entire service. This experience is used as a life-long learning path, as well as to enhance the senior's employability.

According to national and European policy, peoples' employability should be increased by making formal and vocational schooling more adapted to the labour market and/or giving people more opportunities of "work experience". Volunteer work can respond to this need and thus contribute to peoples' chances of a successful professional life.

Dewey affirmed: "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience". Kolb's learning theory defines four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. Kolb includes this 'learning cycle' as a central principle in his experiential learning theory and says that, ideally, this cycle comprises four stages or learning styles: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. In this theoretical framework, the senior's volunteering experience needs to be reflected on, in order to allow them to recognize the competencies associated to their experience and to plan a possible different use for them, fostering their own employability.



James E. Zull contributed to a different application of Kolb's theories that identifies the need to complete the metacognition with a step to test implications of concepts in new situations. This is a new way to interpret what Kolb was defending: "We have an experience, through observation and reflection on this experience (metacognition), we transfer what we learnt in new situations".

The application of these theories and models to the Senior Plus Method results in a process in which:

- a)** the seniors have a training in which they reflect about their accumulated experience;
- b)** they learn to translate that experience into an e-portfolio;
- c)** they are involved in local and international volunteer work;
- d)** they reflect about the learning experience developed with volunteer service, in a sense of "self-knowledge, awareness of how and why we think as we do, and the ability to adapt and learn, [which?] is critical to our survival as individuals" (Z. Zull);
- e)** they include this reflection in the e-portfolio and use it to enhance their employability.

So, the Volunteer Service is a crucial phase in the seniors' individual learning process and, depending if it is local or international, has different individual impacts. Indeed, it involves different experiences, such as contact with a different cultural setting, and this gives rise to different reflections and different competencies that the seniors may later use to enhance their employability.

DIMENSIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

FIELDS OF WORK

In general, the areas of volunteer service projects can be as varied as: Social, Environmental, Educational projects and professional training, Emergency action, Prevention and reconstruction, Rural development and renovation, Peace and reconciliation, Cultural heritage preservation, Support for youth work, Virtual volunteering.

In **Senior Plus**, the participants who do **International Volunteer Work** experience intercultural dialogue by volunteering in a different context from their original one, facing challenges similar to the ones of a job insertion or of an entrepreneurial experience in a new context. The participants that undertake a **Local Volunteer Work** develop volunteer service in different fields (cultural, social) and with different target groups. Through this kind of volunteer work, the Seniors have the possibility to enter in a new organizational reality and discover other fields that are different from the ones that they are already familiar with. They have the opportunity to test new awareness acquired during the training pathway.

THE VOLUNTARY WORK EXPERIENCE IN SENIOR PLUS PATHWAY

The Senior Plus Method includes **Local and International Volunteer Work** as a key component in the individual's learning process with great impact on the individual and the host organisations.

In Senior Plus we are involving 20 seniors from each participant country in Volunteering Experiences, 12 of them in Local Volunteer Work and 8 in International Volunteer Work.



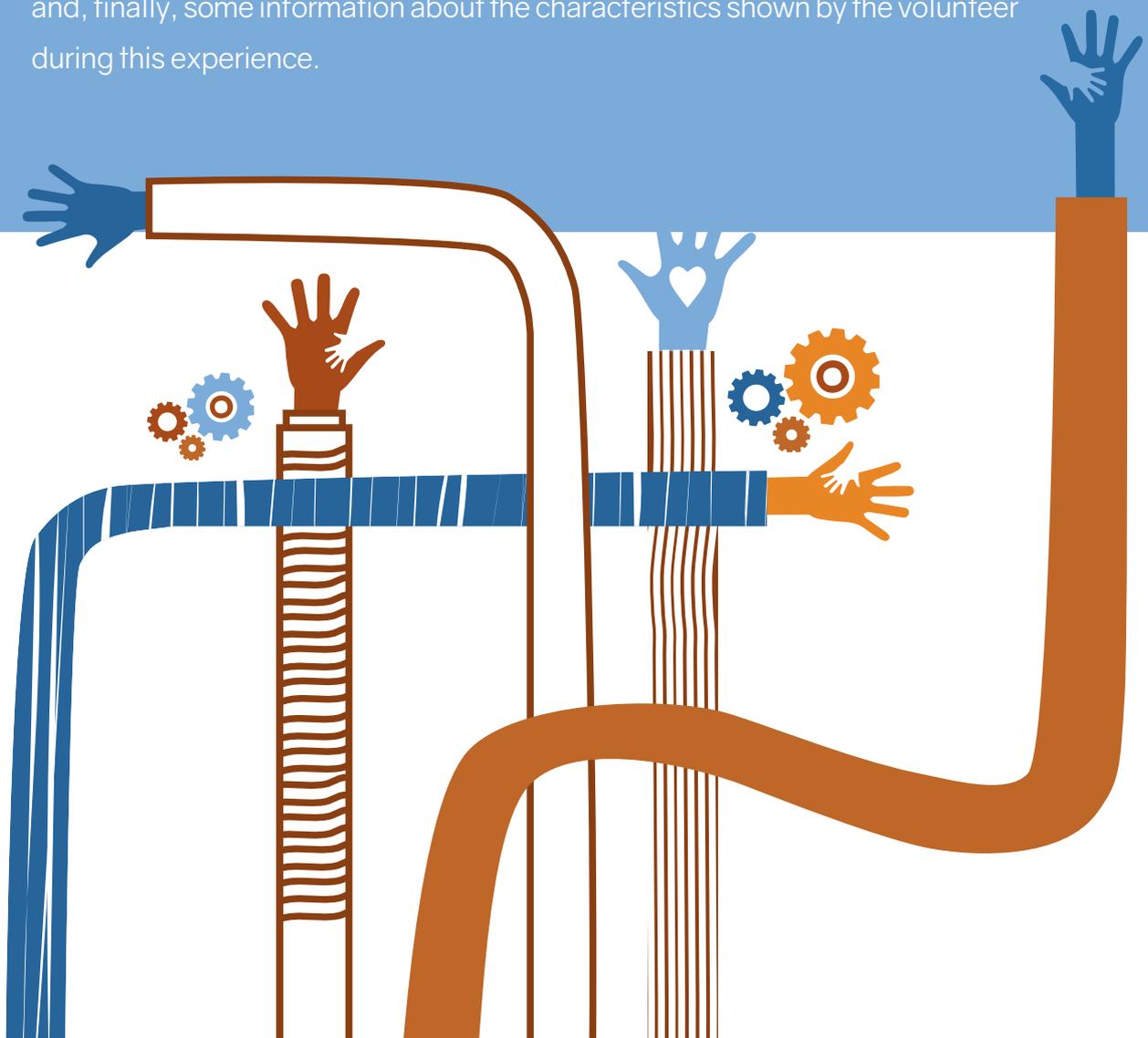
In terms of time investment:

The **International Volunteer Work** undertakes 21 days abroad. Before starting the service, the organisations and participants sign a **Volunteering Abroad Agreement** and at the end of the service the participant receives a **Certificate of Participation in Volunteering Abroad**.

For the **Local Volunteer Work**, we have two different types of engagement:

☞ **Short term engagement:** implies a minimum of 8 hours of Volunteer Work. At the end of the service the volunteer receives a Certificate of Attendance saying that he/she did it.

☞ **Long term engagement:** implies a minimum of 60 hours of Volunteer Work. Before starting the volunteer service, a **Contract of Volunteer Work** is signed between the volunteer and the organisations. At the end of the service, the volunteer receives a **Certificate of Attendance** with information about the duration of the volunteer work, where it was done, what exactly he/she did and, finally, some information about the characteristics shown by the volunteer during this experience.



AGE AND INDIVIDUAL APPROPRIATE APPROACH

It is important to have in mind an individual approach, by considering the experience of each person and using the guidelines of Adult Education principles.

We must always remember that, on the one hand, with a longer life expectancy many people aged 50+ years are still very young in their thoughts and outlooks. On the other hand, for some the sense of ageing and the fear that he/she is too old to get another job is very real. Everyone is an individual and we must assess their needs and decide the most appropriate strategy to work with them in order to maximise the outcomes.

While working with adults over 50 years of age, the workers should focus on identifying positive and negative past experiences with learning and coincide the activities with their life concerns and problems. While working or interacting with them, the workers should establish realistic short-term goals, increase safety precautions, provide a safe environment and frequent rest periods, assess resources and use pertinent material.

In our experience with seniors, we have noticed it can be useful to use methods like concrete examples, positive reinforcement, to present one concept at a time and allow time for processing and responses. We think that it can also be useful to use verbal exchange and coaching, encourage active involvement, keep explanations brief, use analogies to illustrate abstract information, demonstrate the relevance of information to daily life, integrate new behaviours with formally established ones, and help to maintain independence and normal life patterns.

