

## SOCIAL POTENTIAL OF INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING IN RUSSIA: DETERMINANTS AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:** The relevance of the topic dealt with in this scientific research is attributed to a steadily growing interest to the inclusive volunteering in Russia over the recent decades. The key research purpose was to explore and analyze the social potential of volunteering by people with disabilities, to paint a portrait of a physically challenged volunteer in the Russian Federation. The methodological basis of this research was constituted by a problem of the involvement of young people with disabilities in wide-reaching social activities in general, and the volunteerism in particular. This scientific paper is intended for the executive managers and employees of volunteer organizations, as well as for coordinators of inclusive volunteering programs.

**Keywords:** volunteering, physically challenged volunteers, inclusive volunteering, volunteer activity, inclusion, inclusive environment.

### 1 Introduction

The volunteerism in Russia has historical roots that go deep into the past. In different times it existed in the form of Sisters of Mercy communities, Timur and Pioneer movements, associations for the protection of nature and monuments, community policing teams, etc. (Antonovich & Kalinina, 2014; Biyushkina et al., 2015; Velikanova, 2009; Sinetsky, 2006).

"The particularity of the contemporary stage of development of the economy consists in its undergoing the change of priorities system. Among these priorities, the key one is the inclusion principle which gradually becomes a systemic imperative, i.e. it is taking over almost all branches of the economy and all spheres of public life" (Mamedov & Ishchenko-Padukova, 2018, p. 6).

Over the recent years, the scope and areas of volunteer activities in Russia have expanded significantly. Today, the topic of inclusive volunteering is on the agenda of major forums in the country, there are separate panels and round tables in the State Duma, the Federation Council and other government agencies, specifically dealing with it, it is the subject of ongoing discussions at the forums of the Russian Federation Public Chamber. Inclusive volunteering is a form of civic participation of people with impaired health in the good cause initiatives. It is a way of collective interaction and an effective mechanism for solving urgent social problems.

In recent years, the principles of equal opportunities have also been extended to the volunteer movement. Today they relate to the standards of work of volunteer organizations, and apply not only to the staff members, but also to the possibility of and rights for "barrier-free" participation of physically challenged people in the volunteering practices. The principles of equal opportunities are very broad in their scope. The environment necessary for the work of the disabled people is created: they receive more personal support during volunteer shifts; information materials, posters, etc. are translated into different languages to provide access to volunteering to as many people as possible.

Physically challenged volunteers are no different from others - they also want to contribute their time and energy to improve the life of the community. They are often active, showing their abilities in many fields - arts, media, sports and education, and like other volunteers, bringing a wealth of their professional experience and skills to the projects, helping the community to become socially mature, promoting a value-based approach to

building relationships. A remarkable phenomenon is the frequent conversion of physically challenged people from the recipient of services into the one who helps others and then own self, from engagement as a volunteer to a full-time employee.

### 2 Literature Review

The volunteer movement open to disabled people in the Russian Federation is gaining in popularity every year. That's why the volunteerism resource is increasingly becoming the target of studies in the field of sociology, pedagogics, psychology, law, and now also the tourism (Belanovsky & Shirshova, 2018; Ivanov, 2018; Kudrinskaya, 2006; Pevnaya, 2015).

Presently, the mentioned inclusive volunteering sector is represented by a small number of publications. In the modern science, there is no scientific comprehension of volunteering by disabled people as an object of study, no description of its structure and substance, determinants of its emergence and implementation. The phenomenology of inclusive volunteering is dealt with only in a few papers of such authors as Gorlova N.I. (Gorlova et al., 2018), Starovojtova L.I. (2016a, 2016b), Krutitskaya E.V. (2015). The above authors in their collective monograph presented a historical recollection of the inclusive volunteering and an overview of the best Russian and foreign practices in organizing volunteering open to physically challenged people (Gorlova et al., 2018).

The works of foreign authors are interesting in their approaches to studying the volunteer movement. They are based on the in-depth analysis of various directions of modern volunteer practices (Ascoli & Cnaan, 1997). The particular interest is attached to the studies of a group of authors where they present their analysis of participation of physically challenged persons in the volunteering practices (Rak & Spencer, 2016; Settle et al., 2019; Yanay-Ventura, 2019). In broad terms, the works of foreign researchers are highly appealing due to independence of judgments, validity of conclusions, reasonableness and objectivity in statements and assessments.

### 3 Research Methods

The purpose of this paper is to explore inclusive volunteering in Russia and define its current characteristics. The main research objectives are as follows:

1. create a collective image of a physically challenged volunteer;
2. analyze reasons for integration of physically challenged volunteers into the volunteer programs and reveal the key motives for volunteering;
3. identify the volunteer activities of the highest interest to people with disabilities;
4. articulate a range of measures to develop inclusive volunteering in Russia.

