

Volunteering – the Way to Develop Talent and Potential of Young People

Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová
Michaela Šavrnochová
Jana Šolcová

Obsah

1. **Introduction**
2. **Methodology of the research and research sample characteristic**
3. **Analysis of benefits of volunteering for young people**
 - 3.1. Experience of young people with volunteering
 - 3.2. Pathways of young people to volunteering
 - 3.3. Volunteering as a tool for the development of key competencies
 - 3.4. Benefits of volunteering for personal life
 - 3.5. Benefits of volunteering for social life
 - 3.6. Benefits of volunteering for professional life
 - 3.7. Volunteering as a way to develop talent of young people
4. **Summary**
5. **Resources**

1. Introduction

Volunteering brings a lot of benefits. In the Preamble of the Universal Declaration on Volunteering that was adopted at the 11th Biennial Conference of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in Paris in September 1990, it is stated that: "volunteers consider their commitment as a tool for social, cultural, economic and environmental development in a changing world." At the same time, the Declaration states that volunteering „enhances human potential and the quality of daily life, building up human solidarity, provides answers to the great challenges of our time, striving for a better and more peaceful world; and contributes to the vitality of economic life, even creating jobs and new professions."

Report of the European Parliament on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2008) says that "volunteering:

- has an economic value (the economic contribution of NPIs is on average 5% of GDP and that, even conservatively estimated, volunteer time accounts for more than one quarter of this figure);
- is a major force nurturing civil society and strengthening solidarity;
- demonstrated a high level of added value: for every EUR 1 organizations spent on supporting volunteers, they received an average return worth between EUR 3 and EUR 8;
- means a very significant contribution to building up social capital;
- lead to significant savings for public services;
- contributes to the personal and social development of the volunteer and has a positive impact on the community, for example, on interpersonal relationships;
- leads to the direct involvement of citizens in local development, and thus can play an important role in the fostering of civil society and democracy;
- can have a positive effect on people's health; whereas this health benefit can be enjoyed by people of all ages and can help prevent physical and mental illness."

Benefits of volunteering can be divided into benefits from several points of views: of the general public, of a local community, of an organization involving volunteers, of the recipients of help that is provided by volunteers, and of the volunteer himself/herself (Brozmanová Gregorová – Marček – Mračková, 2009). In this publication, we are focusing on the last group of benefits.

While volunteering, a person acquires new skills and experience, meets with new people, places, and/or cultures; he/she is often confronted with social issues and challenges but also with the diversity, differences, and other life conditions or lifestyles. Volunteering strengthens self-confidence, brings new stimuli and motivation into life, it can engage even vulnerable or marginalized groups into activity. Volunteers gain a feeling of importance, meaningfulness, and the value of their activity, donated time, and effort. All these aspects of volunteering are very important benefits for professional but also personal development of a volunteer.

The World Volunteer Web – the Internet portal that was established thanks to the UN program called The United Nations Volunteers, states following benefits of volunteering for volunteers:

- Through volunteering people develop existing and gain new skills;
- volunteering is a way how to participate in the life of the community;
- volunteering is a source of further motivation and sense of a result;
- volunteering improves opportunity for the development of the professional career of volunteers;
- thanks to volunteering, people are finding new interests and hobbies (volunteering can be a way how to escape everyday routine; it can be fun, relax, a way to "recharge" energy. It also can be a way to release tension, to gain new perspective to various situations and to explore personal or professional visions);
- volunteering is a way to gain new experience;
- volunteering is a space for meeting different people (it is an excellent environment for the development of personal relationships and networking. In addition to that, it also offers a chance to get acquainted with people from different backgrounds and environments, etc.);
- volunteering is a signal for an employer, teachers, and family (people are also interested in how other people live their lives outside the environment they know them from. An employer

can be interested in how his employees spend their free time, educational institutions are interested in leisure time activities of potential students as well. Volunteering is a demonstration of commitment, passion, and interest.)

Review of research findings on effects of volunteering on volunteers is also offered by Wilson and Musick (1999) who document that volunteering has an influence on the development of citizenship, reduction of anti-social behavior, physical and mental health, and helps people find jobs.

Volunteering plays a significant role in the support of employment and employability. People looking for jobs but also those who are only entering the labor market can find the help in volunteering as it can help to strengthen their self-confidence and open the networks offering job opportunities. It can also be an opportunity to develop the work habits or specific skills demanded by the labor market.

Empirical findings related to the impact of volunteer programs in the area of risk behavior prove that the participation of young people in volunteer program contributes to the reduction of risk behavior in the area of sexual life, delinquency, truancy, etc.

The latest research of volunteering in Slovakia implemented in 2011 also states some findings of the benefits of volunteering for volunteers. Respondents most frequently agreed with the statement that they volunteer because they like what they are doing – as much as 92.9 % of volunteers agreed. Satisfaction with the results of their work, development of their life experience, personal development, new skills and abilities, new friendships, self-fulfillment, feelings of satisfaction, personal success, self-esteem, and unselfishness were mentioned as important benefits of volunteering. Volunteers also see the benefits of helping others in the improvement of services or in finding solutions to problems. Volunteering for many of them is a relax. Despite the fact that volunteering enables personal development and brings new skills and experience to those involved, respondents of the research in 2011 did not see it as a tool which can improve their prospects for professional life.

Many young people are involved in volunteering in Slovakia. Volunteering is one of the forms of non-formal learning – it provides proofs of the positive influence of the youth work. It has a direct impact on young people – it builds their values and personalities, it increases their interest in the environment and society they live in. Volunteering also supports active citizenship. It is a valuable addition to the impact of a school and a family; it is a mean of personal development and social participation of young people. It provides young people with space for self-fulfillment and opportunity to discover their potential through specific ideas and projects connected with useful feedback and evaluation of their activities. Volunteering is an experiential form of searching and finding a talent. It is a tool for the development of skills; in such a way it contributes to the increase of employability of young people and the development of competitiveness. Through volunteering, young people are gaining new skills, develop or discover their talents they did not even know about. Volunteering is heterogeneous and inclusive – it knows no limits and at the same time meets the needs of the today society and brings benefits to all involved parties. All these characteristics make volunteering a special form of youth work.

EU Youth Strategy – Investing and Empowering of the Position of Youth for the period of 2010 – 2018 states: "Showing solidarity to society through volunteering is important for young people and is a vehicle for personal development, learning mobility, competitiveness, social cohesion and citizenship. Youth volunteering also contributes strongly to intergenerational solidarity." The goal for this area is to support youth volunteering through broader volunteering opportunities for young people, to facilitate volunteering through removing barriers to it; to increase awareness of the value of volunteering; to recognize volunteering as an important form of non-formal education, and to strengthen cross-border mobility of young volunteers. Also, the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Youth for years 2014 – 2020 pays attention to volunteering. One of the main goals of this strategy is to "involve as many people from different target groups as possible through the creation of diverse volunteering opportunities addressing topical needs of young people and trends in volunteering, and through securing the sustainability of young people in volunteering."

In youth work, it is necessary to point out not only to the important societal role of volunteering but also to its influence and benefits for volunteers themselves. In Slovakia, no data confirming the positive influence of volunteering on youth and youth work have been collected in this area yet – at least no data that would be collected by a targeted research. Partial results were provided by already mentioned research of volunteering in 2011 called Volunteering in Slovakia – Research Reflections.

The answer to the question: *What are the benefits of volunteering for young people involved in such activities?* is provided by this publication. **Our goal was to find out what kind of influence volunteering has on the development of competencies, talent, and potential of young people and their personal, social, and professional life.**

This publication is devoted to youth workers, researchers, but also to those who form youth policies and policies in the area of volunteering. Understanding of what volunteering brings to young people can be inspiring also for the actual involvement of young people into volunteering but also for future empirical research and creation of policy related to the volunteering that would be based on real evidence.

2. Methodology of the research and research sample characteristic

For this research, we have used qualitative methodology. Through qualitative research, it is possible to reveal unknown information in a social phenomenon. It is focused on understanding the meaning; it creates a relevant description or construction for the examined phenomenon (Surynek – Komárková – Kašparová, 2001). As Švaříček (2007) stated, qualitative approach to reality is characterized by the fact that it does not try to force its own linguistic game to some part of reality, but it tries to understand linguistic (and other) game lived by participants of social situations. Participants of social life themselves are experts on the life they live. They (at least partially) understand social phenomena because they need to handle them.

The research was divided into two sections. One part was focused on statements of young people and the second part on the statements of the youth workers. **Young people** from Bratislava, Nitra, and Banská Bystrica regions were the first objects of this research – each region was represented by 20 individuals who were actively involved in volunteering within last 12 months. The second object of the research was formed by **youth workers** (volunteer coordinators) from the same regions – each region represented by 10 youth workers.