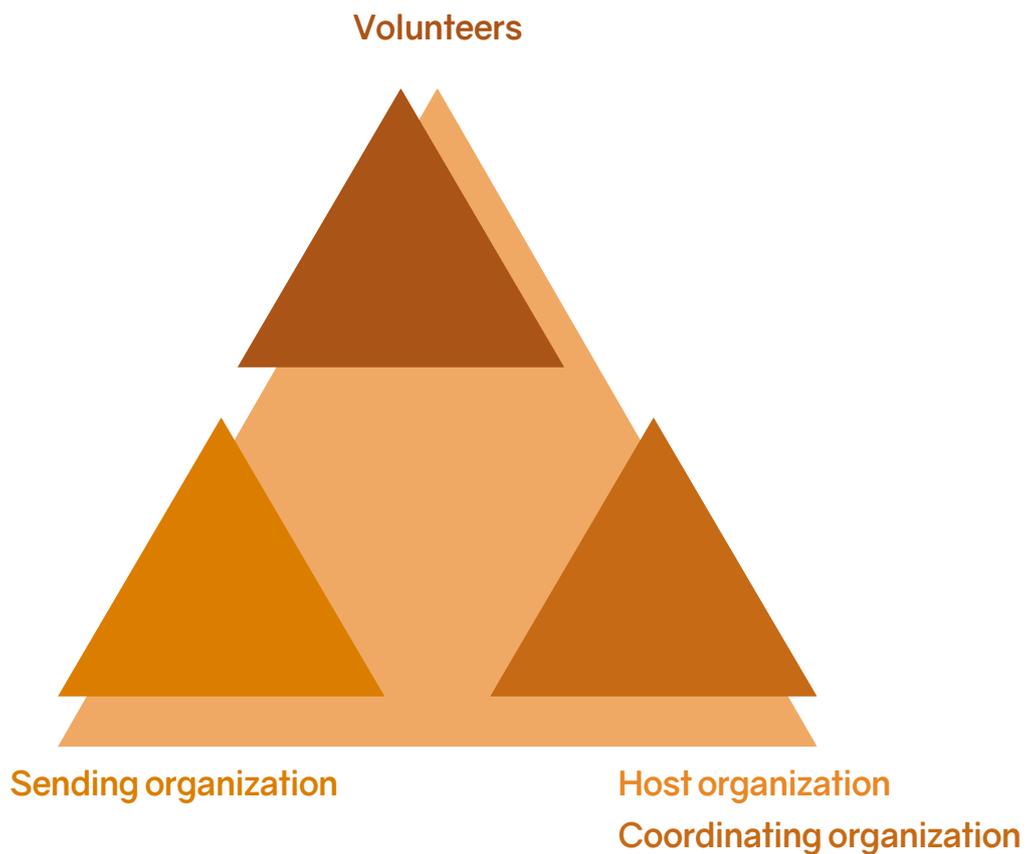
Therefore, each project or activity should be adapted according to an individual approach that respects the needs and learning styles of each individual volunteer.



PLANNING

THE ACTORS

The actors involved in a volunteer service (VS) are different in the case of international or of local volunteering. Three key actors are considered in international volunteer service (IVS): the volunteers, the host organization and, in case of international mobility projects, the sending organization. Sometimes the project coordination is not done by the host organization but by another organization, which is called the coordinating organization.



Volunteers: the participants in Senior Plus Project, seniors older than 50 years.

Host organization: The organization where volunteers are hosted and where the volunteer work takes place. A hosting organization, as well as sending or coordinating organization, can be any non-profit organization, working in a variety of fields. It can be a non-governmental or a governmental organization (such as a local authority), an informal group or a local entity. It can also be part of an international network of VS organizations.

Sending organization: This organization takes the necessary steps to send the volunteer to an IVS project, through its international links. This local organization takes care of all the procedures needed to send volunteers to a partner organization in another country and welcome them back. In case of local volunteering there is no sending organization.

Coordinating organization: The project coordination is normally conducted by the host organization. In the case of international projects it can also be coordinated by the sending organization. However, sometimes for practical reasons, and mainly in large scale projects that involve several volunteers, there can be another organization that is responsible for coordinating the overall project and all the actors involved, working with different placements in other organizations.



PROJECT CYCLE

Ideas require effort to crystallize and to become reality. They need careful planning and good management, including a good analysis, SMART objectives, a thought-through strategy, a good partnership, a clear task division, realistic time planning and careful budgeting.

The project cycle of the VS has some important steps, such as:

- ☞ Aims & concept definition;
- ☞ Partners;
- ☞ Volunteers recruitment;
- ☞ Specific groups consideration;
- ☞ Preparation;
- ☞ On arrival training;
- ☞ Support & motivation;
- ☞ Evaluation & follow-up;
- ☞ Recognition.

We will cover the first two points in the present chapter and the remaining points of the project cycle in next chapter: **Implementation in Senior Plus.**

AIMS AND CONCEPT DEFINITION

The project idea has to emerge and grow into a complete plan or thought-through strategy with well-defined objectives before embarking on the journey, so that they are measurable afterwards. The VS project should fit into the strategy of the host organization, its mission, vision and values, understanding the team's expectations, reasons, priorities and role of the VS.

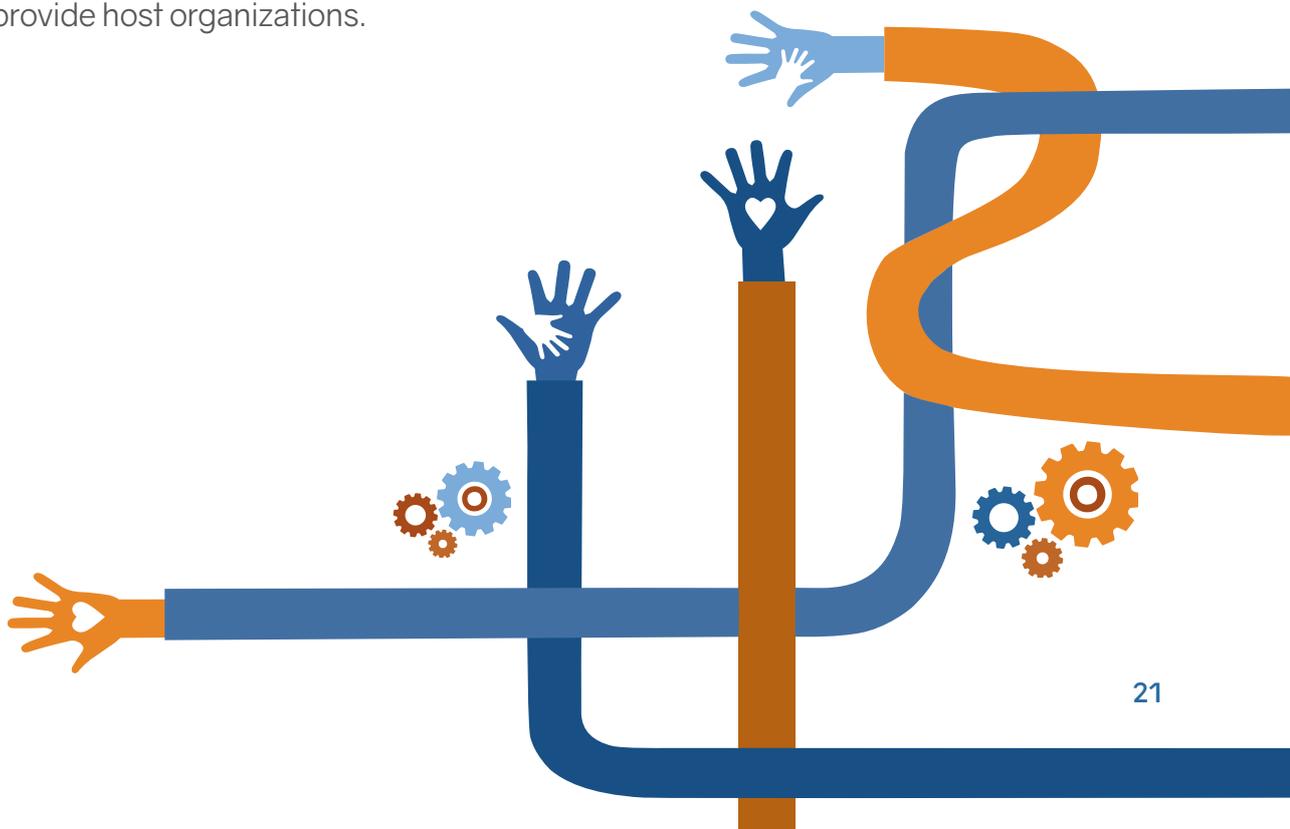
The first step is to understand the reasons and justification for the time, money and effort investments and to define the intended achievements and SMART goals. SMART is an abbreviation, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. If there is a complex structure of different aims, it's good to make all aims explicit and have a common understanding of the priorities.

