



## **Minutes of meeting of Volunteers network for “Mobility Project – Golden Age”**

**Wednesday 12 May 2010  
Paris, France**

### **1) Latest news from the Mobility Project**

- The Mobility Project is flourishing. The network of European volunteers over 50 years old is consolidating as the months go by, particularly because of the effectiveness and very active involvement of the National Contacts. Many exchange visits are being arranged in a number of countries. More older volunteers than ever are taking part in the Mobility Project. The reports from these trips are very positive, and several projects have been started following these exchange visits.
- From the outset of the exchange trip scheme in May 2009, there have been 15 study visits, 3 expert visits and 1 coach trip giving over 70 volunteers the opportunity for cross-border formation, by inspecting new local initiatives or exchange and sharing best practice. Future trips are already planned for coming weeks and months.
- There are still very many opportunities to be exploited. Several projects would still be worth visiting, to encourage new local projects. We must continue to mobilise our efforts! The last year of the Project has already begun and there are a few more months to reinforce our European volunteer network. Talk about the Mobility Project to people around you, suggest new trips or projects to visit.
- As regards publicity for the project, a number of contacts have been made with non-Vincentian organizations. An exchange is being planned by the organizations Caritas Malta and the Italian Solidarity Centre in Rome (CeIS). The idea is for the members of these two organizations to meet and share their experience in helping addicts in recovery.  
We would also like to remind you that it is important to send in your evaluation questionnaires to the CGI as soon as possible, as well as any press articles published in your respective countries. We will then be able to publicize the project, updating the Mobility page on our international website...
- The next step will be to write and publish the Exchange manual, as well as arrange the final European volunteer network in October 2010.

## **2) Evaluation of exchange visits – Report from Contacts**

In preparation for the meeting, the Contacts were asked to prepare a presentation and report of the exchange visits organized in their own countries since the project began.



They were asked three questions beforehand:

- 1) What benefits have the volunteers from your country gained by taking part in the exchange trips?**
- 2) On returning home from the trip, what projects have the volunteers organized?**
- 3) Throughout the Mobility project, as the Contact person, what do you see as the benefits gained from meetings of the European 50+ volunteers' network?**

The Mobility project is a real formation opportunity for older volunteers in Europe. They have learned a great deal from the trips they have made: discovering new projects that do not exist in their own country, sharing knowledge about setting up the same projects from one country to another, new initiatives to take on returning to their own country, developing cross-border cooperation, greater involvement in helping the poor, and so on.

### **Austria**

- Austria → Scotland: After visiting three large prisons in Scotland, and meeting volunteers from the HOPE (Helping Offenders Prisoners Families) association specialising in support for prisoners and their families, the Austrian volunteers set up the same scheme in Graz. A new organization “VINCENT-HOPE” was formed, with 9 volunteers. The volunteers are already visiting two prisoners, and making contact with their families.
- Austria → Germany: A group of 4 Austrian volunteers went to Germany to visit a shelter in Berlin for homeless women with mental health problems. This visit helped them to set up a similar project, as well as the opening of the first such house of its kind in Austria, called “VINZI-LIFE”, on Friday 23 April 2010.

### **England & Wales**

- England & Wales → Romania and Italia. Those taking part in these trips visited various projects, such as initiatives to support people living with a disability, shelters for refugees or homeless people, centres for drug addicts. These English volunteers have found it very interesting to find out about the possible new approaches. They have been very encouraged by what they have seen on these trips, and want to suggest new initiatives to their association.
- England & Wales → Spain: A team of specialist debt advisers from Newcastle went to Madrid to reflect on the approach between debt problems and the difficulties suffered in life by people in debt. The English volunteers were able to share their advice and practical solutions, and have returned enriched by their cultural experience. Since then, they have tried to initiate new methods in Newcastle.
- England & Wales → Ireland: This exchange trip has allowed English and Irish volunteers to share their own best practice for their projects in the field, and their respective approaches in helping the most disadvantaged.

### Scotland

- Scotland → Spain: The Scottish volunteers visited the Montserrat home for the elderly, the Blue House, which throughout the year takes in people affected by the AIDS virus. They also explored the social integration centre, that receives 250 people every day, most of whom are migrants. Because of Scotland's social and administrative structures, it is not possible to reproduce these projects precisely. These Scottish volunteers want to spread what they have learned to other organizations working in the same fields in Scotland.

- Scotland → Hungary: Because of airport closure problems following the Icelandic volcano ash cloud, this study trip had to be postponed till June and is now being prepared.

### Hungary

- Hungary → Italy: In May 2009, Hungarian volunteers went to Marina di Massa. The purpose of this meeting was to exchange their general and specific experiences on the work of the Italian volunteers, to find out about the innovative SSVP Italy concept of family Conferences. It was a very interesting exchange of best practice, and the Hungarian volunteers were able to share their own experience of voluntary work in their own country.

- Hungary → Scotland: The purpose of this trip for the Hungarian volunteers was to find out how the SSVP works in Scotland and its structure at both national and local level. They therefore visited the Ozanam Clubs for children living with disabilities, and also went to a centre for drug addicts. They want to find out how to coordinate their organization and existing work in Hungary more effectively, and expand one of their centres for the homeless.

- Hungary → France: In October 2009, five Hungarian volunteers took part in the celebrations for 30 years of "Mains Ouvertes" [Open Hands]. The aim of this association is to welcome women and men who are excluded from society, and help them to integrate once more in a sustainable way. They attended several conference meetings and took part in a round table event "Changing outlooks for inclusion", visiting training centres and workshops for recycling, sorting, and resale of used goods.

- Hungary → Romania: From 8 to 11 May 2010, 9 volunteers from Hungary travelled by coach to Récica in Transylvania to share their experiences. The Hungarian volunteers are planning to organize a project to support disabled Gypsy children. The Romanian volunteers have a great deal of experience in this field, and gave them good advice, sharing best practice with them.

### Belgium

- Belgium → Italy: In 2009, Belgian volunteers visited Marina di Massa, in order to exchange general and specific experience on the work of Italian volunteers to find out about the innovative SSVP Italy concept of family Conferences. It was a very interesting exchange of best practice, and the Belgian volunteers were able to share their own experience of voluntary work in their own country.

- Belgium → France: In October 2009, Belgian volunteers visited the "Mains Ouvertes" association in Clermont Ferrand with the Hungarian volunteers (see above, Hungary → France). On their return to Belgium, the volunteers agreed to take over managing a social centre that was in serious trouble. They drew on their inspirational experiences at Clermont Ferrand with the methods of "Mains Ouvertes". For the last 6 months, the "New Horizons" Centre has been operating once more, and is now accommodating 34 people in 10 bedsits and 4 flats (transit accommodation, with social support, giving people time to find permanent housing, a job, finish a school year, etc.). This centre offers many other services (food and clothing, 3 "cheap" shops open to all: for furniture, clothes and general goods, administrative help, educational support, legal advice, financial advice, removals, transport to and from the Liège food bank, medical and pharmaceutical care, and so on).

### Italy

- Italy → Scotland: Because of airline strikes, this study trip had to be postponed until June, and is being prepared at the moment.

### France

- France → Romania: After a ten-day trip in May 2009 by some senior expert advisers to the Roma people in Transylvania, French volunteers have strengthened their links with their Romanian counterparts. The various activities carried out for the Mobility project in the field contributed to providing an echocardiograph for the local medical centre. Since May 2009, one of the participants also helped to found an association helping Gypsy families in Paris.

### Romania

- Romania → Hungary: Four Romanian volunteers wanted to describe new working methods for caring for people with a mobility or mental disability and the means used to involve these people, especially the children, to a greater extent in society, through various educational activities. It was a very fruitful trip for exchanging best practice.

- Romania → Austria: In May 2009, a group of Romanians took part in the annual national meeting of the SSVP in Graz. Sharing of their respective experiences encouraged the Romanian volunteers to renew their own voluntary work in Bosca. In turn, they invited some Austrian members of the Hitzendorf conference to come. This has given concrete expression to their wish to pursue their exchange of experience and best practice.

- Romania → Germany: Romanian volunteers took a study trip to Bolchot to exchange experience in managing projects with the poor, and to set up structures for future shared cooperation for children's homes.

- Romania → England & Wales: A group of deaf volunteers from Slatina in Romania came to visit the Newcastle Centre for the Deaf. They shared their various projects (successes, problems, etc.). All the volunteers were very pleased with these exchanges of knowledge and experience, and want to build on this to set up joint projects.

### And also...

Countries taking part in the Mobility Project, but whose Contacts did not attend the volunteer network meeting on 12 May 2010:

Northern Ireland → France: Study visit to learn about the work of a Vincentian conference in Paris with the poor at a local level, and at an international level with a visit to the International Confederation of the SSVP.

Germany and Romania → Poland: Senior experts visit to strengthen the Poland SSVP and advise local volunteers about their work with the poorest people.



Finally, Contacts found it very helpful to take part in European volunteer network meetings throughout the project. Initially, these meetings have helped to set the European volunteer network on a firm foundation. In addition these meetings have contributed directly organizing the exchange visits, sharing ideas on subjects such as publicity or the exchange manual, to shared reflection on the progress made by the project. Finally these meetings have allowed the Contact persons to get to know each other, in a friendly atmosphere.

### 3) “Brainstorming” for the final meeting of European volunteers in October 2010

The Contacts and members of the project organizing committee shared their plans and expectations for organization of the final meeting of the European Mobility Project volunteers’ network. Several ideas were put forward and discussed:

- A big final celebratory meeting, with many people attending, in Paris.
- Introduction of the Exchange Manual produced for the Mobility Project.
- A webcam for use by volunteers unable to get to Paris so they feel part of the meeting.
- Showing photos, films and a golden book for storing testimonies. It will be good to be able to keep the memory of the trips alive.
- Inviting 3 - 4 people from each country, at least one of whom was very involved in the project and joined the exchange trips. The countries will be asked to produce a report, emphasizing the content of the trips, as well as the subsequent actions. It will be important to describe all the work completed throughout the three years by the older European volunteers’ network, and all the local initiatives taken by the volunteers as a result of the project. It may be difficult to report on exchange visits that take place during September 2010, but it must be covered in the final meeting.
- Inviting SSVP National Presidents in Europe and the leaders of other associations to consider continuing and investing in the project after November 2010 when European Union funding comes to an end. This could encourage volunteers and leaders of associations that have not taken part in exchanges to keep the project alive, and consider means for funding it.

### 4) The Exchange Manual

A small group of 4 Contacts: Eva Peter, Michel Bouly, Maurizio Ceste and Ian Tierney met in Paris last February to start work on the structure and content of the Exchange manual.

The Exchange Manual is best understood as a **guide** in its structure and content, providing advice and best practice for arranging cross-border exchange visits as formation for volunteers. As a user manual, it can provide the **procedure to follow**, stage by stage. For this reason, it is important that the Manual includes the two following points:

- a user guide specifically for the SSVP and other bodies, with or without European funding
- an introduction to the Mobility Project

We decided that the Manual should not be too long or too theoretical, to encourage people to organize the same kind of project.

It will have the benefit of being open and flexible: it will be possible to add to it after similar projects are carried out.

At the volunteers’ network meeting on Wednesday 12 May, the Contacts answered the following question:

**Based on your experience in the field as Contact, what contribution could you make to the Exchange Manual plan?**

The Contacts have emphasized the useful and practical nature the Manual must have. It should allow the project begun three years ago to be extended. The Exchange manual should not be a final document, but rather provide support and collect together advice and best practice. It should illustrate the extraordinary contribution made by the Mobility Project, and show how it can strengthen and improve the work of European volunteers of 50+ in Europe.

The Contacts also want the Manual to include some very practical information: the structure of the volunteers' network, its organisation and operation, the best practice in organizing exchange visits, follow-up documents, and communications.

Finally, the Manual may be posted, but it is also suggested that it should be distributed by hand, so that anyone interested, open or curious about the project can be involved.



*A big thank you to everyone for taking part and being involved in this very productive meeting of the European volunteers' network!*