



International  
Association for  
Volunteer  
Effort

# VOLUNTEERING TOGETHER

*Making a difference to  
people and communities.*

# VOLUNTEERING FOR INCLUSION

IN THIS ISSUE:

Education for Rohingya refugees

EVPs to empower girls

Inclusivity for the elderly

Integration of migrants

**...AND MORE!**

# VOLUNTEERING FOR INTEGRATION IN AUGSBURG

By Wolfgang Krell, Executive Director, Volunteer Center Augsburg, Germany

**A**lmost one million refugees fled to migrated to Germany during the 2015 refugee crisis. We were able to help them assimilate to a life in a new country, through the generous support and engagement of thousands of volunteers. Volunteers joined efforts to cover all necessities required for daily life, such as accommodations, clothing, meals and language courses. However, this is not a new phenomenon – Germany’s spirit of assisting those in need began decades before. Since the 1980s, refugee assistance has been an established sector of volunteering, first organized by newly founded free associations and Christian parishes. With these preexisting structures in place, we were able to face the challenge of welcoming hundreds of thousands of refugees to our country in 2015.



## HELPING CIRCLES FOR REFUGEES – REFUGEE PILOTS

Augsburg's City Council responded quickly to the crisis, putting in place policies to open decentralized homes, exceeding no more than 80 asylum seekers per house. Each week in 2015, new homes were being opened in various quarters of the city, to accept refugees. Together with the city's social department, Volunteer Center Augsburg (VC Augsburg) began to promote volunteering for refugees in each of these quarters of the city. This program eventually became Helping Circles. Religious communities, sports clubs, free association for and of migrants, and everyday citizens merged their efforts to support the program. VC Augsburg started training volunteers on asylum laws, intercultural sensitivity, volunteering frameworks and tools to support refugees dispersed throughout Augsburg.

13 Helping Circle hubs have been founded from 2015-2016, consisting of almost 300 volunteers. Aptly named "Refugee Pilots", these volunteers are a part of a bottom-up movement, providing assistance from the ground, in their own neighborhoods. They provide courses on German language and culture, accompaniment to public authorities, assistance in looking for internship and jobs and counseling on the education system for children. The focus now is on proper integration for the migrants, now that all their basic needs have been met. We are focusing on long term goals, such as education, cultural and language assimilation, professional training and jobs. It is interesting to note that now, former refugees are also beginning to give back to their new community through volunteering.





## MENTORS FOR UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

A large portion of the refugees who have migrated to Germany are unaccompanied minors. Most of them are young males, between the ages of 15-17 years old. With the Youth Welfare Office, VC Augsburg developed a volunteering project, linking volunteer mentors with these young refugees. The mentors receive training on youth behavior, cross-cultural issues and guidelines for effective mentorship. Some of these volunteers have been mentoring youth refugees for over four years now. They provide personal support and assist in contacting local agencies. Their work plays an important role for integration – expanding the young people’s German through conversation, troubleshooting issues at school, helping manage personal issues and most of all, just providing company through leisurely activities. Over 80 volunteers are currently paired with 100+ mentees.



Growing up in a new country as refugees, during their journey into adulthood, it is incredibly important to provide a stable source of support to these young people. Even those who have entered adulthood since they first arrived in Germany, still receive support from the mentors they had in their teen years. Phase two of the project is to open the mentorship program to native youth, who are also undergoing problems in their lives. There are also plans to expand program to include international cooking courses, craft apprenticeship courses and cultural visits.



## SPORTS AND INTEGRATION

Sports is a universal activity, enjoyed by many worldwide. Although the types of sports may vary around the world, the activity itself is known to bring together people of diverse backgrounds, through shared experiences,



challenges, frustrations and victories. Sports can be used as an ideal method of integration.

At Volunteer Center Augsburg, a freelancer staff member pairs up refugees with sports clubs around the city, depending on their sport of choice. Some of the refugees have even started up their own department within their sports club, such as the cricket team initiated by Afghan refugees. The local sports clubs now organize festivals, inviting people of all backgrounds and ages to enjoy a day of playing sports together. With the support of the U.S. General Consulate from Munich, training sessions for women boxing and ice skating has also been established. Moreover, volunteers are now offering swimming courses for refugees, many of whom who do not know how to swim.

These are only few examples of how volunteers have been helping refugees integrate into our community. Although we have approximately 4,500 refugees in Augsburg, equating to only about 1.5% of the total population, more than 46% of our people (approximately 140,000 individuals) have a migration history, whether as migrants themselves or as first-generation Germans.

In Augsburg, refugees are not viewed as an issue we want to push out. Living in Augsburg embodies living in diversity. Some quarters of our city have classrooms with over 80% of its students with an immigrant background. Our children, whether native or from abroad, are growing up in a diverse community every day.

In a few years, no one ethnic group will serve as the majority in our city. Therefore, integration will no longer be the focus. Rather, the challenge at hand will be finding ways for all of us to live harmoniously, keeping in mind our various backgrounds and cultures.

### **AMBASSADORS OF MULTIPLICITY**

To find the solution to this future challenge, we have developed the Ambassadors of Multiplicity. We specifically used this term rather than diversity, as we wanted to recognize the multiple values, attitudes and experiences in the lives of the people in our community. These ambassadors are trained in diversity and intercultural relations, increasing their own self-awareness and appreciation for the multiplicity of their community. Their commonalities are more significant than their differences, and at the end of the program the ambassadors go out into the community to celebrate the diversity that exists in our city. We currently have 80 volunteers serving as Ambassadors of Multiplicity, who have organized intercultural fashion shows, public discussions and roundtables.

As citizens, it is our responsibility to integrate newcomers to our community for an inclusive future. An inclusive future is only possible through civic engagement for the Sustainable Development Goals and for peace and justice throughout the world.



International Association for Volunteer Effort

VOLUNTEERING  
**TOGETHER**

---

*Making a difference to  
people and communities.*

Issue No. 6 December 2019

© International Association for Volunteer Effort, 2019

Editor: Jessica Han, Marketing & Communications Manager, IAVE