Apart from the central question “Why”, the aim and concept definition should also combine the answers to the rest of the W-questions, followed by the reasons for doing each one in a certain way:

- 👉 **Who** will be involved and **Why?** For instance, partner organizations, staff, volunteers, support persons, funders, local authorities or others;
- 👉 **What** will be done during the service and **Why?** For instance, work program, leisure activities, etc;
- 👉 **Where** will the service take place and **Why?** For instance, work place, accommodation, etc;
- 👉 **When** and in which time frame will the service be done and **Why?** For instance, timing, season, duration, etc;
- 👉 **How** and in which manner will the project be managed and **Why?** For instance, methods and resources used, support structures, etc.

PARTNERS

Senior Plus has an international consortium with a large experience in exchanges and international volunteer work as coordinating, host and sending organizations. This consortium is prepared to do this in an efficient and successful way. At a local level, the organizations have local networks that provide host organizations.



IMPLEMENTATION IN SENIOR PLUS

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

It is very important to have a clear idea about the objectives of the Volunteer Service in Senior Plus in a perspective of individual learning, self-awareness and skills development and how all this process is demonstrated in the e-portfolio and used to promote their own employability. The organization should have a clear idea about the reason for the project and the volunteers' expectations, developing a detailed "job description" for them that includes the aims and importance of the project, its objectives, the tasks and responsibilities, required skills or qualifications, benefits, schedules, location, performance measurement, support, leisure possibilities, evaluation and follow-up. It's possible to create an ideal volunteer profile and to recruit according to it, while it's also an option to anticipate the interests and needs of volunteers and to develop the projects accordingly.



SPECIFIC GROUPS

Seniors over 50 years old can be considered a specific group. They might need special support and additional resources for participating in a VS program, but they should never be stigmatized as disadvantaged or disabled. If planned properly, it can become a life-changing experience for the volunteers.

There are several approaches that can be useful and it is good to gradually familiarize them with the kind of situation they will end up in. To coach them in the best possible manner and to ensure the physical and moral safety of all, the workers should have a profound knowledge about social exclusion and a clear notion about the volunteers' background and profile, within the limits of confidentiality. It's important to build a trust relationship with respect, attention, regular meetings, and involvement in decision making. The working and learning methods should be adapted to the specific features of the volunteer, especially when working with volunteers who have learning difficulties. In those cases, visual materials such as videos and pictures, oral contact, experiential learning or learning by doing would probably work better. It is advisable to keep them away from everything that reminds them of school.

One of the aims of VS is to give the necessary self-esteem. Thus, it's important to create a chain of successes for the volunteers, starting with small tasks but gradually providing bigger challenges with enough support, follow-up and positive feedback. Failures should be used as constructive learning experiences. There should also be an atmosphere in which the volunteers feel at ease with chats, jokes, etc., being careful not to make the volunteer feel awkward or a burden. Motivation is a big problem for socially excluded groups, so there should be an emphasis on the ongoing support: intercultural (explaining cultural differences or misunderstandings), professional (introduction to tasks and work environment, trainings) and personal (social support in the daily life of the volunteer).

PREPARATION

The success of a VS project depends on the quality of the preparation of all actors involved. A lot of crisis and conflict situations can be prevented by thorough preparation, which will require some time investment. Preparation of the volunteer can be structured around the following points: motivation and expectations, the work and living conditions and, in the case of international projects, intercultural preparation. Knowing the motivations of the prospective volunteers applying to participate in a volunteer project is essential to avoid misunderstandings. It is equally important to raise the volunteers' awareness of the host organization's motives. The expectations from both sides should be adjusted to each other..

The preparation can be done through a motivation brainstorm, reflections on the term and concept, the fears and expectations and in many other ways. The organizations should give all the necessary information about the working and living conditions to reduce the anxiety and the uncertainty.

Here is a checklist of the things the volunteers will need to know:

Working conditions:

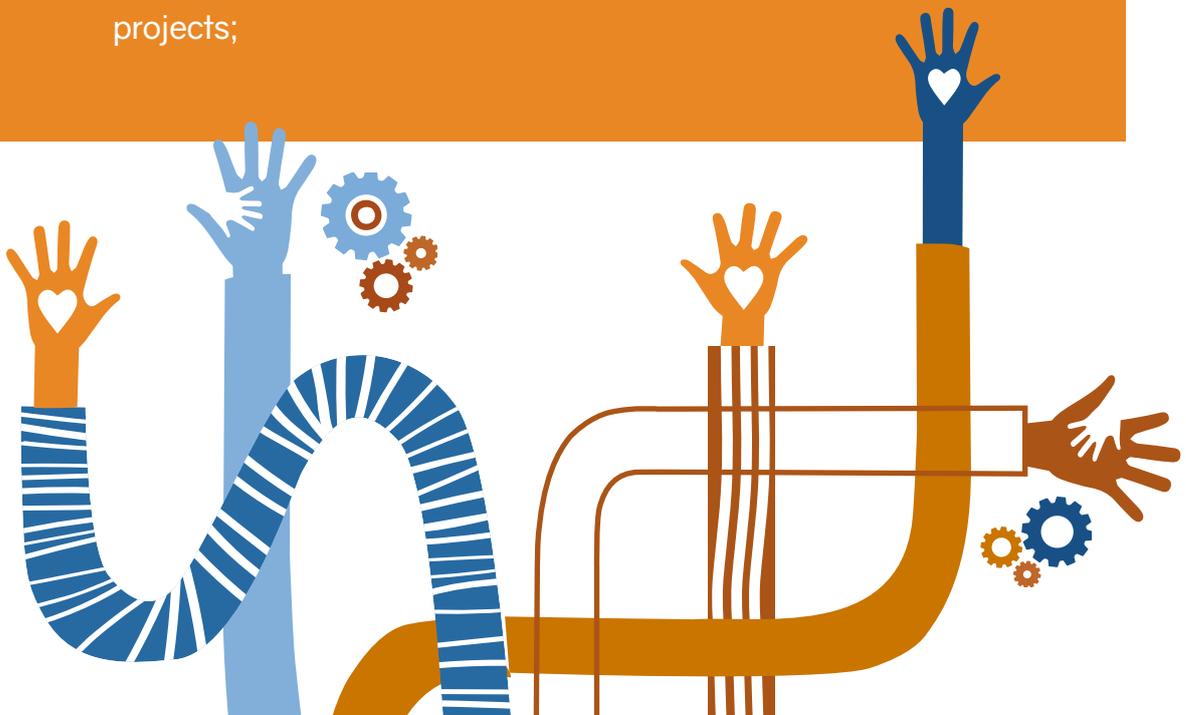
- ☛ Organization overview (mission, aim, objectives, history, work field, activities);
- ☛ Detailed project and job description (aims, tasks, activities, impact, benefits, expectations of the organization, time frame, special work related requirements);
- ☛ Support (training, support person, language training);
- ☛ Description of the host organization and the staff;
- ☛ Safety rules;
- ☛ Suggestion of ways to give and gain as much as possible with satisfying outcomes.

Living conditions (in case of International Voluntary Work):

- ☞ Practical details (insurance, financial, health, social security, emergency procedures, etc.);
- ☞ Food and housing arrangements (location of the work and living quarters, accommodation with photos, privacy, nearby facilities, etc.);
- ☞ Travel arrangements (visa, travel instructions, local transport, etc.);
- ☞ Financial arrangements (contributions, pocket money, etc.);
- ☞ General information about the host country.

Here are suggestions to use or follow while providing information:

- ☞ Interactive sessions;
- ☞ Space for questions, suggestions and discussion;
- ☞ Former volunteer's testimonies;
- ☞ Host country presentations, in the case of international projects;
- ☞ Skype meeting with host organization staff;
- ☞ Games and audio-visual materials;
- ☞ References for further research: literature or websites;
- ☞ Contact details;
- ☞ A basic language course, if possible and in the case of international projects;



The intercultural preparation should raise awareness about cultural concepts that exist in the volunteer's own cultural background and in the host community, possible intercultural encounters, increasing sense of observation and the importance of cultural influence and diversity instead of being guided by stereotypes.

The preparation of the volunteer should be finalised with the signing of a Contract of Volunteer Work between the volunteer and the organizations involved, which sums up all the relevant information and consolidates the volunteering commitment.

Host organizations should be thoroughly prepared as well. First, they should have a clear idea about the volunteer's tasks and ensure the availability of the technical needs or tools beforehand, as well as the necessary conditions for appropriate living and to satisfy volunteer's basic human needs. Before the service, the host organization should prepare a complete information pack that includes all the above-mentioned work and living details to be used by the volunteers and the sending organization, in case there is one.

For a fruitful work outcome, social and leisure needs also need to be satisfied. The start of any service should make the volunteer feel welcomed and at ease. Picking the volunteers up at the airport or station, an orientation tour in the organization, explanations of the board and lodging facilities, a welcome drink or other nice gestures can set the tone for the rest of the stay. All the staff should be involved and aware of the project and should understand the volunteer's specific intercultural situation.

The support to the volunteer should include:

- ☛ Support in the daily tasks, agreeing on the work plan, ensuring they have the necessary skills and sorting out job related problems (e.g. language barrier);
- ☛ If the project has mobility then support for the adaptation to a new cultural environment, for acclimatization, for dealing with emotional issues, as well as help to integrate into the social life of the local community.