The **half-structured interview** was the technique we have decided for. It combines practical advantages of structural approaches with an open, non-structured discussion style. This method is relatively flexible; it enables us to respond to unexpected or interesting facts that do not belong to the structure of an interview but can help to clarify research problem in a better way. During the interviews, we have used the approach based on the active cooperation of a participant with a researcher – the interview relies on mutual interaction.

The interviews were done by trained questioners experienced in both – the research data collection and volunteering. At the beginning of each interview, the consent with personal data processing was acquired; the interviews were recorded and later they were transcribed.

The data were collected from November to December 2015, and the average length of a meeting with each participant was 45 minutes.

The data analysis was done in several phases. At the first stage, the members of the research team were reading transcripts of individual interviews and further – in a group meeting – they recorded key moments and topics they have noticed during the interviews. A report from the meeting was prepared. In the next stage, each researcher was focusing on a particular research issue and analyzed it. Later a joint document was developed that went through a commenting process to reach the final form.

During the research implementation, we were taking care of the fundamental criteria for quality, reliability, and validity applicable in qualitative research. The relevance and validity of a qualitative research lie in the fact that findings are supported by proofs and also by a criterion of authenticity. We were trying to describe the examined phenomena truthfully and to interpret them in harmony with reality. Reliability as an essential criterion of qualitative research was secured through a selection of respondents, the recording process, and transcription of interviews. The criterion of correctness was respected as we were working only with information obtained – without any deductions or guesses of researchers.

The total number of **60 young people** participated in this research – 20 men and 40 women, their age varied between 17 to 30. Talking about their education, 8 participants had elementary, 14 secondary, and 38 university level of education. Forty-four of them were coming from a town and 16 from a rural area. Socio-economic characteristic of the participants was as follows: 21 participants were students of universities, 17 were working, 13 were students of secondary schools, 8 were unemployed, and one participant was at the maternity leave.

Out of the total number of **30 youth workers**, there were 21 women and 9 men, and their age varied between 22 and 64. Out of them, twenty-eight participants had a university degree and two finished secondary school. The same was the proportion of the type of environment they were coming from – 28 were from towns and 2 from a rural area.

Talking about youth workers, all recipients were working with young volunteers; 51.35 % of them were volunteer coordinators; 10.81 % directors of a volunteer-involving organization; 8.11 % project managers or program coordinators. Other positions represented were: workers for community development, social workers, lecturers, and assistants. The average length of their practical experience in the area of work with young volunteers was 4.65 years. Majority of participants defined their job description as the coordination of volunteers that consists of recruitment of volunteers (including the entrance interviews), training of volunteers (introduction of volunteers to the organization, its operation, specifics of the target group the organization is working with and volunteer positions), organization of work of volunteers (involvement of young people in individual programs, planning and coordination of activities, the distribution of work), and providing a reflection for their work. Three respondents also involved control and evaluation of the work of volunteers into their job description. Two respondents also mentioned event management. Organization of supervision and meetings, administrative tasks and promotion of volunteering were cited by the respondents only occasionally.

Youth workers were primarily active in the area of social services for children, youth, and families, people with disabilities, seniors, and other target groups. Other areas covered were: art and culture, sport, recreational activities and hobbies, health, work with children and youth, environmental protection, support of philanthropy and volunteering, and international organizations.

Talking about the legal status of the volunteer involving organizations 90.00 % of the respondents were active in NGOs, and the rest were organizations established by municipalities or state administration.



3. Analysis of benefits of volunteering for young people

In this part, you can find detailed findings gained through the analysis of subjective statements of respondents – young people and youth workers. The goal of this research was to determine what is the influence of volunteering on the development of competencies, talent, and potential of young people and their personal, social, and working life.

3.1. Experience of young people with volunteering

To better illustrate benefits of volunteering from the view of young people, we consider important to characterize the experience of our respondents with volunteering in more details.

Similarly, to previous surveys and researches of volunteering in Slovakia¹, this research also confirmed **a tight connection between volunteering and the membership in an organization**. Up to 73.33 % of young people involved in volunteering who served as recipients for this research were also members of a volunteer-involving organization. Up to 86.36 % of these respondents were volunteering for the organizations they were members of.

The majority of participants were **long-term and regular volunteers**. 50 respondents were volunteering for more than one year, and 10 of them were engaged for a shorter period. Talking about the frequency of their volunteer work – 46 young people were volunteering regularly (at least once a month or more often), and 14 were volunteering irregularly.

Young people were involved as volunteers into various types of activities.

The most often, they were active in **youth work** – organizing various courses, workshops, weekend stays, summer camps or other activities for children at schools; working with children in low threshold centers, etc. Concerning the summer camp organization (but also with charity events), the second most frequent field of activity was the work of an **animator for children** consisting of the creation of various plays and games, competitions, sport and leisure

time activities for children). Another type of activity was the **work with pediatric patients** – work with oncology patients prevailed; it consisted of regular visits and leisure time activities with children (often also connected to handicrafts) and of psycho-social support not only to sick children but also to their families. The core of volunteering activities of several participants lied in **organization, promotion, preparation, and implementation of various events** such as preparation and organization of an ecological festival, summer festivals, exhibitions, contests, lectures for schools or broad public, etc. or help in the organization of events (such as the award ceremony Heart on a Sleeve, Week of Volunteering), participation in money collections (White Crayon organized by the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union, Good Angel), the creation of promotional materials and videos, the distribution of leaflets. Some young volunteers were active as **lecturers** in the area of non-formal education, e.g. within primary prevention at elementary and secondary schools. Also **coordination of volunteers** in various fields was part of these activities. **Humanitarian activities** were also covered – some recipients were involved in the distribution of food, water, and clothes to refugees and work with homeless people. Respondents were also participating in the harm-reduction activities with drug addicts (providing contacts to health-care centers, crisis intervention, access to sterile syringes and other medical supplies, etc.); counselling (for various target groups); preparation of leisure time activities for foreign students, interpreting, translation, and accompanying these students; administrative work; graphic design and artwork; improvements of the environment; work with animals (walking the dogs, cleaning dog kennels in shelters).

It looked quite similar when we asked volunteer coordinators what type of activities they involve their volunteers into. The most frequent answers were: organizing an activity or an event, active participation in a campaign (for example promotion of an organization, its mission or a particular topic) and organization and coordination of leisure time activities for children, youth, seniors or clients with social care centers.

¹ Overview available in: Brozmanová Gregorová, A. et al.: Dobrovoľníctvo na Slovensku – výskumné reflexie. Bratislava : 2012.

Out of 60 respondents, 22 young people were working only for one organization; the others were **volunteering in several NGOs**. The most popular field of activity the volunteers were helping in was the social care for children, youth, family, people with disabilities, seniors, and other target groups; this field was followed by the children and youth organizations. Other respondents were volunteering in organizations active in the field of art and culture, sport, recreation, education, and research, health, environmental protection, support for philanthropy and volunteering, community development and housing, prevention, and humanitarian aid, etc.