In order to fulfill the defined objectives, we have carried out the analysis of scientific literature on the problems of inclusive volunteering, survey, observation, modeling, typologization of the collected information, identification of the main trends in inclusive volunteering. In addition, a systematic and structural analysis was used, which helped to identify the main trends in the development of inclusive volunteering in Russia today.

Practical application of the above sociological scientific methods enabled the authors to fully implement three interrelated principles: concretization, typologization and objectification.

### 4 Results and Discussion

Inclusive volunteering as a social phenomenon originated in the United States, where already in the second half of the 20th century volunteers supported the functioning of various non-

profit organizations and state agencies. For example, the physically challenged volunteers were successfully used for the Volunteers in the Police Service (VIPS) program, administered by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) (Volunteer Charter, 2016) in partnership with the US Bureau of Justice, Office of Justice and Department of Justice. The involvement of physically challenged volunteers in the work of Concord Police Department (CPD) in Concord, California, USA has also been recognized as a good practice.

In 2014, Volunteering Matters, a leading UK non-profit organization (London), developed the Volunteer Charter (Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS), 2020), which lays down the basic principles that organizations should adopt when recruiting and working with the physically challenged volunteers. The Charter has already been signed by over 120 organizations opening their doors to the volunteers with disabilities.

In 2010, C. Giannoulakis, C. Wang and D. Gra (2008) in their study focusing on the impact of volunteering on a person's career development concluded that "volunteering best contributes to the social adaptation of people of retirement age and persons with disabilities".

International studies by Miller, K. D., Schleien, S. J., Brooke, P., Frisoli, A. M., & Brooks III, W. T (2005) have validated the role of volunteer activities in the processes of integration and socialization of people with disabilities in the modern society.

As part of this research, a survey was conducted in 2018 by its authors, aimed at studying the social potential of volunteering by physically challenged people due to health impairment. The pool of respondents (75 people) was made of people with disabilities taking part in the Abilympics National Professional Skills Championship.

The research target were people with disabilities of the first, second and third disability categories aged from 20 to 45 years. The subject area of the research was volunteerism and volunteer activities in the modern Russian society, as well as its appeal for the disabled people.

The methodological basis of the research was constituted by the anonymous questionnaire survey of 78 respondents. The questionnaire included 19 questions, 17 close-ended and 2 open-ended, and a bio section containing basic information about the respondent: gender, age, disability category and education, marital status, level and source of income, as well as information about volunteer experience. The brief results of the analysis are provided below.

The age and sex breakdown of the respondents participating in the sociological survey was as follows: There were 32% of men and 68% of women aged from 20 to 45 years.

Having analyzed the marital status of respondents, we arrived at a conclusion that most of them do not have a family of their own and are not married yet. Thus, 64% of respondents are unmarried; 25.5% settled down to married life; 7.9% are divorced; and 2.6% are widowed.

It turned out that only 56% of respondents of both sexes out of the total pool had previously taken role in volunteering, and have the experience of volunteering at charity events, while 44% of respondents only conceive the idea of becoming useful in this field and getting involved as a full-fledged participant.

The analysis of the level of income and education of the respondents indicated that the majority of them have a vocational secondary education (63% of total), and the level of their monthly income ranges from RUB 10,000 to RUB 20,000 (the main source of income for most respondents is the disability pension).

The key questions of the questionnaire related to the following thematic blocks: the essence of volunteer work and its distinctive features; motivation and interest in volunteerism; experience of

volunteering across different events and activities and its comprehension; upsides and downsides of the process of organizing volunteer efforts, along with the place and role of a person with disabilities in the work of volunteering organizations.

Having analyzed the choice of answers by respondents, it can be noted that the majority of disabled people adhere to a traditional understanding of the essence of volunteer activity and see it as an activity driven by moral and ethical values; an activity that brings unquestionable benefits to any community.

The definition "Exclusively selfless help to those most in need" was the most popular among the respondents (36%), the second most frequent answer was "Any work that is valuable to the community" (33%).

The option "Helping the nearest, but without harming own self and own interests" is ranked third in preference (17.3%). The fourth place (6.6%) is taken by the answer "Work in the spare time outside the main occupation".

As it turned out, the overwhelming majority (41.3%) are "just planning to become a volunteer in the future, and try to keep in step with the times". 21.4% of respondents "are just conceiving the idea, as volunteering is a serious pursuit, it is in my plans for the future", 21.3% gave preference to the answer "I am a beginning volunteer and have not yet accumulated significant experience in this field". And only 16% of the interviewed get engaged in volunteering on a regular basis.

The major motive for young people with disabilities to get involved in volunteering is "a desire to be useful and help others". This is the opinion of 42.6% of respondents. 20% of respondents turn out to care about what is happening in the country in general and their locality in particular. "A desire to apply accumulated professional experience" was indicated by 13.3% of respondents. The number of respondents who chose "a desire to implement own ideas, as well as to acquire new knowledge and skills"; "a desire to fill the spare time, lack of communication with others" was 9.3% and 9.3% respectively.

