

Outreach and embracing inclusion: our beneficiaries share how



Breaking down the language barrier, reaching out to refugees and listening to young people in gangs are just some of the many different approaches for inclusion shared by our beneficiaries during the final seminar of a Strategic European Voluntary Service (EVS) project.

The project, called Young People for Europe of Inclusion, Solidarity and Social Justice, was carried out by Volunteering Matters (UK), Volonteuropa and other partners across Europe, beginning in February 2018.

During the final seminar, which took place in Brussels in November 2019, experienced organisations shared how they had reached and engaged with young people with fewer opportunities from their local areas in the UK.

“Hard-to-reach groups are easy to ignore. They are not hiding, you can reach them!” said volunteer Lanai Collis-Phillips from Volunteering Matters during a panel at the event.

A young person herself, Lanai has volunteered in Ipswich since she was 15 years old. Be inspired by the best practices shared by her and other organisations and embrace inclusion in your project too!

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Adapt your approach

Organisations willing to reach out to groups with fewer opportunities might need to adapt their approach to connect with them, so bring all your creativity to the table. Lanai explained that her organisation uses drama pieces as a great tool to help with inclusivity, because you do not necessarily need to know the language to understand the message.

However, be mindful that some measures might require patience and persistence.

“It takes time to break down barriers and to connect with refugees in the community. It took us around eight to nine months to get to know them, then we helped them to integrate into society,” said Lisa Laidlaw, youth engagement manager at ProjectScotland.

Start from the beginning

Tonia Wilson, Volunteering Matters project manager in Ipswich, works with a variety of projects on topics including young people in gangs and violence against women, as well as with the black and ethnic minority community. Her approach is to engage through partnerships – with schools in the community, for example – and at grassroots level.

“We give control back to young people – it is about being brave enough to do that, to be led by young people. This group holds the answers, and you are the vehicle to ask: ‘How do we do that?’” said Tonia.

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Another best practice was shared by Marion Schumann. Former director of Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Centre, Marion is now the co-founder of I&M Fundraisers, a member of Volonteuropé. She spoke to the audience about her experiences in approaching the issue of gang rivalry in communities.

“We were challenged with trying to engage young people in gangs who are self-excluding. To combat this, we contacted the local radio station with a view to create an advert, which then went to the estate and asked the young people if they wanted to volunteer, to be involved and have a voice. We got young people to put an advert together and were then able to engage them, and always in areas that they were interested in and that mattered to them.”

Being able to connect with young people’s interests is essential for successful projects.

“It (volunteering) has to be centred on what is going on in their life – it has to be personalised,” said Paul Reddish, highlighting the role of in-country volunteering in reaching out to more young people with fewer opportunities.

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