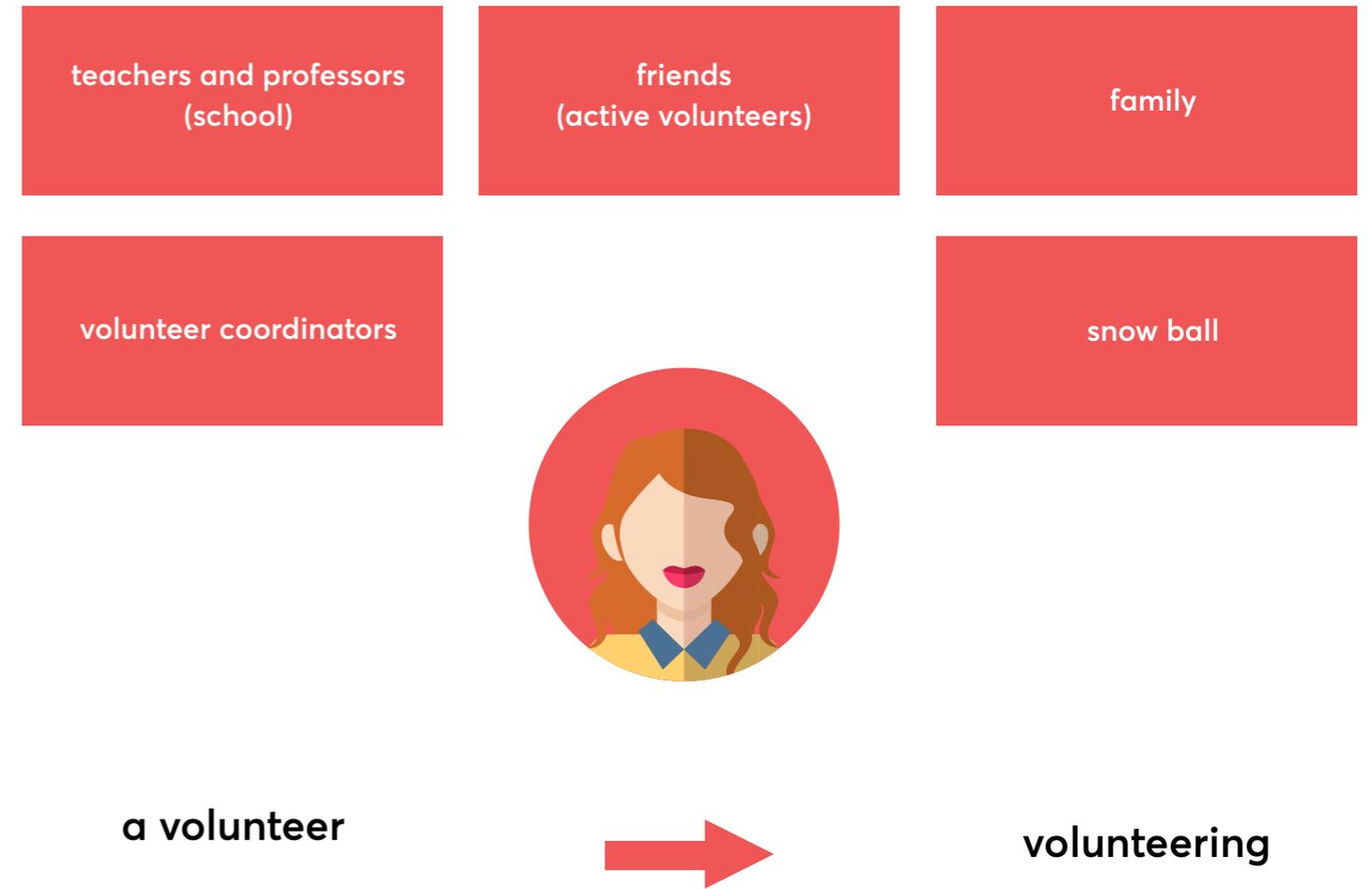
Talking about the type of volunteer involving organizations, 95 % of young people stated they volunteered for an **NGO**, 11.67 % for state organization, organization established by a state administration or a state state-owned enterprise; 6.67 % characterized it as an organization set up by regional or local government, municipality, and 6.67 % said they were volunteering for a private company. 5 % of young people stated it was another type of an organization (specifically, they have mentioned a project, an association or a private university).

3.2. Pathways of young people to volunteering

The first experience with volunteering can – to some extent – influence future involvement of people in volunteering. Findings related to the ways of the first volunteer involvement say a lot about how young people were informed about volunteering and who introduced this type of activity to them.

To describe people/organizations which connected young people with volunteering, we are using a term **links to volunteering**.

Links to Volunteering





The most frequent links of young people to volunteering were **friends**. Thanks to them, young people received not only information about volunteering but also got involved in volunteering for the first time. These friends have already been active as volunteers in organizations.

"I have started to volunteer after I was approached by my friend."

"One of my friends once invited me to an event and I liked the idea of becoming a volunteer. Since then, I am in."

"... at that time, one of my friends got a job in an organization called Depaul Slovensko and invited me to become a volunteer for them. I have applied and since then I have been volunteering there."

Also, **classmates or schoolmates** were mentioned within the group called friends.

"... for the first time, I get to volunteering through my classmates at the secondary school. They have invited me to a meeting where we were supposed to help with children as volunteers..."

The second most frequently mentioned person who mediated the contact of young people with volunteering was **a teacher** – mainly secondary school teachers or university teachers.

"I have learned about volunteering at the secondary school, through my teacher – she has supported me in volunteering."

"I got to volunteering through my secondary school – through my teachers..."

"... it was thanks to the secondary school I was attending, and its involvement in the international exchange of students – specifically, it was my teacher who was responsible for these exchanges..."

"Within one project done at my elementary school, we were preparing particular types of homework. My teacher supported me in writing about volunteering..."

"Thanks to teachers at the university I am studying at right now."

"I have started to volunteer at the beginning of my studies at a university thanks to my teacher who was also active in volunteering."

"I got to volunteering at the university – through my teacher. Later I started to look for volunteering opportunities. However, the primary impulse was done by my teacher who motivated me to become a volunteer."

Other people who acted as links to volunteering were **parents, siblings, and other relatives**. Thanks to these persons, young people were able to get in touch with volunteering already in a lot younger age (sooner than at a secondary school or a university). They served as role models because they were also involved in voluntary activities.

"... my parents took me to services and events organized by Salesians of Don Bosco – they were volunteering there. Gradually, I found my friends there and started to feel the need to give back what I got there."

"I got to volunteering thanks to my sister. She was a leader in a summer camp, and I wanted to do the same. I was keen on her volunteering activity, so I wanted to be a volunteer as well, and I am there even nowadays."

"... for the first time, I got to volunteering through my sister... She asked me to join her, and I am glad she did it."

"... it happened through one member of our family."

A particular group of young people linked with volunteering was formed by those who were involved in this type of activity through a method called **snowball**². Examples are provided by young people who visited an organization where volunteers were active, or they were members of such an organization. In such a case, also, **leaders (or coordinators of activities)** served as positive examples and links to volunteering because these young people wanted to follow them.

"First I was a member of a children organization, later I became a leader in the same organization... Zuzka was my leader and then she has left to study at the university, and I took over the leadership. I did not have any experience in being a leader though..."

"Since my childhood I was part of that civic association – I participated in their programs. As I was getting older, I wanted to be one of the leaders responsible for the work with children to show them values that are somehow different..."

"I got to volunteering through my participation in programs organized by volunteers – as a child I was a recipient of such programs. When I got a little older, I started to get involved in the program as an assistant to a leader, and now I am in the position of a leader in this organization..."

"In our organization, I have seen older people who were volunteering, and I also wanted to get involved. And similarly, as they were preparing activities for me as a child, I started to develop programs for

² Method snowball in this sense means that the experience with volunteering is getting larger with the age and the development of volunteers (the development of roles, skills, and competencies).



„Kamarát ma raz pozval na jedno zorganizované podujatie, mne sa zapáčila myšlienka byť dobrovoľníkom a odtedy sa to so mnou vlečie.“

children that were younger than me. Later I could not imagine my life without volunteering, so I only continued in this type of activities in different organizations."

Also, **organizations and institutions** can serve for young people as such links to volunteering. Such a perception shows us the importance of them in the life of young people.

Young people mentioned these particular organizations/institutions in the interviews: schools (especially secondary schools and universities), NGOs (mainly civic associations), volunteer centers, but also the work environment or non-formal groups.

"Thanks to my secondary school and its participation in the international exchanges of students."

"... they (Bratislava Volunteer Centre) were talking about volunteering at our school."

"I got to volunteering thanks to my secondary school, specifically through a competition called Olympic Games of Human Rights – since that time I am an active volunteer."

"I got involved in volunteering at the beginning of my studies at the university through the Volunteer Centre in Banská Bystrica."

"... regular volunteering started through C.A.R.D.O. – an organization that was organizing a recruitment of volunteers for a social care organization..."

Links to volunteering were not always provided by other people. Some young people got involved in such activities thanks to **their initiative**. They were actively searching for volunteering opportunities and for contacts to organizations who were looking for volunteers. To do so, they were using opportunities published on various websites, Facebook sites, or databases of volunteering opportunities, or they participated in a recruitment process they found out about through some leaflets.

"... basically, I was looking for information about volunteering – I wanted to know what it is, what it means, etc."

"... it might sound strange, but it was my decision that I will establish my project that would be functioning on a voluntary basis, and through which I will help people who need some help."

"Somehow unconsciously, I was attracted by work with a particular group of individuals – I knew that my former neighbor is helping these people as a volunteer. It helped me to apply for a volunteering position in that organization and to stay there."

² Opis postupu, keď sa skúsenosť s dobrovoľníctvom postupne nabaľuje v súvislosti s pribúdajúcim vekom, rozvojom rolí a pozície dobrovoľníka, rozvojom jeho zručností a kompetencií.

The pathways of young people to volunteering document that also this group prefers the direct sources of information about the volunteering opportunities and that a personal contact with active volunteers or volunteer coordinators is a vital link to volunteering.