During this preparation stage the personal e-portfolio is the tool that includes the volunteer's employment history, educational background, skills / expertise, leisure interests, photo, health and wellbeing, next of kin contact details, and any other necessary information. This tool is used by the organizations to know in advance more about the volunteers and act accordingly, matching the work and living in the best possible way.

Finally, during the volunteer service the projects often need proper dissemination, so the organizations should prepare necessary material for media or social media.

ON-ARRIVAL TRAINING

Right before the start of the volunteer service it's crucial to have further preparation that can be done through meetings or trainings. In the case of international projects, these initial trainings are called on-arrival, as they happen immediately after the arrival in the new country and organization. In the case of local volunteer services, even though they remain in their own country, the aim and the content of on-arrival trainings should also be considered for a kick off training that prepares them for starting a service in a new organization with a different environment. The less experienced the volunteer is and the longer the service is, the more important is the training, which can last from a few hours in a welcome meeting to several days of seminars, depending on the type of the project. Sometimes the impression does not necessarily correspond to the expectations, especially when service is in another country, therefore intercultural differences should be taken into consideration as much as possible.

On-arrival (international volunteering) or kick-off (local volunteering) trainings should include a welcoming, an introduction to the host organization and the project, technical aspects and information about intercultural learning, the region, country or local culture if necessary. It should also provide space for an introduction of the volunteer (and the sending organization if there is one) and to reflect on his/her motivations, expectations, needs and skills, as well as his/her ideas and suggestions. Sometimes peer education can be used through enthusiastic members of the organization or the community. All these details and clarifications will prevent possible misunderstandings.



Here are some hints:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee a proper and positive meeting, including welcoming, transfer to the apartment upon arriving at the airport or station, presenting the living conditions, rules, contact details, giving a welcome pack with food, map, transportation card etc, having a welcome dinner together if possible;

2. Explain the local facilities, such as shops, libraries, post office, healthcare, places of interest and information centres;

3. Make a clear Action Plan and timetable of all the activities and tasks, considering the individual features and preferences;

4. Conduct an introduction of the entire staff and team to integrate the volunteer, as well as of the venue, location and so on;

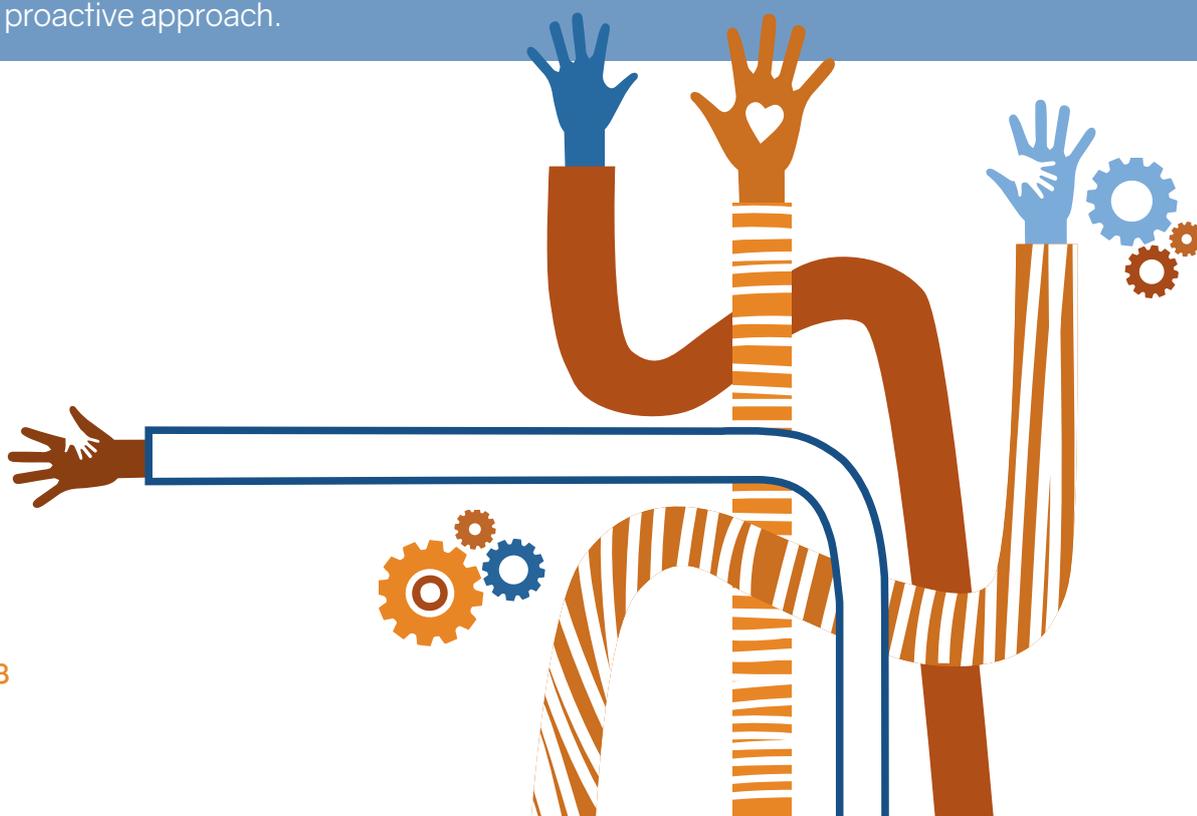
5. Give the volunteer time and the necessary help to explore the organization, the reading materials and to explore the new place, the new environment, culture and country (in case of IVS);

6. If the project includes language class, arrange it right after the arrival;

7. Establish a clear and punctual financial arrangement;

8. Initiate social interactions with other volunteers or other local people;

9. Provide space for the volunteer's innovative thinking, new ideas and proactive approach.



MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT

MOTIVATION

It is important to keep the volunteers motivated. Motivation is energy, excitement, enthusiasm and effort. Volunteers are usually motivated for different reasons. Most are not altruistic to the point of doing some work for nothing. Their efforts are in exchange for the fulfilment of certain needs, a symbolic, social, pragmatic and psychological return for their contributions rather than material benefits. If not, they won't like the service and will leave it, which is why the organization has an interest to keep them happy to be volunteers, conducting efficient volunteer management in order to maintain them.

Volunteers have different motives. Mostly they want to help people, to do something useful, to acquire skills, to increase their employability, to get to know people, to have a good time, to gain status and recognition, to belong to a group, to express their own identity, to put values into practice, to find a way in life, among many other things. Knowing what they can offer, knowing well the volunteers and their needs, the organization should find an ideal common ground of giving and taking, which should be ongoing and balanced by both parts. Providing the volunteers with work that is in line with their preferences is a plus for motivation (creative activities, social or practical tasks, etc.). The volunteers should be involved in setting the aims and determining the tasks so that they feel ownership and responsible for them.

Some important suggestions to foster motivation:

- ☞ The work really needs to be done – so volunteers feel needed;
- ☞ The job done should be appreciated and recognized by the staff;
- ☞ The work should be interesting, challenging and rewarding;
- ☞ The goals should be clear, constantly reviewed, keeping the records of the results and the volunteer's performance;
- ☞ Regular feedback sessions should be built in, monitoring volunteer's development both personal and professional;
- ☞ Sharing responsibility for results with focus on a meaningful final product;

- ☞ Symbolic rewards: fun or out-of-work activities, dinners, weekend outings, learning new skills, little gifts, a genuine compliment;
- ☞ The volunteers should have the authority of critical and analytic thinking;
- ☞ Guiding and supervising the volunteer whenever needed;
- ☞ More positive than negative feedback based on objective and observable facts;
- ☞ Taking mistakes and failures as learning experiences;
- ☞ Preventing dissatisfaction in the work environment, such as noise, no access to computer, unusual working hours, lack of interpersonal relationships.

SUPPORT

Volunteers should receive ongoing support throughout the entire service for their well-being and the success of the project. Sometimes the volunteers need to adopt or adapt to the work culture and social environment and need to develop some new skills to work efficiently. There should be a support person (sometimes called a mentor, coach, volunteer manager or tutor) who guides the learning process and the contribution of the volunteers, especially in long-term engagement volunteer service. The support person (SP) must have the necessary availability for the volunteer to easily reach and contact whenever necessary, e.g. in case of work related, personal, physical and health problems, stress, depression, homesickness, concerns, hesitations and any other problems. The SP should create a comfort zone for the volunteer to communicate and interact freely and should help with finding solutions, getting the necessary resources and tools, always considering the volunteer's professional and personal needs, suggestions and expectations.

The SP should monitor or assess the performance of the volunteer through regular meetings, focusing on the positive achievements, the learning outcome, as well as giving objective feedback, as comments are steps in a learning process and not a judgment on someone's personality or capacities.

He/she should have Active listening skills (e.g. responding with nods, smiles and encouraging questions), making sure all the messages were understood, sometimes rephrasing and asking for confirmation. The SP should ensure the volunteers' well-being and be alert to notice problems like loss of appetite, sleeplessness, tiredness, homesickness, anger, fear of being cheated, resentment towards locals, impatience, defensive or aggressive behaviour and so on. He/she should try to find solutions for the problems, encouraging the volunteers to overcome them.



EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

EVALUATION

Evaluation should be an integral part of the VS, measuring the set goals. The evaluation can address work and learning outcomes (accomplished work and tasks, gained skills, trainings, etc.), social integration (making friends, having fun, getting along with colleagues, etc.), intercultural dimension (knowing the people, experiencing the country, culture, learning a language), personal issues (motivation, homesickness, conflicts, etc.), practical arrangements (food, accommodation, transport, free-time and leisure, etc.) and other aspects of the service.

In **Senior Plus Pathway** there are different kinds of evaluation depending on the type of Volunteer Service that is developed, namely if it is a short-term engagement or a long-term engagement.

In terms of Certificates, at the end of the volunteer service the participant always receives a Certificate of Attendance, saying that he/she did a volunteer experience. In the case of long-term engagement, the participant receives a Certificate of Attendance that gives specific information about the duration of the volunteer work, where it happened, what specific tasks were developed and a description about the characteristics shown by the volunteer during the experience.

After finishing the service the volunteers might have difficulties with reintegration in their home country (in case of service abroad) or in their previous environment and activities, especially in case of long-term projects. The volunteers should have follow-up opportunities, which show the impact of the project. Right after the service, the workers should arrange meetings to compare expectations or objectives with the actual outcomes and to identify the main negative and positive outcomes, dealing constructively with the negative ones. It is also an opportunity for volunteers to share or exchange their experience, as a lot of volunteers conduct the service also to develop skills (language, social, practical etc) outside the regular schooling or training opportunities for their future pathway. Thus, it's important to keep this educational perspective in mind and relate them to future plans or activities. After the evaluation, they might decide to practice new working methods and activities, following suggestions or simply realizing the need for change.



RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCES

Volunteering in the **SeniorPlus** Method is a great learning path that provides competencies also necessary for employability. The volunteers gain valuable life experience and skills, which will certainly have an impact on their personal and professional development. They gain soft skills such as communication, team work, decision making, language, intercultural and other skills, as well as become flexible and autonomous. The mentors or workers should raise the volunteers' awareness of their learning by using a variety of methods, such as discussions, learning diaries, reflections on certain exact competencies, non-formal learning and personal development and peer reflections. The centre of the validation process is the individual, so the validation should be considered in light of the impact on the individual. All the learning outcomes should be documented afterwards to increase people's employability chances of success in the labour market and included in the e- portfolio.

EUROPEAN PATHFINDER PLATFORM AND E-PORTFOLIO

The Pathfinders Platform is a multilingual interface developed in the context of Senior Plus Project and its main function is to combine needs and opportunities so that seniors have the possibility to consider different paths that support lifelong learning through the experience of volunteer work.

In order to do this combination, the platform gathers information about local and international organizations and projects that are willing to receive a senior for a volunteer work period and seniors are able to link to it their own profile for potential volunteer work with direct access to the E-Portfolio system prepared by Senior Plus.

This Platform system can then combine requests, offers, and training/preparation courses available for seniors by cross-referencing the information, suggesting the organisations that are available for preparation or for welcoming volunteer work and that better fit the needs of the seniors.

The E-Portfolio is a simple-to-use tool for seniors that offers the possibility to link videos and interactive elements, but its true specificity is that it gives importance not only to the experience but to the overall competencies of the candidate. Skills, life experience and stories are as important as a working position, or important in a different way: this tool can help the volunteer give these aspects the relevance he/she wants, due to the different possibilities of expression it provides.

The E-Portfolio allows a guided self-evaluation of their own competencies so that it can present information regarding individual competencies and a general description of the achievements in the fields of education, work, and life. The possibility for the user to choose the level of data to be published or not published due to considerations of sensitivity or discrimination according to the legislation of each of the countries, together with the possibility of associating videos, photographs, images and documents useful for a deeper knowledge of the candidate ensures that this tool can give a very personalized result in terms of the individual's profile.

During the local training sessions, the seniors begin to fill in the E-portfolio, which will be continuously updated until the end of the project and further, recording the competencies they will acquire on a long-term and life-long perspective.



SECTION II

For Volunteers



WHY VOLUNTEER WORK IN SENIOR PLUS?

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering signifies freely assumed intention, willingness to offer time, effort, skills and goodwill for the accomplishment of different tasks, activities and missions that bring benefit to others and to you.

WHY DO PEOPLE CHOOSE TO GET INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEER WORK?

Generally, people enrol in volunteering activities for different reasons: to express their altruistic and humanitarian values, because they care for humanity and for others; to gain new learning experiences and to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities; to interact with other people and work with them for their sake and benefit, feeling helpful; to have personal growth and development; to have career-related benefits by gaining competencies.

So, the question is:

WHY SHOULD I DO VOLUNTEER WORK IN SENIOR PLUS IF MY OBJECTIVE IS TO FIND A JOB??

In the **Senior Plus Pathway** we look at volunteer service as a learning experience, thus, we conceive the volunteer work as a personal experience that allows the person to grow and gain more self-awareness of his/her competencies.

We think that involving yourself in a Volunteering experience is a reactivation opportunity to enhance your employability.

What we are proposing in Senior Plus is a challenging international volunteer experience that implies competencies in intercultural dialogue by doing volunteer work in a different context from your original one; this way, you are facing similar challenges to the ones of a job insertion or of an entrepreneurial experience in a new context.

At the local level, **volunteer service** is an opportunity to enhance local networking and contacts, to test competencies and discover new working fields.

By doing volunteer service, at a local or international level, you are developing competencies that you can use in others contexts to enhance your employability and, finally, to find a job.



ACTORS INVOLVED

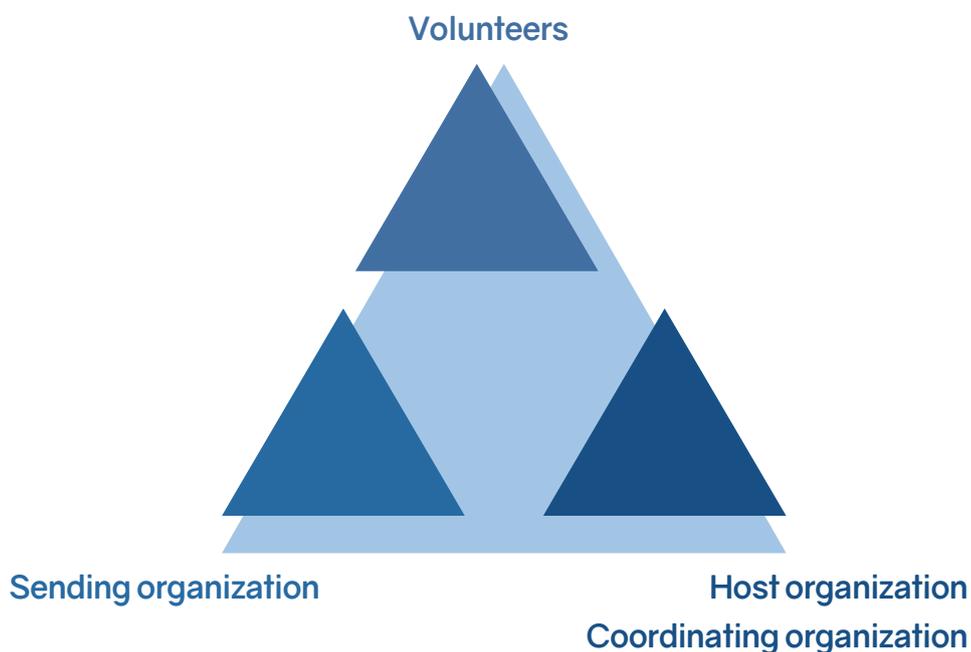
The actors involved in a volunteer service project are different in the cases of international or of local volunteering. Key actors considered in an international volunteer service (IVS) are: the volunteers, the host organization and, in case of international mobility projects, the sending organization. Sometimes the project coordination is done not by the host organization but by another organization, which is called the coordinating organization.

Senior Volunteers: Are people older than 50 years, who contribute by their own free will to a certain project with their energy, ideas and active participation.

Host organization: The organization where volunteers are hosted and where the volunteer work takes place.

Sending organization: This organization takes the necessary steps to send the volunteer to an IVS project, through its international links. This local organization takes care of all the procedures needed to send volunteers to a partner organization in another country and welcome them back. In the case of local volunteering there is no sending organization.

Coordinating organization: The project coordination is normally conducted by the host organization. However, in the case of international projects, it can also be coordinated by the sending organization.



INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL VOLUNTEERING

In Senior Plus you can do International or Local Volunteer Work.