So, the option of "helping the homeless, orphans, disabled, seniors" was most preferred. It was chosen by 24% of respondents. It is important to note that those respondents, who already have experience of volunteering, making up 28% of total, were providing assistance to the above categories of population. The second most popular option among those who are only going to provide targeted assistance to others was the answer "activities aimed at the protection and preservation of animals and the environment" (18.6%). However, those respondents who have already participated in volunteer activities gave second preference to the option "organization and participation in preventive talks about the harm of smoking, alcohol and drugs" (14.6% of votes). It is important to highlight that this form of assistance is preferred by the older respondents (aged 31-40, 41 and older). In personal conversations with interviewees, they expressed a concern that today the Russian youth and the younger generation, unfortunately, are often exposed to such deviations. That is why presently they find the most sense in the conversations and actions aimed at prevention of such harmful habits.

The third most popular option, which was preferred by an equal number of respondents of all ages, 12%, was "organization of or participation in the activities which aim is to protect the interests of the most socially vulnerable population segments".

The activities for conservation and protection of the environment have received great attention from the present-day society. This is confirmed by a rather high percentage of preferences (9.3) given to the option "greening, garbage collection, cleaning of water bodies, participation in the cleanup events". Moreover, the necessity of cleanup events and removal of garbage was underlined by respondents of all ages: both those under 30 and over 40.

The next question of the research helped the authors to understand how much personal time (outside the main occupation) a respondent is ready to spend on volunteering. 9.3% of all respondents are engaged and ready to get engaged in volunteering on a regular basis, which means daily. This includes those who have already acquired strong professional skills and are able to provide highly qualified assistance to those in need.

25.3% of the survey participants volunteer a little bit less often, i.e. monthly. These are individuals of all age groups, who spend 1-2 days (often Saturday or Sunday) per month to volunteer and do so in their spare time outside the main occupation (study, job). The most common activities of this group of respondents include: visits to and patronage of orphan asylums, consultations, including via hotlines, funds raising for those in need through charity auctions and fairs. 29.3% of the interviewed take on the role volunteers on an annual basis. Having studied the range of their volunteer activities, we found out that there are those who donate blood once a year, those who every spring take part in the greening initiatives, cleanup events, annual charity marathons, etc.

In the light of the above, we asked the respondents what exactly, in their opinion, prevents the physically challenged people from volunteering.

It should be noted that the opinions of the interviewees were divided, but the majority picked the answer "own state of health" (32%). This is quite understandable, as 72% have the 3rd disability category, 23% - the 2nd category and 5% - the 1st category. 55% of the survey participants suffer from motor disabilities, which certainly limits their choice of activities. 25.3% complained about "the lack of information about the initiatives and events held" and pointed out that they would willingly take part in some charity events if they found out about them in proper time. 24% of respondents honestly admitted that they do not possess "necessary knowledge and skills to help others". 13.3% noted that they are prevented from taking an active role in volunteering by "the bias of others towards people with disabilities" and this poses a significant obstacle to their desire to become a volunteer. 5.4% named "communication difficulties in interaction with the others" as the main obstacle.

It is important to highlight that the analysis of the information collected by us through this research allowed us to achieve the announced purpose and to fulfill the defined objectives.

## 5 Conclusion

Thus, inclusive volunteering is a social phenomenon facilitating the social adaptation of disabled people in the community. The cumulative image of our volunteer shows that women have more proclivity for volunteering (68% of the total pool of respondents); the age range of the overwhelming majority of the survey participants varies from 20 to 40 years old (80%); the 3rd disability category is not an obstacle on the path to provide assistance on a gratuitous basis for 72% of respondents. The most common health problem suffered by our volunteers is the motor disorder (55%). A larger number of the interviewed, i.e. 63% of the respondents covered by the survey, have secondary vocational education. 64% of respondents are not married and 49% have a monthly income level of RUB 10,000 - RUB 20,000, which is in most cases a disability pension or a salary. At the time of the survey, more than half of the respondents already had some experience, even though little, of participation in volunteer projects (56%).

The results of the survey allowed the authors to articulate a range of measures to develop inclusive volunteering in Russia:

- Implement programs of individual and encouraging support for people with disabilities to facilitate their involvement in volunteer activities;
- Provide an accessible environment for volunteering practices involving people with disabilities, including

specially equipped workplaces and barrier-free communication opportunities;

- Ensure support of initiatives of people with disabilities, develop the inclusive volunteering programs, including steps to attract, select and train volunteers with disabilities, organize the labour process in a sensible way;
- Create a positive image of inclusive volunteering, conduct awareness raising campaigns, create and spread inclusive volunteering insignia, inform the public of specific programs and their impact on the lives of people with disabilities;
- Encourage socially oriented non-profit organizations to consider implementation of new inclusive projects and programs, as well as incorporation of inclusive technologies into their existing projects.

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