3.3. Volunteering as a tool for the development of key competencies

In today – so quickly changing – world, the need to have competencies which are not related only to a particular profession but are universal for personal, social, and professional life, is more and more urgent. Such competencies are called key competencies. As Belz and Siegrist (2001) state, key competencies are knowledge, abilities, and skills that form a competence thanks to which it is possible to perform a significant number of positions and functions and which are suitable for dealing with problems related to unexpectedly changing requirements during the life. Not only formal but also non-formal education (in a mutual symbiosis) should contribute to the development of key competencies. The fact that volunteering can be a way how to develop these competencies is also confirmed by the responses of the participants (young people and youth workers) of our research.

Both groups of participants of this research were provided by a list of competencies based on the online tool for validation of competencies acquired through volunteering called V-Skills for Employment (D-zručnosti pre zamestnanie) . Young people, similarly to youth workers, considered **social and personal, communication, problem-solving competencies and competencies related to employment and entrepreneurship** as those most developed through volunteering. Based on the views of both groups, thanks to volunteering, people also develop digital and civic and cultural competencies. Mathematical and scientific competencies are the least developed in volunteering.

Similar results were also reached through the analysis of the benefits of volunteering for unemployed people (Brozmanová Gregorová, 2014). We consider this experience to be significant especially because of the relationship to the labor market, the professional life of young people and the support of their employability. As the Report of the survey among

³ Bližšie: <http://dzrucnosti.dobrovolnickecentra.sk/>

T1 The development of key competencies from the point of view of young people and youth workers

Competencies	Young people	Youth workers
SOCIAL AND PERSONAL	96.67 %	100,00 %
COMMUNICATION	93.33 %	100,00 %
RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP	91.67 %	100,00 %
PROBLEM-SOLVING	90.00 %	100,00 %
LEARNING COMPETENCIES	78.33 %	96,67 %
DIGITAL	75.00 %	96,67 %
CIVIC AND CULTURAL	65.00 %	86,67 %
MATHEMATICAL AND SCIENTIFIC	13.33 %	46,67 %

N young people = 60

N youth workers = 30

employers carried out within the project Volunteering – Way to Employment (2014), the most important factors for the selection of future employees from the point of view of representatives of organizations (mostly HR managers) involved in this survey, were social and communication competencies and knowledge and skills demonstrated during a job interview.

Also during the other parts of the interview, young people but also youth workers were pointing out to the development of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that are part of key competencies, and saw them in the context of the benefits for their personal but also professional life. In the offered list of specific competencies, we were not able to find any that would not be checked by any respondent; that is why in the following text, we are focusing on those competencies that were mentioned explicitly.

In the area of communication competencies, young people improved especially: **ability to communicate with other people** (“... I have learned how to communicate better...”), **empathy and active listening** (“... I have improved my empathy...”; “I have learned how to perceive the feelings of others, how to listen actively, and how to talk about feelings with somebody indifferent – to talk about his/her problems and issues.”), **communicate in a foreign language** (“my communication skills in English improved”) but also, **ability to establish contacts with other people** (“... now I am better in establishing contacts with people I don’t know...”), **presentation skills** (“... I have learned how to present things in public and to negotiate with authorities...”; “... I have stopped to be afraid to give lectures in front of people...”).

Out of personal and social competencies, young people developed through volunteering especially **the ability to tolerate other people** “I have developed understanding for people I would have judged before without a second thought”; “... I have learned how to accept people as they are”) and **ability to participate in teamwork** (“I have learned to cooperate in a team...”; “I have learned how to function in various types of groups...”).

Volunteering also contributed to the **self-awareness, self-development**, and **self-control** of young people. Their **self-confidence** and **self-esteem** were improved, they have become more independent and **responsible**.

"The best experience for my personal life was my personal development."

"Volunteering contributed to my personal development in a spiritual area."

"I have learned a lot about myself and my skills."

"My self-confidence was improved."

"I have revealed characteristics and abilities I did not know I have."

"My skills of reflection and self-reflection were improved."

"My self-confidence is improved."

"I have learned to be more responsible."

"I am able to be more independent at work."

"I have learned where my limits are. I have realized my opportunities."

"I have learned how to manage my own life."

Among competencies related to employment and entrepreneurship, as the most developed through volunteering were mentioned: **the ability to organize time, and to plan and organize work**.

"I have learned to organize my time."

"I have learned how to distribute my time and share it with others."

"I found out what a deadline means."

"I have learned that if you want, you can handle a lot of tasks in a very short period."

"I have learned to organize my work and time."

"I have learned to manage the time I have very effectively."

In this group of competencies, young people improved their **ability to manage projects** ("I have learned how to plan and implement projects."; "At the same time I have learned how to prepare a project proposal.")

To illustrate this statement, below you can also find some statements of volunteer coordinators who document the development of key competencies of young people through volunteering from their point of view:

"They learn how to organize events, how to fundraise, their project management skills improve, some of them also improve their time management..."

"They develop certain skills such as communication, presentation skills, planning and – for example, also a project thinking."

"They learn how to discuss, how to present publicly, how to solve conflicts, how to defend their opinions, etc."

"After the experience with volunteering, they feel safer; they are better in the initiation of communication with strangers; they are much more sensitive towards the needs of others; they learn how to listen."

"... kids who volunteer for a longer time are much more confident, they are better in communication, they are not afraid to present in public."

"On one hand they improve the skills to organize events, presentations and communication skills, team-work, leadership skills but also learn how to be part of a team."

"... they acquire communication skills, flexibility, ability to solve problems."

"... they are developing because they improve their self-confidence, understanding, and self-esteem."

3.4. Benefits of volunteering for personal life

The analysis of benefits of volunteering for personal life shows that volunteering has an impact on different areas of **development of young people's personality (cognitive, emotional, and performative side of it)**.

From the emotional perspective, young people are gaining various feelings from volunteering:

"I felt good with those people."

"I had a good feeling from work I do unselfishly."

"I have a good feeling that I can help through my presence."



Benefits of Volunteering for Young people

cognitive side
emotional side
performative side

"The biggest benefit for me was the good feeling I had during the project implementation."

"Good feeling I gain because I am part of something that we are able to accomplish together."

"Joy from this work, feeling of fulfillment."

"Good feeling from helping others."

"... good feeling. A person is happier if he/she can – even in today´s materialistic society – devote his/her time to somebody who needs it."

"Good feeling that I have helped somebody."

"Feeling I have done something that makes sense and brings joy."

Also, volunteer coordinators were emphasizing the positive feelings of young people during volunteering.

"... a person has a good feeling; he/she is somehow more satisfied."

"If you enjoy it and put your heart in it, the feeling you get is priceless."

"... good feeling from a well-done job, a feeling of satisfaction (I have done something for others), and feeling of humanity (I am a good person because I help others)."

From the emotional point of view, also, **experience** are crucial for young people.

"Thanks to volunteering, I have a lot of experience I will never forget."

"... experience with people."

In the cognitive part, we need to mention that young people are developing or acquire **knowledge, skills, and competencies**. Findings related to the development of key competencies in volunteering analyzed in the previous part, only confirm it. In addition to this set of knowledge, skills, and abilities, young people are also gaining **specific knowledge and skills** through volunteering, such as: knowledge about functioning of NGOs (*"I have learned how the NGOs work", "now I know how different social care centers but also NGOs in the region function"*), lecturing skills (*"I have acquired lecturing skills"*); skills in the area of youth work (*"I am very prompt in reaction to youth work"*); manual skills (*"I have developed my manual skills."*); knowledge in the area of promotion (*"I have learned a lot about social media and graphics"*); financial literacy (*"I have learned*

how to manage money better"); knowledge about the protection of historical monuments (*"I have learned a lot about the preservation of historical monuments – especially ruins, and gained a lot of technological knowledge but also manual skills."*); and many others.

As the help with event management was one of the most frequently performed volunteer activities, the fact that volunteers have learned how **to organize different events** was mentioned quite often (*"I have learned how to organize various events."*)

In addition to specific knowledge and skills that young people can acquire through volunteering, youth workers also pointed out to a more general level of **personal development**. As one of the participants stated: *"... they learn a lot in our organization. All our lectures and training are free for them (and they are not cheap at all) plus they can participate in specific projects... they can learn a lot from us, our partners, about life; they have an opportunity to grow and develop in all areas."*

In the field of personal benefits of volunteering for young people, both groups of participants emphasized various **changes**. These changes are happening on several levels and influence cognitive but especially performative side of youth personality. The first level we have called **changes in opinion** of youth and the broadening of their perspectives.

"I see problems differently now."

"I have gained an entirely new perspective on everyday life and challenges."

"My perspective is much broader now."

"I gained a new perspective on life; I can see things differently now. I found out that things are not black and white."

"Thanks to volunteering, I have a different perspective to life."

"I have gained new perspective and opinions on life, and they influence me in the decisions about what I want to do in the future."

A volunteer coordinator for example stated: *"Also a change of perspective thanks to which not all people are oriented only to profit and business but also to social responsibility is a benefit."*

Volunteering can also **change values of young people**.