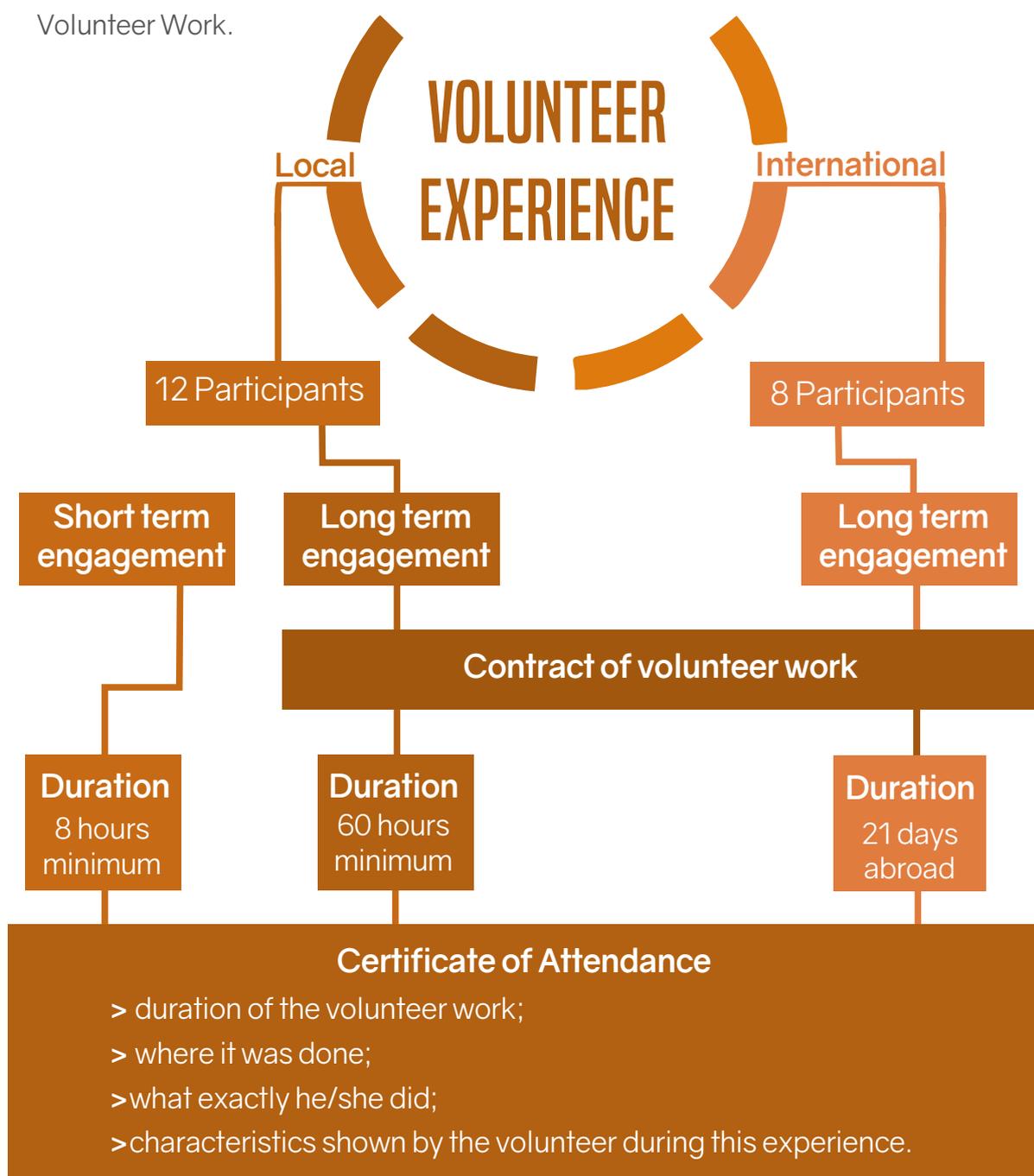
What you need to know about it in terms of **time investment**:

☞ **The International Voluntary Work undertakes 21 days abroad;**

For **Local Volunteer Work**, you can choose one of these two kinds of **engagement**:

☞ **Short term engagement**: implies you do a minimum of 8 hours of Volunteer Work.

☞ **Long term engagement**: implies you do a minimum of 60 hours of Volunteer Work.



BEFORE YOUR SERVICE

During your attendance of the local training you are invited to create an E-portfolio that is elaborated and continuously updated until the end of the project and further, recording the competencies you are acquiring during that time.

The E-portfolio is a complete curriculum that offers the possibility to link videos and interactive elements, but its true specificity is that it gives importance not only to the experience but to your overall competencies. Skills, life experience and stories are as important as a working position, or important in a different way: this tool can help you give these aspects the relevance you want thanks to the different possibilities of expression it provides.

After the matching between you and the hosting organisation, you may be invited to an interview just to allow a first contact and to check each other's expectations. This interview allows you and the organization time for questions and curiosities and to get more information if needed, helping to guarantee the perfect match to the specific placement.

Once you are selected to take part in the VS project, you will receive the necessary preparation and, in case the case of long term engagement, sign a Contract of Volunteer Work between you and the organizations involved. During this preparation, you will be given detailed information about the work and living conditions and, possibly, references for further research, such as literature or websites and contact details.

In the case of International Volunteer Work, you might also receive a basic language course and, if applicable, some intercultural preparation to learn about cultural concepts and possible intercultural encounters.

In the case of Local Volunteer Work, you receive preparation to help you understand better the organization in which you will be Volunteering and what it is expecting from you.



DURING YOUR SERVICE

In the host organization, you receive further preparation before starting to work, which can last from a few hours in a welcome meeting to several days of seminars depending on the type of project. You have **on-arrival** (international volunteering) or kick-off (local volunteering) trainings, which include welcoming, introduction to the host organization and the project, technical aspects and information about intercultural learning, the region, country or local culture if necessary. You can reflect on your motivations, expectations, needs and skills and share your ideas and suggestions.

During the service you have ongoing help, such as:

Learning support trainings and various educational sessions by the staff, experts or peers, group and individual meetings, dialogues, reading;

Support in the daily tasks: agreeing on a work plan, ensuring that you have the necessary skills and sorting out job related problems (e.g. language barrier);

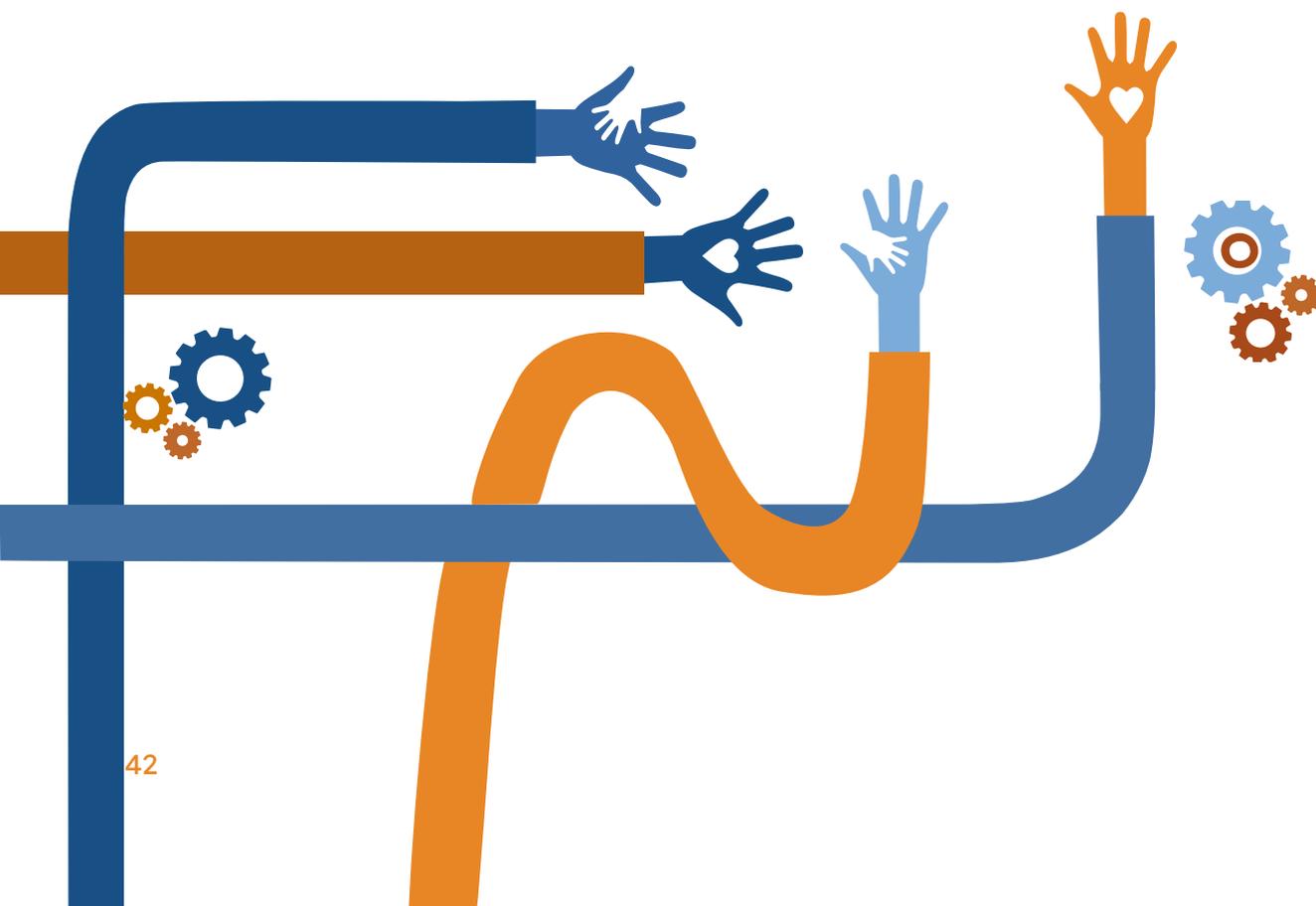
Adaptation to a new cultural environment: acclimatization, dealing with emotional issues, integration into the social life of the local community. This happens in International Volunteer Work, but also in Local Volunteer Work in terms of your adaptation of the hosting's organizational culture.

