

# Join the dots!

GET CONNECTED  
VOLUNTEERING AND SHARED VALUES  
**PRACTITIONERS' BRIEFING**

SCOTLAND

CROATIA



BELGIUM

IRELAND

## Living European Values Through Volunteering **PROJECT REFLECTIONS**



APRIL 2019

# Living European Values Through Volunteering

## PROJECT REFLECTIONS

The reflections are based on a 1½ year Europe for Citizens European Union funded collaboration between Ireland, Belgium, Croatia, and Scotland. A summary brochure and independent research paper about the project are available from the contact details below.

The context is both a threat and an opportunity. The threat of people becoming divided from each other with a 'them and us' mindset. The opportunity for people to come together in friendly relationships, that look out for each other, and share values and common goals. This guide for practitioners is not so much about management as it is about leadership. Leadership that works with people to discover higher level common ground through values, and is open to negotiate what will give meaning to those values through giving time and energy to volunteering activities. To strengthen EU values through an increase in volunteer participation and diversity.

### dot 1 - We need to talk!

It seems to us that the public square has become smaller. Whilst people have shown a very strong empathy and interest in the well being of others, the experience of actually coming together to meet shared needs is limited. Practitioners can play a vital role in creating trust and shared values through facilitating dialogue between people.

### dot 2 - We have the tools for dialogue

Get Connected adapted the World Cafe method to design a 'Conversation Salon' approach. Scotland invented the commUnity bubble as a way of inviting those people least engaged in volunteering to community based dialogue. These tools are available for you to apply in your own context, and we found that conversations about values and community spirit fully engaged people and identified rich material to work with.

### dot 3 - Values with meaning

We held a number of dialogues about values and discovered that citizens have no difficulty in expressing the values that are important to them and their focus of interest. Once we gathered all the material and codified the key themes and shared ground we recognised that there was a real connection with higher level EU values, and that there was a strength from the meaning that people had from their own words and feelings. Shared values then become the driver and energiser for shared action.

### dot 4 - Living the values

Get Connected involved nearly 150 people in direct volunteer activities and their stories were shared. If you observe these stories from a values perspective you see a number of very strong themes emerge. These include friendship, empathy, compassion, humility, joy, learning, imagination, togetherness, and community building. Yes, tasks were undertaken, however, volunteers rarely spoke about the actual task. They spoke about their values and feelings. This is a vital question for practitioners about re thinking the language and narrative about the volunteer story. Get connected with values!

### dot 5 - Walking the talk

Volunteer participation is an activity and an experience. Doing things with others and learning through action. Thinking about the world and acting upon it to make a positive difference. The flexibility of volunteering, covering a very wide spectrum of activities, contexts, and time is the wonderful offer it makes. An opportunity for people to live their shared values through action with others and to EXPERIENCE this. The challenge for practitioners is to help co create the space and opportunity for the talk, and walking the talk.

### dot 6 - Everyone's needs can be met

At the heart of a values based approach to volunteer practice is needs. This is a negotiated space where there has to be an honest sharing of the different needs in play. The volunteer. The community. The beneficiary. The organisation. The interest. Given that our main focus here is about volunteer engagement, it makes sense for the needs and interests of volunteers or potential volunteers to be centre stage. If we understand the needs, motivations, values and feelings of our volunteers we will co create more meaningful experience and value.

### dot 7 - Volunteering is friendly, uplifting and rewarding

Whilst many contexts of volunteers were challenging and sometimes harrowing we are struck by the testimonies of life giving and life enhancing stories. "To me volunteering is an act of creation..." quote from Ivo sums up this spirit. This is a highly attractive essence to volunteering and offers a focus for engagement and challenges the 'Super Hero' descriptor of volunteers to one that is much more concerned with our common humanity.

### dot 8 - Freedom!

Volunteering is, of course, an activity of free will. We have also reflected on how shared values have connected us with higher principles of freedom. Freedom of movement, freedom of expression, freedom from fear and our universal rights and responsibilities. Environmental protection emerged as a key value from our conversations and this has a link to UN Sustainable Goals and global risk. Volunteering activity will, we believe, be a game changer in whether we protect our current freedoms, and freedoms for future generations and face up to the inequality of the current system.

### dot 9 - You're Invited!

Get Connected is a project that doesn't come to an end along with funding. Dialogue into action is an on going process of change and you're invited to join us. We will for example, be taking our roadshow to the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, to Padova (European Volunteering Capital 2020), and aim to contribute to conferences and community participation events across Europe. Join in and have your own say!

### dot 10 - Get Connected

Our final reflection is to express the value we have experienced for ourselves in a cross country collaboration that connected with thousands of people, in many different places, and in many expressions of passion for volunteering. A values approach offers a vital resource to tap into the often latent good will and common cause of our citizens. The need for connection has never been greater and the value that's brought about by working on shared values is perhaps the greatest untapped resource we have?

## Contact

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