"I have realized what the real values are."

"I study music and during volunteering, I have learned and found out that music and art – even they are vital, are not the only value and the only meaning of life."

"Thanks to volunteering, I know where my priorities are."

"Volunteering helped me to see where my values are."

"A lot of things have also changed in my thinking, and in my relationship to health and disease, and their perception. I see the role of a family now differently as well – I see its importance not only when we are healthy, but also when we are sick."

"Mainly, I feel a better balance, my values are clearer to me now. I have met inspirational people who have changed my views."

"The advocacy for these minorities helped me to reach humbleness in my life."

"Now I appreciate what I have."

"I am comparing worlds, values; I change my attitudes... To summarize it – volunteering has helped me to see the priorities I have in life and to realize that there are people who are in a much harder situation than me."

Also, the youth workers emphasized the opportunity for the change of values under the influence of volunteering:

"... it is rather about the development of values, changing the values, and setting up a new approach to life that says it is necessary to help others... learning how to be sympathetic."

"... they may change their values and priorities that influence their perspective on many issues."

"... they gain the right perspective on life that is not focused on profit and money, big expensive cars but also on the life in a community which is more important - they gain a satisfaction in life which gives them more than an expensive car."

"... volunteering can help them to set up priorities, to find the right direction in life."

Some young people also **changed their lives and lifestyles** more radically thanks to volunteering.

"I am rather an extrovert now. Before I was just lying on my bed reading books and now I do something. I have no time to lie in my bed anymore."

"Volunteering moved me further in several areas of my life."

"Volunteering influenced me in many areas, and it moved me further in my personal but also professional life. The benefit is that it influenced what I am doing professionally and what kind of person I am."

„The most important benefit is who I am thanks to volunteering. It also influenced my lifestyle and the way how I see the world."

"Volunteering has changed my life completely – it showed me various ways and opportunities."

"Volunteering became some kind of a job description for me."

An interesting benefit of volunteering stated by both groups of participants was that some young people can **find themselves in volunteering** (*"... I have found myself in volunteering", "they can find themselves in volunteering"*).

In the area of personal life, the **social contacts** proved to be one of the most significant benefits. Thanks to volunteering, young people broadened their social networks, gained new contacts, new friends or acquaintances; some of them even a husband or a wife.

"... I have gained new contacts, met new friends."

"In volunteering, I have met a lot of new people, made new contacts."

"Through volunteering, I have met my husband."

"... I have met a lot of new people."

"Thanks to volunteering, I have friends from all around the Europe."

"... I have met a lot of awesome people."

"... I have met new people and became a part of better society."

Social contacts and interactions are significant benefits of volunteering for young people also from the point of view of volunteer coordinators.

"They can meet new people, find friends but also great contacts to various organizations and interesting people."

"They can meet their future husbands and wives in volunteering."

"They find new friendships and relationships that stay with them during their lives – sometimes even their life partners."

Also the fact that young volunteers met new people with similar interests and attitudes to life and became a **part of some community** was confirmed as an important factor related to the social contacts.

"I have met other volunteers with similar interests and opinions."

"... I have met people with similar perception, interest, attitude to life."

"Through volunteering, my need to belong somewhere, to meet similar people was satisfied."

The following statement of a youth worker also points out to the integration opportunity provided by volunteering. At the same time, she also emphasizes the diversity of social interactions in volunteering. *"A man is a social creature and volunteering is a great thing also from this perspective. Thanks to volunteering, people from different social and family backgrounds, religion, extroverts but also introverts become one group. Such a mixture of people enriches personal lives of volunteers and brings new opportunities for new social contacts – from professional, collegial, up to personal, etc. It is vital for volunteering to have this feature of inclusiveness. Important is also that all people are accepted there – regardless of the type of their personality. Everybody benefits from such an approach."*

Fun is also a significant advantage – especially in the relationship with the target group of young people as it is an inevitable part of volunteering. Recommendations for the work with youth in volunteering (2014) state that in the case of involving young people into volunteering, a non-formal, relaxed atmosphere is necessary. Volunteering should be fun for young people.

This fact was also confirmed by participants in the research with their statements: *"... I liked it...", "... we have laughed a lot...", "... fun is also important for young people"*.

Opening new opportunities and horizons is another benefit of volunteering from the perspective of their personal lives mentioned by respondents:

"I am a young person who does not like monotonous activities, and stereotypes and volunteering provides me with an opportunity to enrich my life."

"... finding diversity in volunteering."

"It has unlocked unbelievable opportunities for me."

"... a broad focus of interests in various areas."

"... I have new hobbies."

Young people also find the **feeling of fulfillment and meaningfulness** in volunteering:

"The work with people and contact with them is tremendously enriching."

"... volunteering gives me a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment."

"They see the meaning and results of their work and it fulfills them – that is a great benefit."

"The greatest benefit for personal life lies in the fact that I do something that makes sense."

"It is a meaningfully spent time."

"It gives a meaning to life."

Thanks to volunteering, some young people had a chance **to travel abroad and get acquainted with countries** they haven't visited before.

Volunteering provided young people with **a space to try new things and confront themselves with unknown** ("*... to try something I have never done before*"; "*... I had a chance to confront myself with new life situations*"; "*Volunteering brings an opportunity to test your skills and abilities*") or to overcome limits ("*I have pushed my limits*").

Young people also realized **the benefits of their activities for others**:

"For me, the interest of children in our activities and their joy is the benefit of volunteering."

"Benefit is to realize that I have taught somebody something."

"An opportunity to bring joy and to make nicer the time spent with children and adults who are fighting a disease."

Volunteering also contributes to the **satisfaction of so-called higher needs**. Young people satisfy **their need to be useful** ("*Thanks to volunteering, I started to feel useful*.") and **the need for self-realization** ("*Thanks to volunteering, I had a chance for self-realization – I can do what I like and what fulfills me there*").

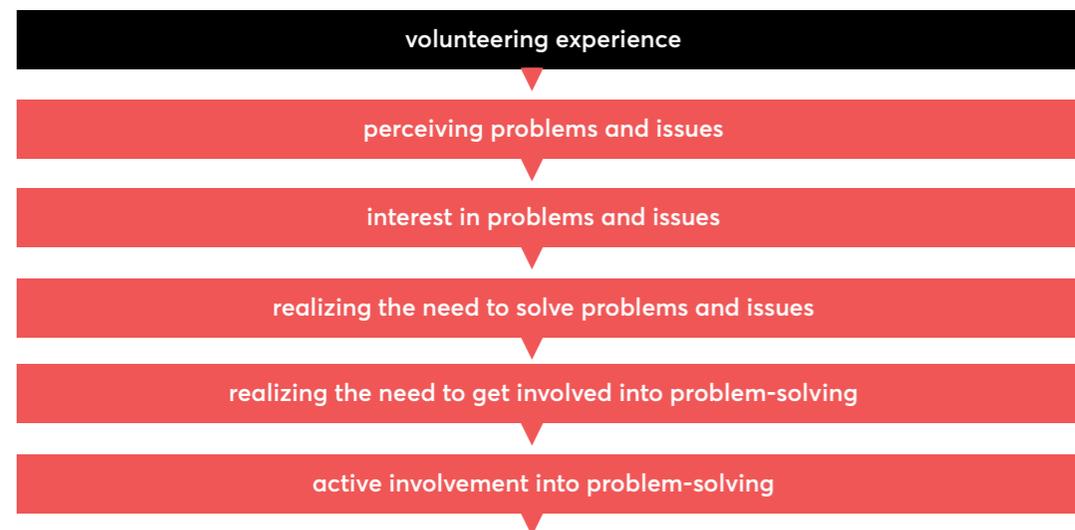
3.5. Benefits of volunteering for social life

Similarly, to benefits for personal lives of volunteers, also in the area of social life, young people **gained new social contacts**, friendships, and broadened their social networks. Thanks to that, they became more communicative and open to people, and they perceived it as an essential precondition for an active social life ("*I am more open to people, communicative, and I think that what counts if we talk about social life*").

Youth workers also perceived social contacts as an important benefit for social life while emphasizing their diversity and inclusiveness in the relationship with tolerance building. "*Volunteering can help improve their contacts with people or can help them to feel accepted in some community even though they do not have good communication skills. Volunteering is important because it connects a person with different life stories and backgrounds and that is – according to me – distinct from a typical social life. A person has a tendency to meet with individuals who are similar, but volunteering can also connect people with different opinions. It is very enriching to confront your opinion with other people – especially in such a small and conservative society like Slovakia.*" "*They have a chance to meet and confront with different opinions, different social status, different nationality or sexual orientation. Contacts with individuals who are different are the best tools to raise the future generation that would make this country more open and tolerant.*" "*Well, volunteering stops social exclusion, volunteers gain a group of friends they can ask for help if they need to; they can unite to change some measures related to young people; they form a community that is not selfishly oriented.*"

In the relationship to social life, we consider the fact that volunteering lead young people to **the development of their personal and social responsibility, engagement, and participation** especially beneficial. This pathway is illustrated below:

Volunteering as a Way to Involvement and Participation



The first level of benefits in this area is represented by the fact that thanks to volunteering, young people start to **perceive certain issues in society and begin to be interested in them.**

"I have realized what type of issues is people dealing with."

