

Good Practise Summary

This proposal presents the practise of **Volunteerism in Athienou Municipality**, Cyprus. Volunteerism in our community is one of the biggest and most effective activity, that helps strengthen the social ties and creates a healthy and highly functioning society. Individuals of all ages are excited to participate and offer their time and resources towards their fellow in need. The spirit of volunteerism exists in most families and it is passed from generation to generation contributing to the healthy evolution of our society.

Athienou is a Municipality of six thousand inhabitants. The Municipal Council of Volunteerism (MCV) of Athienou was established in 1970 to help people in need. The following years were a difficult period for Cyprus and Athienou. Social problems were exacerbated from the Turkish invasion in Cyprus, in 1974. Ever since Athienou is a town within the buffer zone isolated from the rest of the island, with most of its rural land occupied by the Turkish troops. Many people were in need to restart their lives and volunteerism was one of the main tools that help our municipality grow again during difficult years. Athienou although a highly functioning society, still suffers from isolation and seeks to find solutions in the volunteering collaboration between its citizens.

The strategic goals of the MCV are to: i) identify the social needs within the Municipality and establish the necessary social programs to tackle them; ii) engage the community members into taking part in the development and upgrading the quality of life of the community; and iii) raise awareness and educate the public regarding the current social programs and social needs. The MCV currently operates four programs that offer solutions to social problems faced by our community: the Kleanthios Elder House, The Constantineleoneion Centre for Adults, the Municipal Nursery Centre, and the Social Welfare Council. These programs cover the needs of almost all the generations within the community and they wouldn't be possible without volunteerism. The Kleanthios Elder House (established 1983) is a living caring organisation for the Elders which goes beyond a typical elder house, combining volunteerism and high quality standards and facilities. The main goal of the Constantineleoneion Centre for Adults (established 2001) is to offer, on a volunteering basis, to all people over eighteen years old high quality service of social and daily living needs, daily entertaining activities, healthy food, and diminishing social exclusion in the society. The Municipal Nursery Centre (established 1991) has managed over the years offers high quality nursery services to the families of the community. The Social Welfare Council (Established 2012) has the goal to provide economic and any other kind of help to struggling individuals and families, based on evaluation in collaboration with governmental authorities. All the programs are in a very close collaboration between them and with other local organisations (schools, church, Municipality, etc.), which achieves a strong integration of the different generations and helps achieving the set goals beyond the standards.

The MCV operates on a volunteering basis. Every citizen can be a member. The members of the governmental body of the MCV are proposed by local organisations (political parties, church, schools, Municipality) and are approved by the members. The programs follow strict standards that are set and audited by the authorities, and are operated by professionals that are employed on a full-time basis, thus creating job opportunities. Funding comes from membership subscriptions, private donations, and governmental aid. However, the essence of the program is the time and resources spent by volunteers.

A basic innovative element of the MCV is the close collaboration of the volunteers and the (local and national) authorities. Volunteers with their activities managed to gain the recognition of the authorities and have become part of the national mechanisms for Social Welfare. A second innovative element is the uniform approach to social problems, where all the issues are managed under a single Volunteering Council. This has created the basis for collaboration between people of different generation to solve the problems of different generations. Overall, the community works together towards the future considering the old and the new.

There is high potential for improvement of the programs. Volunteers are always active to identify social problems that might arise from modern challenges, e.g. Cyprus as a EU member state and European social integration. The MCV has the strategy to use new technologies to improve its programs and facilities, given the available resources. This practise can be transferred for reuse by other European cities and communities to tackle social problems. Overall, a high sense of volunteering is a sign of a healthy and growing society.