SUPPORT PERSON (SP)

You have a support person (sometimes called a mentor, coach, volunteer manager or tutor) who guides you through a peaceful stay, learning process and your own contribution. You can always easily reach and contact your SP whenever necessary, e.g. in case of work related, personal, physical and health problems, stress, depression, homesick, concerns, hesitations and any other problem.

The SP also helps you with the daily routine logistics, with social life and leisure, e.g. activities related to special interests, links to sport clubs, continuing a hobby, meetings with other volunteers, foreigners or local people. The SP together with the involved organizations and staff provide first aid for arising conflicts, helping to discover the issues, make the parties work together on conflict resolution and implement the proposed solutions with common agreement and satisfaction.

A VS project always includes certain evaluation procedures to assess the process, the development, the outcomes and results achieved and the quality of the project. Apart from being involved in the general evaluation prepared by the organization, you will continue to use the platform to update your e-portfolio with the new competencies achieved thanks to self-assessment, actively monitoring your learning process and considering your feelings, experiences and observations. You should regularly share your self-assessment with your SP, using the portfolio categories or your own creativity to express yourself in the way you prefer, and update your e-portfolio with references to your progress and new perspectives you may have on some aspects of your personal or professional life.



AFTER THE SERVICE

After finishing your service, you have meetings with the involved organizations to compare expectations or objectives with the actual outcomes, identifying the main negative and positive outcomes and dealing constructively with the negative ones. You should understand the educational perspective you had before and the actual learning outcomes you gained and relate them to your future plans or activities. For this you need a recognition or proof of your experience and achievement.

In case you do **International Volunteer Work**, at the end of the service you'll receive a **Certificate of Participation in Volunteering Abroad**.

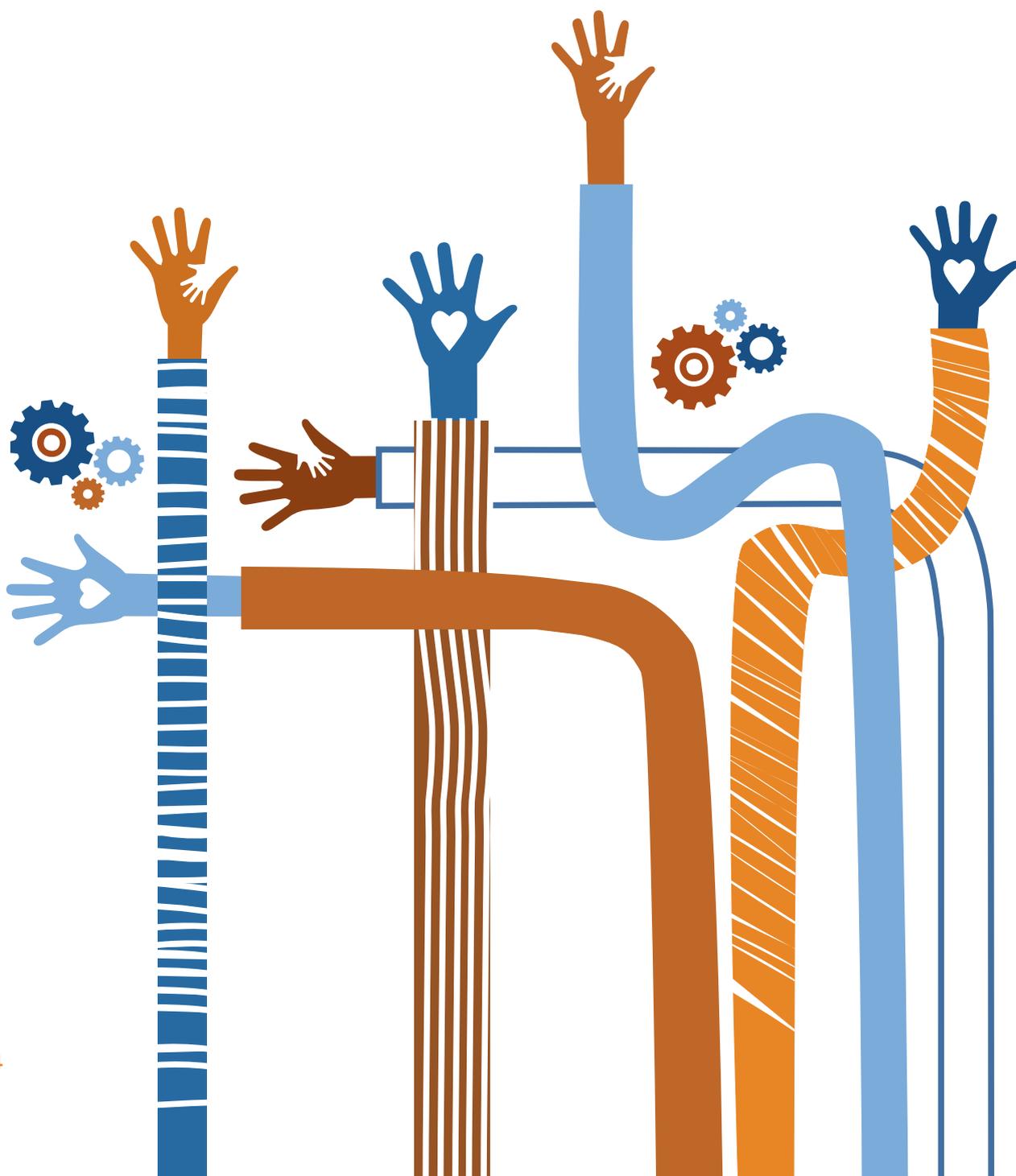
In the case of **Local Volunteer Work**, if you do a short-term engagement you will receive at the end of the service a Certificate of Attendance saying that you did it. If you do a **Long term engagement**, at the end of the service, you will receive a **Certificate of Attendance** and a **Contract of Volunteer Work**, with information about the duration of the volunteer work, where you did it, what exactly you did and, finally, some information about the characteristics shown by you as volunteer during this experience.