"I have a need to know more about homelessness in Bratislava."

"I am more interested in what is going on in Slovakia and the world."

"I am more interested in politics."

The next level of development of participation is represented by the situation in which young people start **to realize the need to solve problems and to get involved actively in the process of solving them.**

"I have realized the need to get engaged. If we want to change something, we need to start with ourselves. And I have also realized the social responsibility – a general one that everyone should have because we all are responsible for the world and not just for the environment we live in."

"... the need to get engaged in what is going on in our society – into things that are positive but also into the efforts to eliminate negative issues in the environment."

"I have realized it is necessary to get involved in activities that are going on around me, to be an active person."

"Yes, I am aware of the fact that it is necessary to be active in solving societal issues."

"I have understood the need and importance of the participation of young people."

"I see the urgent need for volunteering and solutions of problems of marginalized groups of people."

"If we want to change something, we need to be active."

"The understanding of the need to help others."

Volunteering also contributes to the real activation of young people and their involvement in the process of problem-solving.

"Activation is a significant benefit... to get involved in issues instead of swearing that something is not functioning... the effort to try to change something, not just sit around and wait that somebody else will do it."

"Through volunteering, I have a chance to comment on what is going on in our country."

"... I am more actively involved in various topics."

From the point of view of higher engagement and participation of young people, we consider as important also the fact that through volunteering, young people can get a feeling **they have the power to change the world** ("I have a feeling I can change the world around me").

Benefits of volunteering in the area of personal and social responsibility and engagement of young people were also identified by youth workers.

"Also, a change of perspective thanks to which not all people are oriented only to profit and business but also to social responsibility is an important benefit."



"They can change things around themselves or in our country and thus to be involved in the decision-making process."

"The primary benefit of volunteering for young people lies in the fact that the time we are now living in, the period of childhood or youth lacks the responsibility for a family and livelihood. I mean that currently, young people are getting to these responsibilities later and later. A person lives and functions within a framework and lacks crucial experience that would move him/her towards mental maturity. And exactly there the volunteering plays an important role – it can bring this kind of experience to young people through various contacts with people, communities, and situations. It often produces strong feelings that can show a young person the responsibility for the world we live in; the responsibility we all should feel and use actively. Small things are important, and we should not forget about them. The power of the most vulnerable part of the team is greater than the power of the strongest one – or better to say – also administrative tasks are important."

"Interest in what is going on in the society, the opportunity to change things, the awareness that also young people can make difference in the world around them and contribute to the development and improvement of different areas; the support of active citizenship."

"To be engaged in society, to feel like an important part of it."

The fact that **volunteering does not necessarily lead to a higher participation** is confirmed by this statement of one recipient: *"... I have realized that there are many issues I am not able to solve, and it is not worth even trying because I am not an expert yet. There is no need to get engaged by all means."*

3.6. Benefits of volunteering for professional life

Findings of the analysis of interviews with young people and youth workers show that benefits of volunteering are **closely connected with the world of studies and work**.

Also in the area of professional life, young people and youth workers consider social contacts acquired in volunteering, to be very important. However, they see the relevance of these contacts for the area of employment.

"I have gained a lot of contacts with potential future employers."

"... I have gained a lot of contacts within the world of my profession."

"... vast majority of friends and contacts I have, are related to the world of Salesians. Thanks to these connections, I have no problem to get a job."

"Creation of a social network, contacts they can use if they want to get employment in the future – those are benefits I realize. Also a better chance to learn a lot about the organization they are volunteering for – volunteers have easier access to job opportunities, if they decide to apply for a job there because the people in the organization know them."

"... relationships with the organizations they are volunteering for are a benefit because they can get a job there in the future."

"Thanks to volunteering, a volunteer can – in addition to practice – also gain a lot of contacts. Those are priceless as volunteers can build a good network for communication, search for job opportunities, and recommendations, etc."

"Through volunteering, they can influence their future career – they can gather new contacts or meet people who can give them a job in the future."

In the area of professional life, young people appreciate the **experience and practice** they acquired through volunteering, but also the fact that they can use it for their current or future studies, job, or career development.

"I am volunteering in the area of my future profession and current studies. It is an excellent tool for gaining experience."

"... I have gained a lot of working experience."

"The most significant benefit of volunteering is that you get in touch with practice."

"I think the best I get from volunteering is practice. It provides me with hands-on experience. I meet with stories of people, children, parents, and their relatives, and it is a school of life for me. So, if I talk about the benefits for my studies, it is the practice I have mentioned and the unbelievable amount of new life experience."

"... through volunteering I have gained the working experience necessary for my future life."

"As I want to become a teacher of Slovak language, there is nothing better than this life training."

"If I can explain our language to people for whom it is a foreign language, I think I will be ready for Slovak children at schools."

"Thanks to volunteering, I will be accepted to a university."

"In the future, my volunteering experience will help me in my profession."

Also, youth workers mentioned the importance of volunteering for gaining experience and practice usable during studies and work.

"Volunteers usually gain practical experience they have no chance to get in touch with during their studies. It can help them during a job interview but also in their future work – they can prove they truly understand the topic."

"Young people gain new experience and competencies they can use for example in their future practice."

"Every person is growing and developing through new experience, and volunteering is a great mediator of such experience. A person needs positive experience but also failures so that he/she learns to deal with them and move further. Volunteering is the best way to get in touch with such experience. In our organization, volunteers are somehow protected – they are allowed to fail, and that is good because they can try again."

Young people but also volunteer coordinators realize that experience gained through volunteering can mean an important competitive advantage while **applying for studies or a job**.

"Volunteering will have a meaning also for my studies – it will make me special. I will study abroad, and volunteering is a condition when you apply for studies there – this means that thanks to volunteering, I will get accepted to the university."

"I have realized after my graduation from the university that if I don't have something more in my CV than just the studies, employers won't compete to give me a job."

"I can mention this experience in my CV and employers appreciate it."

"Also, a richer CV is a benefit for young volunteers."

"They come in and give you their CV, or they do not provide you with a CV, you just ask them something, and they tell you precisely what they were doing and for what organization, with what kind of target group. In such a way, the CV is richer, and the employer saves expenses because the organization or a company does not need to send these people for example to a communication training."

In addition to experience, through volunteering, young people also gained **knowledge and skills they can use in their professional life.**

"Through volunteering, I have gained a lot of experience I use now in my job. I work as a graphic designer and a lot of stuff I know I have learned while preparing materials or taking pictures and then working with them in the organization.

"... a lot of stuff I use today I have learned through volunteering."

"Thanks to my volunteering experience I have learned a lot about graphics, photography, videos – it happened thanks to one of the Salesians who approached me and taught me how to do it. As I have developed these skills to a high level, I have a lot of side jobs."

Some young people **found a job** thanks to their volunteering experience.

"Thanks to volunteering, I was able to find two jobs at the same time."

"Through volunteering, I got my current job."

"... I found my job through volunteering."

"Based on volunteering in the organization, I was able to do also some paid jobs."

"... I found a job because my boss liked my volunteering experience."

Volunteering experience influenced young people in **the selection of their future studies or professions.**

"Volunteering influenced my choices for studies and my future professional career."

"Based on volunteering I have chosen my studies. Also part-time jobs I choose are focused on positions where I can use experience acquired in volunteering."

"... I have gained motivation for studies at the university."

The statements of volunteer coordinators also confirmed the influence of volunteering on the professional orientation of young people.

"Through volunteering, they find out what they would like to do in their lives."

"Profiling their interest or more interests is also a benefit. Volunteers find out what they want to do in the future."

"Volunteering can help them with the professional orientation."

"... it helps some of them to change a job. Sometimes people who want to change their profession, try volunteering. Such an approach helps them either to find fulfillment in their lives or to decide for a change in their career."

Volunteering helped young people in **professional development** ("*... thanks to that I had a chance to attend a lot of training activities and lectures that have helped me in my professional development.*").

Students also perceived the benefits of volunteering for **interconnection of theory and practice.**

"Volunteering gave me a chance to connect the theory I have studied with practice."

"Volunteering has helped me to understand some subjects at the university."

