

SUMMARY OF

best practice

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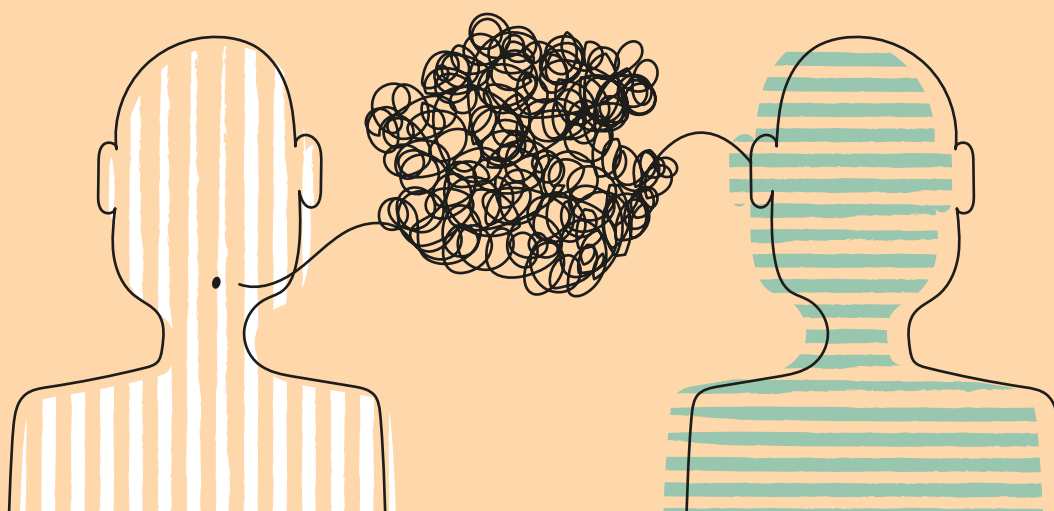
RECRUITING

young volunteers

in

Telephone
Emergency
Services

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European Project



Best practice in recruiting young volunteers in Telephone Emergency Services

Short version handbook

2019

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International Federation
of Telephone Emergency
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1 . I N T R O D U C T I O N

1.1 Aim of the project

The aim of the YOUThES project was to share experience and achieve additional knowledge through **common reflection and exchange on best practices for recruiting young volunteers** to the emergency listening services of partner organisations.

1.2 Themes

The following themes and objectives were explored during the project development:

- **age** structure in the individual associations and TES centres: similarities and differences
- **analysis** of the outcome and **data** of the previous projects QuaLiS and TESVolSat with regard to the age and motivation of volunteers working on crisis lines
- **sharing models and experiences** of the partner organisations regarding the successful recruitment of young volunteers
- **training and support** for young volunteers: specific needs and characteristics of the target group
- **work-life balance** for younger volunteers in terms of number of hours and length of stay

1.3 Partners

IFOTES Europe (IE) - Germany

SOS Amitié France (SOS) - France

Kirkens SOS i Bjørgvin (KIRB) - Norway

Telefono Amico Italia (TAI) - Italy

Magyar Lelki Elsosegely Telefonszolgálatok Szövetsége (LESZ) - Hungary

Telefonseelsorge (TES) - Austria

Studio Rucli (SR) - Italy

Palveleva Puhelin (PP) changed now in Kirkon keskusteluapua - Finland

1.4 Methods

During the project TES partners had **six transnational meetings and workshops** for exchange and to develop strategies for recruiting and using different media.

The results were based on project workshops and **two questionnaires**. Results were reported in topical order.

YOUTHES Questionnaire A was for project partners. Questions concerned information about recruiting young volunteers, benefits for young people, for TES organisations and for society to recruit young volunteers and the using of media and internet in recruiting. All partners answered the questionnaire giving an overall view of the situation in 11 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Switzerland).

YOUTHES Questionnaire B was for young people in Europe. Questions concerned motivation, improvements needed in helpline and information seeking. The electronic questionnaire was open from December 2017 to March 2018. 315 answers were obtained from the 11 countries mentioned above. In total 84% of the respondents belonged to the targeted age group 20-34 years. One third were 25-29 years old. Three quarters were female. Nearly half of respondents were volunteers in helpline and 10% has been a volunteer earlier; 42% were non-volunteers at that moment in time.