RECOGNITION: E-PORTFOLIO

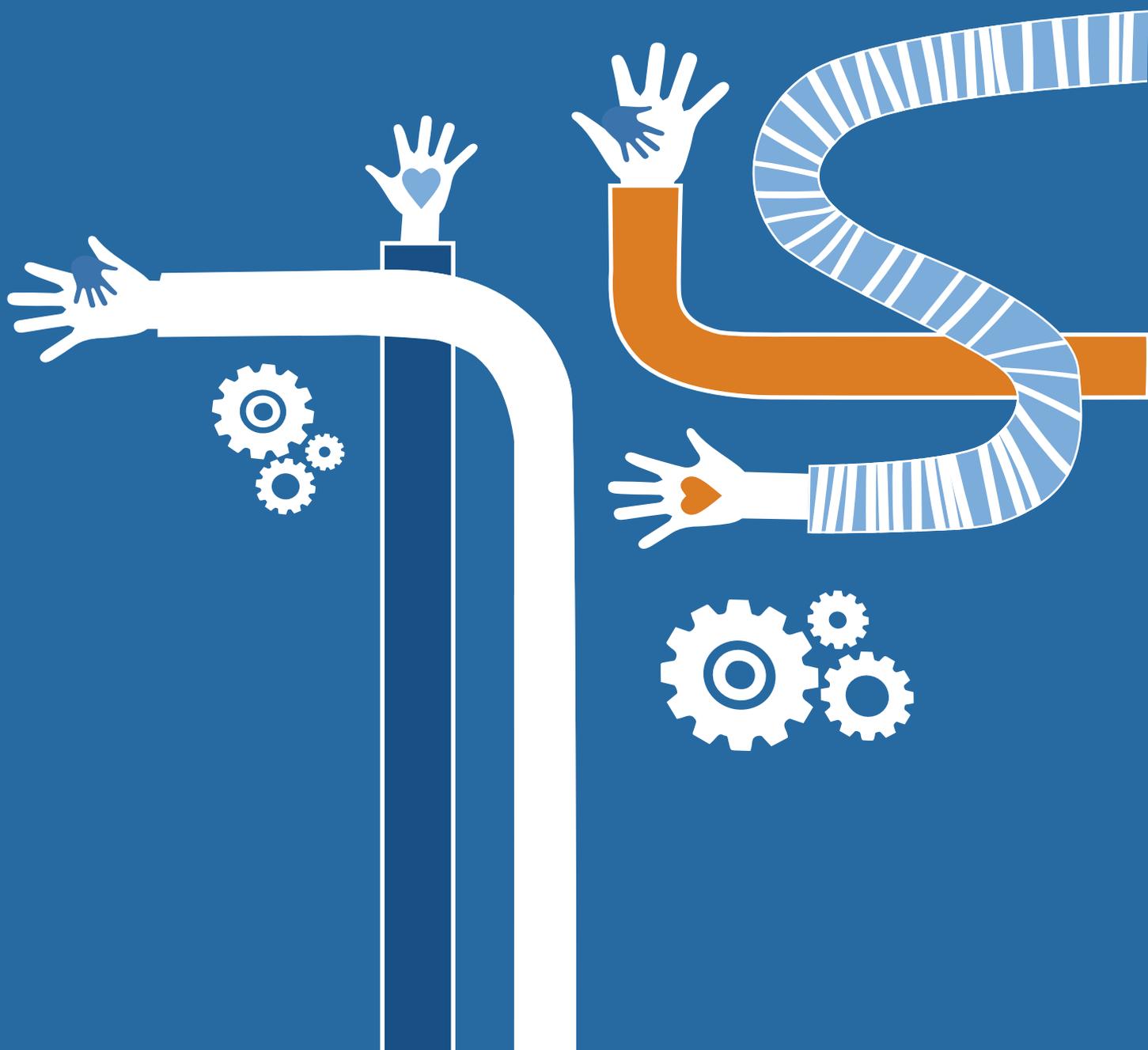
Volunteering is a great learning path that provides competencies also necessary for employability. You will probably gain valuable life experience, awareness, which will certainly have an impact on your personal and professional development. You gain social and soft skills, such as communication, team work, decision making, language, intercultural and other skills, as well as become flexible and autonomous. You also acquire work related professional knowledge and practical skills in different fields like administration, social care/services, intercultural communication, accountancy, environment and many more.

All these learning outcomes should be documented afterwards to increase your employability chances of success in the labour market and to get recognition for the experience. Senior Plus project has chosen E-portfolio as its recognition tool, which the volunteers use on an online platform. The E-Portfolio is a tool to record the gained competencies. It's an electronic collection of evidence (samples, photos, videos, research projects, observations or reflective thinking) that shows the learning path over time of specific academic fields or lifelong learning, allowing to a guided self-evaluation



SUCCESS STORIES

We present bellow some examples of seniors **volunteer success stories** developed in the context of previous projects led by the consortium's organizations, such as: Grundtvig Multilateral Project "SENIOR PASS" and Grundtvig Senior Volunteering Project "MOVE 50+ II Mobility Opportunity for Volunteering in Europe 50+ II".



LYNDA'S STORY

Name of the volunteer	Lynda Livsey-Randall	Photo
Age	60 years' old	
Project type and name	Senior Pass – Lifelong learning	
Organizations and countries involved	Community Action Dacorum (United Kingdom) Gulbenes Novada Dome (Latvia)	
Project theme and brief description	3-week exchange to give senior confidence to get back into work and see the importance of volunteering as way of adding skills and competencies.	
Dates/Duration	3 weeks: 18th Sept to 8th Oct 2014	
Short text coming from the participant explaining Outcomes and impact of the Project on his/her progress, what does it changed thanks to that project, if some personal or professional competences were achieved	<p>Being a valued and appreciated volunteer in Latvia gave me the confidence to apply to volunteer at a local museum as a tour guide. That did not go well, but undeterred I went on to volunteer at three other local organisations. One of which advertised a permanent paid position which I applied for. Now I have an interesting and rewarding job that I love. I also had the confidence to lose weight and am now a motivated, physically and emotionally changed woman.</p>	

EDI'S STORY

Name of the volunteer	Edi Saviola	Photo
Age	51 years' old	
Project type and name	Grundtvig Senior Volunteering Project “MOVE 50+ II Mobility Opportunity for Volunteering in Europe 50+ II”	
Organizations and countries involved	CEMEA del Mezzogiorno (Italy) Pistes Solidaires (France)	
Project theme and brief description	Senior Volunteering project supported by the Lifelong learning Programme in the educative and socio-cultural field.	
Dates/Duration	08/10/2013 - 05/11/2013 (1 month)	
Short text coming from the participant explaining Outcomes and impact of the Project on his/her progress, what does it changed thanks to that project, if some personal or professional competences were achieved	<p>Edi is from Lombardia region, in Italy. She used to work in Human Resources responsible in a Social Cooperative for disabled people. When she applied for the senior volunteering abroad she used to have a very busy life both at work and at home. She described her month abroad as her “oxygen therapy” where she hoped to find many new things to discover and enjoy. Her departure meant for her a way to rediscover herself in a new environment where it was possible to find new perspectives that could bring her new energy. The volunteering project gave her the possibility to focus more on herself, rather than only on the others, and to take that time to simply enjoy life and freshen her thoughts, in search for a new direction.</p> <p>Exactly one year after the volunteering in France she wrote to us: “I have changed my life. I have left the cooperative where I used to work. I have re-started massage courses and I have organized my new life/work in my house.”</p>	

PENNY'S STORY

Name of the volunteer	Penny Clifton	Photo
Age	Old enough!	
Project type and name	Senior Pass at Pistes Solidaires	
Organizations and countries involved	Community Action Dacorum (United Kingdom) Pistes Solidaires (France)	
Project theme and brief description	Senior Volunteering	
Dates/Duration	October 2014	
Short text coming from the participant explaining Outcomes and impact of the Project on his/her progress, what does it changed thanks to that project, if some personal or professional competences were achieved	<p>The placement gave me the chance to experience community volunteering in a small provincial city in France; to meet and work with like-minds and fellow volunteers from several countries; and to improve my knowledge of France and my grasp of the language. I was particularly interested in helping with Pau's community gardening project and in sharing cultural ideas and information through activities at local schools and at Pistes Solidaires itself. The project gave me an appreciation of how my professional and personal skills, built up over many years, have a value in many different settings. I came away feeling confident that there are many opportunities, previously unexplored, which are available to me as a 'senior'.</p> <p>Lastly, the project gave me an excellent understanding of the value of organizations co-operating and working together across Europe.</p>	

MARIO'S STORY

Name of the volunteer	Mario Nicosia	Photo
Age	56 years' old	
Project type and name	Grundtvig Multilateral Project "SENIOR PASS"	
Organizations and countries involved	CEMEA del Mezzogiorno (Italy) Community Action Dacorum (United Kingdom)	
Project theme and brief description	<p>Senior Pass was a project supported by the Lifelong Learning (LLP) programme focused on valuing the place of unemployed senior people between 50 and 65 years old in our societies, professionally and socially, and to give them a way to recover an active place. One important part of the project, with the aim to support seniors' employability, was a volunteering experience abroad.</p>	
Dates/Duration	<p>Dates of the volunteering experience abroad: 07.07.2014 – 27.07.2014 (3 weeks)</p>	

Short text coming from the participant explaining Outcomes and impact of the Project on his/her progress, what does it changed thanks to that project, if some personal or professional competences were achieved

My name is Mario Nicosia and I am from Rome.

I have worked for a multinational company in the automotive industry for over 30 years, as an After Sales Manager. The corporation had a strong restructuring at a European level. As I was older than the others, the solution for me was an early retirement. When I discovered Senior Pass project I was struggling to find a new job and considering starting an independent work activity in view of my age. The Senior Pass process was very interesting and rich, the more I participated in group meetings and project activities the more I gained confidence in myself. A very important part of Senior Pass project was the international scenario. I felt it very useful to see how people in other countries were dealing with stories similar to mine. I was given the opportunity to serve as a volunteer in the United Kingdom, for 3 weeks, in the organisation Community Action Dacorum. Personally I gained a lot from this experience. It was one of the best experiences in my life. After the Senior Pass project and volunteering experience I was strongly motivated and ready to approach the job search with new vitality. I enlarged my horizon and I decided to consider working in the social field, for a non-profit organisation. I then started to work part-time as a mentor for youngsters doing European Volunteering Service in Italy. Taking new challenges increased my self-confidence and I was ready to take in consideration new opportunities and face job interviews with peace of mind, determination and energy that lead me to finally find a full-time permanent job. The Senior Pass experiences helped me assess strong points and weak points, screen my skills other than my professional profile, review my competencies at a 360°. I gained more flexibility in adapting to today's always changing scenery. I learned more about my skills and how to make better use of them. I learned that am able to adapt to different work environments, as well as to different job accounts. The experience had an important impact on me, both on the personal and the professional side. Losing my job made me feel isolated, the Senior Pass experience helped me to regain my focus and create new relationships. It was really a turn over experience.



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