"... I used activities with children to a great extent during my studies."

"Thanks to volunteering, the theory was more understandable for me, and I was able to interconnect it with practice."

In the area of professional life, young people perceived the fact that they learned how **to work with people** (not only colleagues but also with various target groups) as important.

"... I have learned how to work with people, and I am quite good at it."

"... I have learned to work with different types of people."

"I have learned how to cooperate with people with disabilities."

"I can work with children in a better way."

On the other hand, within the benefits of volunteering for professional development, youth workers emphasized the development of **responsibility.**

"The most important is to be responsible for something – no matter what kind of volunteering you are involved in. To have a chance to experience the feeling of responsibility – that is the most crucial part of it all."

"Volunteering lead to responsibility; the ability to take over responsibility for fulfilled or not fulfilled tasks."

For the real applicability of volunteering experience in the world of work, also, the **formal recognition of volunteering** is necessary. That is the reason we were interested whether young people describe their volunteering experience in their CVs. 78 % of young volunteers who participated in our research said they do so. Some of them mention this experience only briefly (38 %), but others are also stating specific skills, knowledge, and abilities they acquired through volunteering (40 % according to our research). It is quite surprising that youth workers do not share the same opinion if we talk about the need to provide or issue a legitimate document that would declare the knowledge, skills, and abilities volunteers acquired through volunteering. Such a formal document or certificate is issued only by the half of youth workers participating in the research. This experience was also confirmed by young volunteers because 51 % of them did not get any certificate or document proving their skills, abilities, and knowledge gained in volunteering.

3.7. Volunteering as a way to develop talent of young people

Talent is a term that describes the ability developed to a certain level. Most often, talent is related with art, but we also know other talents (e.g. talent for mathematics, crafts, organization, work with people, lecturing, leadership, sport, etc.).

Also, the young people participating in our research were perceiving a talent in a wider sense and as talents mentioned especially their characteristics, but also knowledge, skills, and abilities they are good at. In their answers, we can identify **a talent** in the area of **communication with other people** ("I have a talent for communication in a foreign language."; "I am good at talking and listening."; "I am able to listen to others and to understand them and that is sometimes more important than to talk."), in the area of **art** ("... singing, music, drawing, dancing..."; "... shooting and making videos..."; "... graphic design and photography..."; "I have a talent for music, writing and drawing."; "I have talent for art."), in the area of **leadership** ("I know how to motivate people."; "I think I can lead a team."; "I am good at motivating and leading other people toward certain goals."; "I have a talent for connecting different people and for the management of group activities."), in the area of **work with people** ("I have a talent and sense for the work with children."), in the area of **work with information**

("... I can find relevant information."; "... I can see what is important..."; "... I can analyze the situation quickly."; "I can think logically."; "... I can look for solutions, I have analytical thinking."), in the area of **event management** ("I am a small ruler and have good ideas I can carry out."; "... I like to organize different programs and events."; "... organization of people..."; "... organizational skills..."; "I have a system and can organize things."; "I think I can organize meaningful activities."), and in the **area of sport** ("I am also good at some sports."; "I am good at sports – especially at floorball."; "I am active in sports from my childhood so that must be it – sport is my talent."). Other specific areas of talents can be seen in following statements of young volunteers:

"I am good at IT, graphic design, and video-making as I have required knowledge in these areas."

"I am good at providing the first aid; I also went through a professional course..."

"My talent is in writing – I can put my ideas into words; I am a beginning writer."

"I have a good orientation in the area of volunteering."

Young people, similarly to youth workers, perceive volunteering on one hand as an opportunity **to discover a talent** and at the same time as a tool for the **development of talents**. This fact is reflected in the following statements of volunteer coordinators:

"The most important is that they can discover it [talent]. Because during volunteering, people are also involved in activities they usually don't do. They can try a wide spectrum of activities, and they may find out they like some of them. In addition to that, they can also develop talents they already have and know about."

"Volunteering can be an opportunity to discover a talent; it can offer a space for its further development. It is one of the ways that provides young people with a chance to try new activities and find out what they are interested in and want to focus on."

"When I was observing some of our volunteers, I had realized that when they came to our organization for the first time, they did not know about their talents for stuff they started to be active in through volunteering. Thanks to volunteering, they discovered it and improved it. And now they are excellent at it."

More than 90 % of young people agreed with the statement that through volunteering, they have developed their talent. Only four young people said they hadn't developed their talent in volunteering. Both groups of respondents (young volunteers and youth workers) mentioned two ways through which volunteering contributes to the development of talents of young people.

The development of talents happens mostly **through direct work and implementation of activities.**

"I am working with children; I teach them in a way that enables me to develop my relationship with them."

"... I was able to develop many of my talents while working with children... and I still use them. I had to learn how to adapt to a certain age group of children and also to their interests."

"When I was volunteering, I was creating many graphic materials, I made pictures, worked with photos and used them for promotion."

"I have participated in an international project and at the introductory meeting, I had to communicate in English for five days with people from Central Europe."

"... I had a chance to be part of many unexpected situations and in such a way I trained my ability to be flexible and adapt to different environments."

"Volunteering contributes in particular through the fact that it provides young volunteers with a chance to do something; in an ideal case, the opportunity comes from the organization that does not want just to 'use' the volunteer but trying to provide him/her with the opportunity to develop, learn, and meet people. All these things are necessary for the development of talents."

"If a volunteer is active in an organization where they create or paint something he/she can find out he/she is talented for such an activity and can develop this talent. Specifically, in our program, they can find out they are good at the work with a particular group of children."

"It is about a practical experience from the field – volunteering is not about sitting in a school but about real activities – you can either try to do it and find out you are good at it or decide not to attempt..."

The cooperation with professionals who are providing leadership and support to volunteers

is the second way to develop talents of young people through volunteering.

"Volunteers can do various activities under the supervision of professionals who are leading them and provide them with mentoring or coaching. And often it happens in professional organizations they would not have a chance to work for otherwise."

"Volunteers get help and support of professionals. Professionals are there to teach volunteers, to provide them with training after which they can do various activities. In such a way, they develop the talents of volunteers."

"... through cooperation with professionals."

Youth workers also perceived the fact that activities young volunteers are involved in, bring joy and fun to them, and it is an important factor for the talent development through volunteering.

"An important aspect is that volunteering should be a source of joy for the volunteer – he/she should enjoy it. If he/she likes to do it, usually it is because he/she has a talent for that type of activity. And if he/she wants to do it and does it regularly, he/she develops not only in that particular activity but develops also his/her talents and his/her personality."

Volunteering as a Tool for Talent Development



4. Summary

Volunteering experience brings concrete and unique benefits for every volunteer. These benefits are dependent on the character of activities the volunteer is involved in, the length and frequency of these activities, the target group the volunteer is working with or the organization he/she is volunteering for.