1.5 Outcome

The partners developed a **best practice manual** which contains the outcome of the project and Recommendation to helplines that intend to improve the recruitment of young volunteers through a more focused information and training methods. The manual is accessible to all the helplines for emotional support in Europe and any other non-profit organisation that wishes to recruit young people.

The full version of the handbook is in English and is available on the partners' websites.

An **abstract of the manual** was produced. Thanks to the commitment of the partners and members of IFOTES present in the International Committee, this abstract was translated and is available in the following 10 languages:

- English
- German
- French
- Italian
- Spanish
- Dutch
- Slovenian
- Finnish
- Norwegian
- Hungarian

All abstracts are available on the IFOTES web site www.ifotes.org and, depending to the language, on the respective web- sites of the IFOTES partners and members.

Note

TES: Telephone Emergency Services

2 . REVIEW AND EXCHANGE OF HERE AND NOW SITUATION

2.1 The current situation of volunteers in TES

The working group started by describing the situation in Europe at the beginning of the project. A **survey of partner organisations** (YOUThES_Survey 1_Data from Members) was made to show the situation in TES in Europe at the present time.

Results showed that volunteers are mainly the over 50s with 77,04% of them between 50 and 79 years, and 76% were women.

This data confirmed a **severe lack of young people engaged in helplines** and posed questions about the future of the services and social impact of this situation. At the beginning of the project the group decided to define “young people” as those between 20 and 34 years old.

2.2 Young people in TES

A questionnaire for TES directors, (YOUThES_Questionnaire A for members) helped to further clarify the **composition of TES young people**. They generally represent less than 5% of the volunteers, are female and stay in TES for 1 to 2 years which is the minimum time most TES require.

For contacting, recruiting, training and motivating young volunteers TES invest 20-30% of their working time and 0-10% of their budget.

2.3 TES Training

Specific **training** for young people is not provided, and the majority (18 out of 20 TES) have no specific tools for young volunteers. Neither are there differences in the length of training periods for this group which is normally from 40 to 120 hours over 3 to 24 months. This long period for training in TES environment is considered to be a **guarantee of quality**, a good way to explore trainee’s motivations and a way to obtain long-term volunteers. A demanding training is intended to be an opportunity to prepare people well for the job and better involving them. TES are not willing to sacrifice the quality of training to recruit young people (YOUThES_Questionnaire A for members).

2.4 Conclusions

As the results emerged from the Survey (YOUThES_Survey 1_Data from Members) and the questionnaire (YOUThES_Questionnaire A_for members) concerning the low investments of resources in young people's recruitment and training, the group's debates during the first meetings indicated a lot of **resistance in TES environment to recruiting young volunteers**. Negative aspects appeared more evident than positive ones.

However at the end of the project the whole group was both enthusiastic and appreciated the benefits that can come from more young people in TES.

“First comes thought; then organisation of that thought into ideas and plans; then transformation of those plans into reality. The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.” Napoleon Hill

3 . MOTIVATION FOR RECRUITING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

One of the first questions at the beginning of this project was “Why should we recruit young volunteers?” Traditionally volunteers in helplines have been mainly adults and elderly people.

However the outcome of the project showed that partners believed young volunteers bring many benefits both to TES organisation and to society as a whole.

3.1 Benefits and motivation for TES organisations to have young volunteers

Brainstorming in project workshops produced the following ideas and opinions:

- Young volunteers give us **access to new technologies**.
- Because of their life situation, they are more **flexible**.
- They are **dynamic, enthusiastic, innovative and motivated**.
- Young are **more fun!** Therefore, TES is more fun and this is a joy for us all.
- They have **eagerness to improve and learn**. They challenge older volunteers in a good way.
- Young volunteers have **connections to young**, so they can recruit more young volunteers.
- They have **mutual understanding of problems of young** generation.
- They speak the **same language as the young callers** so they can be excellent listeners especially for young callers or chatters.
- They have **recently studied** so they have up-to-date research information about human issues.

Having young volunteers is a real hope for the TES organisations’ survival in the future. Beside this, young volunteers give TES improved and up-to-date image.

3.2 Benefits and motivation for society in having young volunteers in TES-work

When TES have more young volunteers this has an influence on the whole community. TES training and work make young volunteers better at handling crisis and at facing challenging situations. They become **more aware**

and attentive to others. They can become **committed citizens**, which then reflects in their private and working environment. They **spread the idea that talking can help** and the benefit of being listened to.

By working as a listener, young adults **can participate in suicide prevention.** When there are more young listeners, TES can enrich their service to young callers and chatters.

3.3 Benefits and motivation for the young volunteers themselves in working for TES

In the project, we made one survey and two questionnaires. In questionnaire B we asked young adults themselves about TES work. The most motivating aspect for young adults to be a helpline volunteer is **being helpful to others.** In fact 96% of respondents valued this aspect as a « very important » or « important » reason to do TES work. The young adults do not only seek benefits for themselves. They want to give something to the world, to other people.

Nearly 90% of respondents valued as « important » or « very important » the possibility to **develop self-awareness and personal growth.** The listener hears about hardships and misery they may never have heard about before. TES work develops empathy and maturity.

The **quality of the training** provided also makes TES work attractive for young people and can enhance CVs.

A possibility to work in a group of different ages is relatively rare. Groups for hobbies or other voluntary work are often very homogenous. TES work gives the young volunteers a possibility to get known and work with adults and elderly people. **Larger age diversity** was considered beneficial by the partners.

3.4 TES organisations doubts in recruiting the young as volunteers

At the beginning of this project, there were some doubts within TES organisations about recruiting young volunteers:

- Training young people is an investment. If **young volunteers leave shortly** after training, the organisation can feel let down.
- Young volunteers **might not be so committed to listening.** They are involved in many projects and TES is only one of these.
- TES may doubt that young volunteers have enough **experience of life** to do TES work.

3.5 Conclusions

YOUTHes project gave plenty of new perspectives in motivation to recruit young volunteers. The biggest obstacle for recruiting young volunteers seemed to be the fear of the young volunteers leaving TES work too soon. This can be seen as a mind-set issue. Partners identified that the **advantages of having young volunteers outweighed the problems their recruitment could cause.** It was also noted that short projects were now the norm and not necessarily something that concerned only young people.

TES organisations should **reconsider policies of total anonymity** of those working at TES. Young volunteers could tell their friends about the TES work and this could help TES in recruiting young people.

TES organisations should **talk more about listening-skilled volunteers as members of society** and the value this gives to the whole community. In the workshops the importance of having skilled listeners in society was discussed. Questionnaire B revealed that young people want to be helpful to others and through their TES work they increase the possibility of people being listened to in general even after volunteers leave TES. This is valuable to the community as a whole.

3.6 Recommendation

The biggest obstacle for recruiting young volunteers seemed to be fear of losing them too soon. TES organisations should reconsider their thinking about “leaving too soon”. The advantages of having young volunteers is considerable. Even if young volunteers work as a listener only one year, it is worth recruiting and training them.

4. LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES IN RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE

The benefits for TES services and society as a whole in recruiting and training young volunteers have been demonstrated. What strategies could be developed to ensure that a balance between generations within TES is achieved?

4.1 On the local level

- **Change mentalities** to make everyone involved (recruiters, trainers, post members) aware of what the association has to gain: a more modern image, a help with new technologies and social media, a service where people of all ages can work together towards the same goal.
- **Communicate:** surveys on young people's needs and expectations, in the context of TES work, could serve as basis to implement a clear and targeted communication strategy with support material aimed specifically at under 35's: presence on social media, creating digital contents and regularly updating them.
- **The impact of word of mouth communication** among the young should not be underestimated.
- **Maintain close relations with local youth organisations, schools, universities.**
- **Adapting the contracts,** the number of hours' presence required to the possibilities of young adults with jobs and families, as well as the training methods used.
- **Promote the idea** that acquiring listening skills is a life-changing experience on the personal and social level.

4.2 On the national level

It is up to the directors and members of national boards, who should first be convinced of the necessity to recruit and train young volunteers, to drive change, make the decisions and implement them.

- **Image** in national communication should be inclusive, presenting people of all walks of life and all ages.
- **"An ambassador"** with a positive image among young people should be found to become "the face" of the organisation, to represent it on national campaigns and relay its actions on national and social media.
- **Training** should be similar in contents in the different posts so as to make it possible for young volunteers to continue their activity within TES even if they have to move for personal or professional reasons.

- **Connections** with universities or research institutes: students in psychology or social studies are likely to be attracted by the quality of the training TES services provide. But business schools should not be overlooked as they train the leaders, trustees and donors of tomorrow.
- **Projects** such as national events, congresses should involve young people and take into account the topics that are relevant to them.

4.3 On the international level

- **IFOTES delegates** should report to their national federations and inform them about the findings and conclusions of this project.
- **The role of IFOTES** is to support its partners in adopting a new perspective on the involvement of young volunteers.
- **Web-platform:** IFOTES could reserve some pages for young volunteers to provide information about its European network (chats, meetings and exchanges between listeners from different countries)
- **Congresses :** IFOTES could encourage young volunteers to attend by offering them lower fees and devoting workshops to the issues that more specifically concern them
- **A lobbying campaign** for the inclusion of an article in the European Convention on Human Rights stating that being heard is a basic human right.
- **An International Day of Listening,** a single day event in Europe could serve to highlight the benefits for individuals and for society as a whole in being listened to.

4.4 Recommendation

- Motivate services at all levels, convince and communicate widely about the benefits of all kinds to be gained for TES services, for young people and for society as a whole.
- Use all the new means of communication and social media to create a modern, inclusive and attractive image.
- Welcome young volunteers, be attuned to and adapt to their specific needs and expectations.

5. USING DIFFERENT MEDIA AND INTERNET IN RECRUITING

5.1 General use of the media and the internet

The project has charted the general use of the media and the internet in the work of recruiting young volunteers for TES work. The survey reveals that today's practice is mostly characterized by quite static use of media and internet and that there are major differences in capacity, knowledge and motivation in the use of media and internet to recruit young volunteers.

All centers have their own **websites**. These websites are easy to find and have an informative landing page, but only a few centers use the website or Facebook to target young people and to recruit them to become volunteers. The centers have different solutions to navigate further from **Facebook** to the website for information on how to apply for volunteering. For young people it is important that there are simple and readily available methods for finding information and for volunteering. Today, only half of the centers offer an **on-line** solution with the completion of **application** forms.

There may be other reasons for this random practice in targeted use of the media and the internet to recruit young volunteers for the TES work but these are the two most prominent reasons:

- The organisation does not have enough knowledge and capacity
- When taking into consideration the investment needed for training, the organisation may not want to gamble on young volunteers because they only stay a short time in service.

5.2 Where do young people seek information?

Young people seeking information on **Google** to find information about helplines or other similar organisations use keywords. Questionnaire B established that the 10 most relevant **keywords** in an international context are these: helpline, help, volunteer work, volunteering, suicide, depression, anonymity, loneliness, crisis, listening.

These words should be integrated into a strategy for recruiting through **Facebook** and via the **website** and should be used in texts on the website or Facebook. The awareness of this “gateway” strategy may be stronger in some centres and less so in others.

5.3 What motivates young people for voluntary TES service?

From questionnaire B there were three factors that young people found motivating: The first is to know they are **helpful to others**, that the volunteer work makes them good listeners and that it gives them life experience that will be useful for their **own life** and **development**. The second is the possibility of receiving **certification** that they have completed training and that they have fulfilled the minimum requirement for this activity. The third is that the training and practical experience qualifies them for service at other TES centres if they move.

5.4 What improvements can the TES organisations make?

National centers should have employees or volunteers who have experience and can **prioritize and use the internet and the media in a modern way**. Ideally the local centres in combination with a central management should create content on local sites. There should be regular postings of news, current events and articles and information about the service. Young people pointed out that the most effective communication is to **convey stories that affect them emotionally through photos, short videos, stories or in a combination of these**. Immediate interaction with employees, volunteers or others who can talk about their experience in the service would be a further advantage for visitors to the website.

5.5 In summary

TES in Europe has the means and tools needed to use the media and the internet effectively to recruit young volunteers. However there are not enough partners who do so at the moment. Web sites and Facebook pages are not as dynamic as they could be. Targeted contact with young people is almost absent. There is significant potential for improvement and developing new ways to recruit young people to TES work through social media. In order to develop strategies, we suggest that the starting point is to know what motivates young people to be TES volunteers.

5.6 Recommendation

1. Create your own strategic plan to use media and the internet to recruit young volunteers
2. Have what motivates young people for TES service as a starting point
3. Find competent people to facilitate the use of social media in your organisation.

6. COMMUNICATION, PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES AND OTHER WAYS TO MOTIVATE AND INVOLVE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

A **survey** was made of over 300 **young people** to find out what appeals to this age-group and what inspires them.

The findings of the YOUThES project stressed that motivation within TES to increase the numbers of young volunteers is a key factor to being successful.

6.1 Methods

Current methods of attracting young volunteers to join TES and to stay were surveyed with the following findings:

- TES must have **desirable training contents** to attract young people.
- With regard to mobility, a **common European training** content should enable volunteers to continue working for TES even if they change jobs or place of residency.
- **Skills and talents** of young volunteers other than listening are under-exploited (eg. peer communication).

6.2 Challenges

There are special challenges concerning young volunteers with special solutions required:

- Difficulties to make **commitments necessitate offering** psychological support
- **Lack of time** means considering the shortening of the recruitment period
- **Early loss of volunteer's motivation** could be combated by offering counseling and support

6.3 Useful activities

The following activities were identified as useful for recruiting young volunteers:

- Use of **media and press releases**.
- Organizing **workshops and surveys**.
- TES presence on **social media** with trained employees updating regularly.

- Using volunteers' **personal contacts** with their family, friends and colleagues to recruit.
- Contacts and **co-operation with universities**.
- Using volunteering as a possibility for students to learn and **improve their listening skills** *in situ*.
- **TES's presence at festivals, exhibitions and special events** such as World Mental Health Day.
- **Videos and interviews** of celebrities, young TES listeners and callers.

6.4 Useful tools in TES recruitment and policy

- **Recruitment campaigns** using identical, well designed material simultaneously via all the possible communication channels.
- Use of **keywords** instead of long and complicated texts for recruitment and « embedding » these words in articles and interviews.
- Developing **cooperation with other NGOs, businesses and local and national institutes**.
- **On-line access** for recruits to training modules and voluntary work while waiting for selection.

6.5 Supporting young people in the service

- Creating a **good and open atmosphere** in the post.
- Giving young volunteers **special attention** from professional directors, supervisors, and crisis workers.
- **Adapting their shift hours** or even decreasing hours.
- **Paying for certain listening shifts**, especially at night or during holidays.
- **Inviting psychological experts or famous lecturers** to speak in the post.

6.6 Recommendation

- Common training program that enables movement between posts.
- The possibility to choose from several tasks other than listening.
- Increase in the association's presence and visibility on social media.

7. MODELS AND CONCEPT FOR BEST PRACTICE IN RECRUITING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Motivation of the staff, both the management staff and the other volunteers, is the basis of successful recruitment of young volunteers. If post directors, recruiters and volunteers are convinced of the value of the young, the first step is taken.

The next step is to **make the organisation known** to young people and to advertise the advantages of participation in TES offers young people, in particular helping other people, being a useful member of society, personal growth and gaining life-experience. A certificate that testifies they are trained listeners and the length of their service.

In addition to traditional communication tools and channels, it is important to **use social media** to reach out to young people.

At the moment webpages, Facebook and personal acquaintance are the top three places. It is important to be up to date and to keep an eye out for the target group's favored communication tools. The goal must be to meet young people where they spend their time (e.g. on the internet), to present useful and interesting information about the organisation and to invite them to make contact in an easy way. A precondition for all this is that the organisation has sufficient skills to use internet effectively or resources to employ somebody to do this.

It is not only the internet where young people can be found. Personal contact is still important. Getting **in touch with schools and universities** is also an option.

Structural changes in the organisation can also be required. It can be necessary to think over and change old rules and habits, for example minimum time of commitment, anonymity, accustomed ways of recruitment and training. With regard to mobility it should also be possible to go from one post to another.

Partners felt that young people are able and willing to stay for a longer period of time or come back later in their lives if they feel good in the organisation. **Good training** attracts them and training must not stop after the basic entrance course.

Another important aspect is that the **young should integrate into the organisation**. They should not be those on the edge but those in the middle. Their period of engagement can be preserved through taking care of them and fostering their talents.

7.1. 5 Points of Recommendation

01 MOTIVATE THE STAFF TO APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF HAVING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS!

- Use different ways to motivate: workshops, discussion at local and national levels and with volunteers, staff and organisation
- Change mindsets: don't be afraid of young people leaving too soon

02 MAKE TES KNOWN TO YOUNG PEOPLE!

- Engage experts to develop a strategic communication plan
- Use modern channels of communication
- Get into personal contacts with young people through schools, universities and national and local events

03 THINK OVER AND ADAPT RULES, HABITS AND WAYS OF RECRUITMENT!

- Mobility: entitle trained volunteers to work in any center of your organisation, even in TES organisations abroad
- Integrate young volunteers in the organisation and give them responsibilities
- Esteem and foster young people's talents
- Reconsider the anonymity of working for TES. Let young volunteers talk about their commitment to helping people
- Ask new volunteers to agree to make at least a one-year commitment to TES

04 CONTRIBUTE TO THE MOTIVATION OF YOUNG VOLUNTEERS!

- Offer quality, attractive and certified quality training
- Stress the benefits of gaining personal growth and life-experience
- Give young volunteers the opportunity to be a part of an international community (IFOTES)

05 SHARE THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING SKILLS IN SOCIETY!

- Develop methods to show how good listening can make committed citizens and contribute to mental and social health of the society

8 . CONCLUSIONS

YOUThES project gave plenty of new perspectives in **motivation for recruiting young volunteers**. At the beginning some partners recognized the need for young volunteers but other doubted even that. During the project, we had many workshops, one survey and two questionnaires. At the end of the project the advantages that young adults bring into TES work were identified by the partners.

Nevertheless, there are **some obstacles to overcome** and problems to be solved. The biggest obstacle for recruiting young volunteers seemed to be the relatively short time the young volunteers stay in TES work. Organisations have been used to a situation where volunteers stay as listeners for many decades. This can be seen mainly as a mindset issue. When there are so many advantages to having young volunteers this issue should not be difficult to resolve. For example, the new volunteers could make a commitment to work as a listener for at least one year.

TES organisations train young volunteers to be listeners in helplines and to chat but they also become **better listeners in their everyday life** outside TES. They increase the possibility of people being listened to in their communities and of understanding that, in times of misfortune, talking can help. These aspects are important from the point of view of the whole society.

Young volunteers were asked how they saw voluntary work as a listener. The results were eye-opening. Beforehand it was thought young volunteers were motivated mainly by getting advantages for themselves such as quality training and useful commendations on a C.V. However the most important aspect for young volunteers was the **possibility to help others and the feeling of being helpful**. Their motivation comes more from within themselves than had been imagined.

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European countries where the project was implemented and disseminated, and the TES organisations concerned:

Austria:	Telefonseelsorge - www.telefonseelsorge.at
Belgium:	Fédération des Centres de Télé-Accueil de Belgique - www.tele-accueil.be Federatie van Tele-Onthaaldiensten - www.tele-onthaal.be Telefonhilfe - Anonyme Lebenshilfe - www.telefonhilfe.be
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