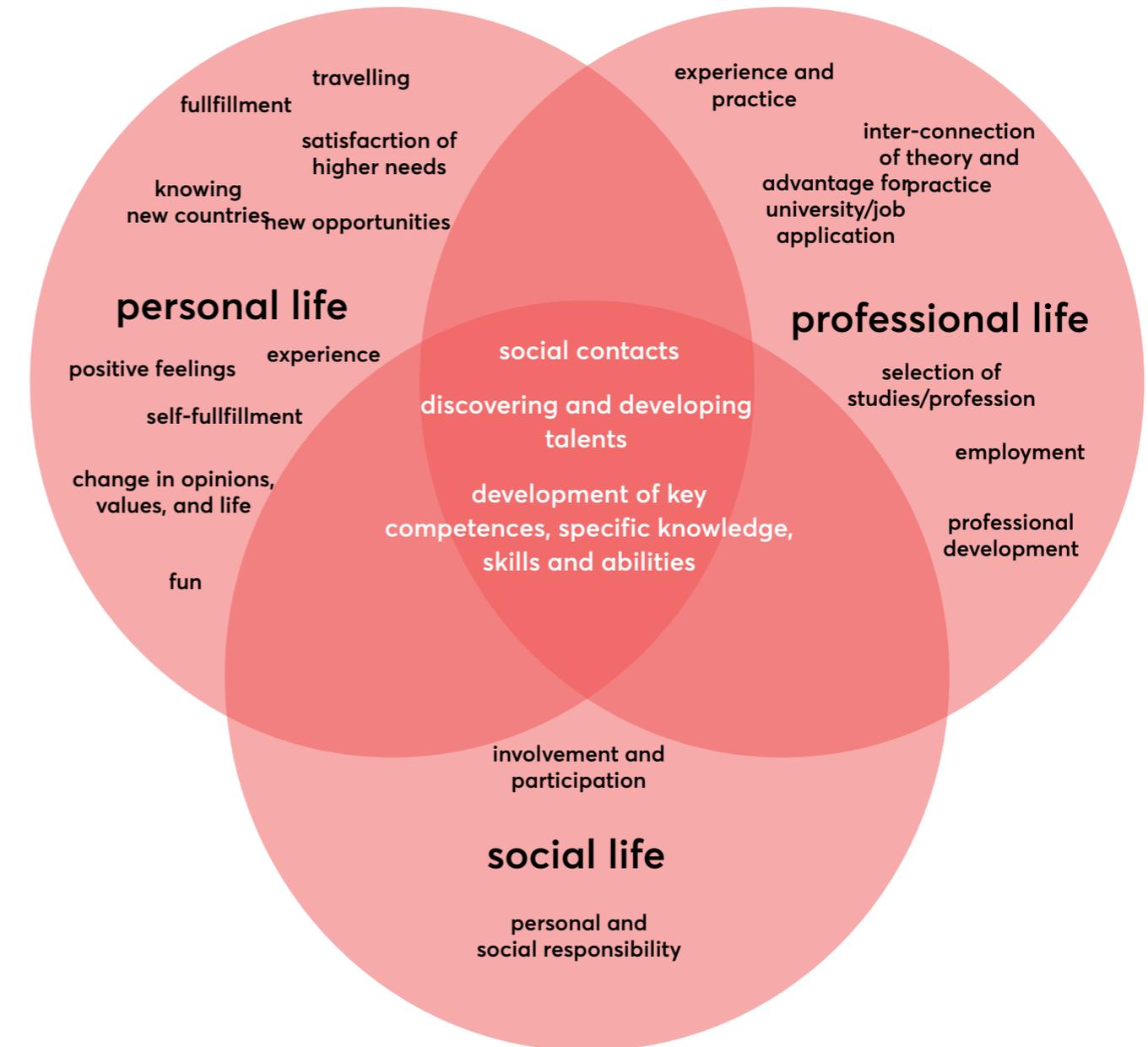
Pathways of young people to volunteering prove that a personal contact with people who are active volunteers or organize volunteering activities is crucial. Young people are in direct contact with these people – through them they start to be active in volunteering. However, there is also a group of youth who have the inner desire and interest to become volunteers and do not need other people to link them to it.

The analysis of answers and responds of both groups of research participants proves that volunteering has a great influence on individuals who participate in it, and the benefits vary from fun and joy up to the personal and professional development or the change in life or a lifestyle.

Benefits of volunteering for young people can manifest in the emotional, cognitive and performative area. Volunteering is a source of social interaction, positive experience, and emotions; it is a space for the development of key competencies and further specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thanks to volunteering, young people can change their attitudes, values, perspectives, their views on their life or their lifestyle. Volunteering opens new opportunities, it brings diversity and enriches the life of volunteers; it brings the feeling of meaningfulness, usefulness, and self-realization. It enables volunteers to try new things, to confront with new and unknown or to push their limits, and sometimes even travel abroad and get acquainted with new countries.

In the area of social life, we can perceive volunteering as a way for the development of personal and social responsibility, engagement, and participation of young people.

Volunteering as a way to engagement and participation



For young people, the benefits of volunteering are closely connected with the world of their studies and work. Thanks to volunteering, young people gain valuable experience and practice but also knowledge and skills they can use in their professional life. Based on volunteering experience, some of them were able to get a job, or they decided for a particular area of study or profession. For students, the volunteering also means a better interconnection of theory and practice. Even though in our case, we were focusing on a qualitative research and it is impossible to generalize our findings, the analysis of the interviews with young people and youth workers shows a particular development in this area in comparison with the results of the research carried out in 2011 (Brozmanová Gregorová, 2012). While in 2011, the experience gained in volunteering was not perceived as transferrable to the area of professional life and development, in our current research, the connection between these two fields was mentioned almost by all participants. Young people perceive the volunteering experience as a comparative advantage in the process of applying for a university or a job and mention it also in their CVs. On the other hand, we have identified some gaps in the formal recognition of knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through volunteering on the side of youth workers. Issuing certificates or other documents confirming the development of volunteers through volunteering is still not a common practice.

The benefits of volunteering for the personal, professional, and social life of young people are mutually connected. This fact is reflected in the picture below. Especially social contacts and key competencies young people can develop or gain through volunteering can be used in the sphere of personal, social, and professional life.

This interconnection is also reflected in one statement of a youth worker: *"Through volunteering young people can meet new people, find new friendships, and gain great contacts with various organizations and individuals they can approach in future."*

Volunteering is also a way how to discover and develop talents of young people. It is done especially through implementation of specific activities and cooperation with specialists and professionals who provide them with leadership and support.

The analysis of the statements of research participants from the group of young people shows that young people are aware of the benefits of volunteering for their personal, social, and professional life. These so-called "selfish" benefits of volunteering were prevailing over the benefits of volunteering related to others or wider community (society, target group, environment, etc.) It is evident that the trend of so-called selfish volunteering becomes a reality also in our society. This fact has a significant influence on the management of volunteer programs as it brings higher demands on the youth workers or volunteer coordinators who are managing young volunteers. It can be expected, that with the increasing awareness of the benefits of volunteering for volunteers themselves, there will be higher demands related to the activities of the youth workers and volunteer coordinators but also of organizations these professionals are working in.

5. Resources

BELZ, H. – SIEGRIST, M. 2001. Klíčové kompetence a jejich rozvíjení. Praha : Portál.

BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ, A. et al. 2012. Dobrovolníctvo na Slovensku – výskumné reflexie. Bratislava : Iuventa.

BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ, A. – MARČEK, E. – MRAČKOVÁ, A. 2009. Analýza dobrovolníctva na Slovensku. Banská Bystrica : PF UMB, OZ Pedagóg, PDCS, PANET.

BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ, A. – VLAŠIČOVÁ, J. 2014. Správa z prieskumu medzi zamestnávateľmi v rámci projektu Dobrovolníctvo – cesta k zamestnaniu. Bratislava : Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici a Platforma dobrovoľníckych centier a organizácií.

BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ, A. 2014. Analýza prínosov dobrovolníctva pre nezamestnaných. Banská Bystrica : Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici a Platforma dobrovoľníckych centier a organizácií.

BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ, A. et al. 2014. Odporúčania pre prácu s mládežou v oblasti dobrovolníctva. Banská Bystrica : Centrum dobrovolníctva.

MAYER, S. – SANDEL, K. 2001. Bibliography: Research on Service-Learning and Teen Pregnancy/ Risk Behavior Prevention. RMC Research.

Stratégia EÚ pre mládež – investovanie a posilnenie postavenia mládeže 2010 – 2018. Dostupné na: https://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/legislativa/2010_2018_strategia_eu_spoluprace_v_oblasti_mladeze.pdf

Stratégia Slovenskej republiky pre mládež na roky 2014 až 2020. Dostupné na: [https://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/legislativa/strategia_sr_pre_mladez%202014-2020_final%20\(sj\).pdf](https://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/legislativa/strategia_sr_pre_mladez%202014-2020_final%20(sj).pdf)

SURYNEK, A. – KOMÁRKOVÁ, R. – KAŠPAROVÁ, E. 2001. Základy sociologického výskumu. Praha : Management Press.

ŠVAŘÍČEK, R. – ŠEĎOVÁ, K. et al. 2007. Kvalitatívny výskum v pedagogických vedách: Pravidla hry. Praha : Portál.

Uznesenie Európskeho parlamentu z 22. apríla 2008 o prínose dobrovoľníckej práce pre hospodársku a sociálnu súdržnosť (2007/2149(INI)).

Všeobecná deklarácia o dobrovolníctve. 1999. In: Fakty o treťom sektore na Slovensku. Bratislava : SAIA.

WILSON, J. – MUSICK, M. 1999. The Effects of Volunteering on the Volunteer. In: Law and Contemporary Problems, Vol. 62, No. 4, p. 141 – 168.



Copyright © 2016

**Bratislava Volunteer Centre, Nitra Volunteer Centre
Volunteer Center in Banská Bystrica**

Authors:

doc. PhDr. Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová, PhD.

PhDr. Michaela Šavrnichová, PhD., Mgr. Jana Šolcová, PhD.

Reviewers:

Mgr. Zuzana Heinzová, PhD., doc. PhDr. Ladislav Vaska, PhD.

Translation:

Jana Vlašičová

Graphic Design:

MFA Hana Hudáková BA (Hons), Ing. Milica Schusterová, ArtD.

Published in: Bratislava

Published by: Bratislavské dobrovoľnícke centrum

Published in: 2016

ISBN 978-80-972255-1-3



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVA,
VEDY, VÝSKUMU A ŠPORTU
SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY

This publication was created within the project Experience Talent.

The project is supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic.