4. On the road

4.1. Induction and on-arrival orientation

```
Needs        →   Aims &       →   Partner-    →   Budget &
analysis         concept          finding         fund-raising
                                                       ↓
On arrival   ←   Preparation  ←   Specific    ←   Recruit
                                  groups          volunteers
    ↓
Support &    →   Conflict &   →   Evaluation  →   Recognition
motivation       crisis           & follow-up
```

Just as important as the preparation before departure is the introduction for the volunteers once they have arrived. The volunteers are anxious and somewhat insecure because they do not know what they will find. The first impression they receive is crucial, to reassure them and make them feel safe in their new environment. A host organisation that receives many volunteers may not realise how it feels to be starting your first day of voluntary service in another country: what may seem easy routine to the host is the start of an uncertain adventure for the volunteer. As a general rule it can be said that the less experienced the volunteer – and the longer the stay – the more important is proper on-arrival training.

The question of a proper reception of the volunteer is particularly relevant in the case of an individual placement. When a group arrives somewhere together they have each other as a reference, which absorbs the on-arrival shock to some extent. The length of on-arrival training will also depend on the type of project and placement; it can range from a few hours in a welcome meeting to several days of seminars.

Apart from the first impact, the arrival at the host organisation is also the moment of truth for both sides: the images of the place and persons created beforehand in each other's heads do not necessarily correspond to what they find. Especially if the culture of the volunteer and that of the host are very different, the expectations about how to welcome a person can differ a lot. The host organisation should take these intercultural considerations into account and facilitate the first contact for the volunteers as much as possible. Step by step, the volunteers will adapt to the customs and communication patterns of the host organisation and community.

The on-arrival training should complement the preparatory training already given by the sending organisation. The better the communication between the sending and hosting organisations, the better the hosts will be able to fill any gaps the sending organisation has left. On-arrival training should include information about the local culture and an introduction to the project. The time of "dry swimming" is over; now the volunteer wants to experience the water. When it comes to an introduction to the project, make sure you leave enough space for the volunteers' ideas and suggestions. Try to find out their expectations and ideas about the project and invite them to ask questions. Now is the best time to prevent misunderstandings.

Suggestion for training

Invite a friend, colleague or relative (preferably from abroad) into your house for a new activity. This can be playing a new card game, a session of fortune-telling or a party on a strange theme. Try to make the visiting person as comfortable as possible, using some of the suggestions above (picking the person up at the railway station, breaking the ice, introducing other people present, explaining what will be happening). Ask afterwards if the visitor noticed your efforts and what kind of effect they had on him or her. Deduce principles from this experience and apply them to the hosting of your volunteer.

4.1.1 Using young locals to introduce the volunteer

An excellent way of introducing a volunteer is through peer education. You can prepare a number of local young people or active members of your organisation to receive the incoming volunteers. Let them introduce the volunteers to local realities. In this way, from the beginning you provide the volunteers with a network of social contacts and people to refer to. The locals will feel responsible for the well-being of the volunteers and give them a much better introduction to the place than an employee of a hosting organisation ever could.

You need to prepare the locals first, so you may want to introduce them to some intercultural concepts like the iceberg, the onion and the adjustment cycle (more in the T-Kit on *Intercultural Learning* available to download at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int) to help them understand what the international volunteer might be going through and to make them more open to the volunteer. These concepts help the local young people to reflect about their own culture, as well as the presumed culture of the volunteers, and become more open to a process of intercultural learning. Avoid, however, asking too much from the volunteers during the first days. The volunteers should not feel harassed by over-enthusiastic teenagers who have found a new toy to play with. As in any emotionally intense situation, the volunteer will need some quiet time to reflect as well.

4.1.2 Topics to consider in an on-arrival training programme

It is the responsibility of the host organisation to make sure that all the (technical and content) aspects of the IVS project that they have prepared for the volunteers are communicated to them (see also Chapter 3.2.1 "Preparation of the volunteers"). The volunteers need to be given a chance to react and explain their motivation and their specific needs and skills for the project.

In the following box you will find some issues that should be dealt with in on-arrival training. The exact programme of such training will depend on the time frame available for it. As far as the methodology is concerned, everything depends on whether you are welcoming one or several volunteers. If you are dealing with a group of volunteers you should let them work in small discussion and brainstorm groups as much as possible and avoid lecturing situations.

When the volunteers arrive

• Welcome

Try to pick up the volunteer at the airport/train station, especially in the case of a long-term project – this will make the volunteer feel safe and wanted. First take care of the immediate needs of the volunteer: hunger and thirst, needs for a toilet or a shower, phone call to parents. Afterwards you can organise a reception or dinner with the main players of your organisation at your office or in another place. Take into consideration time and food differences and the effect this may have on the volunteers. Make sure you deal with the volunteers from the first moment they arrive. You may not have a lot of time, but make sure you dedicate at least 30 minutes immediately for the items mentioned above, explain what is going to happen next and when, and then take the volunteers to a place where they can relax. Never leave volunteers totally unattended during the first hours of their stay. Their support person should be around from the beginning.

Items to deal with in the first two days

The following items should be dealt with as soon as possible and certainly within the first two days, to make the volunteers feel safe and provide some basic orientation. Volunteers tend to arrive with the expectation that the project corresponds 100% to what was written on paper and that everything is perfect, planned and prepared. Even if this is not exactly the case, it is important to discuss all relevant issues and to inform the volunteers about the state of things. It is important that they understand that you care for them and that you are committed to finding solutions for any aspects that are not perfect yet. The volunteers might even be happy to discover that the frame of the project is still flexible enough to take into consideration their special wishes, needs and capacities.

- Introduction

Introduce the volunteer to the responsible people in the organisation, as well as other staff and volunteers. Explain each person's role and explain who else is involved but is not in the office (for example, board members).

- Technical aspects

Explain any rules related to the accommodation and anyone sharing the living space, whether already there or still to come. Clarify questions related to food (where will the volunteers eat every day?), pocket money if applicable, insurance, language training, holiday regulations, any option to make phone calls from the office or in town, where to find foreign newspapers or have Internet access, etc.

- The host organisation

Introduce the aims, activities, structure and people in the organisation. It is important to explain the framework and larger goals of what you do. It can be frustrating to be asked to work on a given task without any idea of what the final aim of the project is. The volunteers need to understand that if you make photocopies, cook for a group or carry heavy stones, you do it for a larger goal and that specific action is a precious and valuable contribution to it.

- The work project

Show the volunteers the physical working place, refer to the original project description, explain any changes, explain who else is working on the project and put the project in the context of your overall activities. Allow the volunteers to comment and offer ideas; they need to feel ownership in the project and be able to bring in their personality and experience.

- Motivation

Explain to the volunteers why your organisation chose to embark on IVS and what experience you have had with such projects. Ask the volunteers to explain their motives and expectations for this project, but be aware that for reasons of politeness they will probably not have the courage to be very explicit on this point on the first or second day. It is important to come back to this point regularly as part of the ongoing support for the volunteers. You will have to renegotiate your own and the volunteers' expectations a number of times during the project.

- The region and country

Other volunteers from your organisation or a group of young locals could organise an evening or a day out to introduce volunteers to the local reality and get to know each other. They can organise a tour of the town and take the volunteers to some nice place to spend an evening. You could take them to visit any sister organisation or outlying work project. You should also introduce them to any special rules and traditions that they need to take into consideration, if there are any.

- Intercultural learning

It can be useful to run a session like the ones suggested for pre-departure training, bringing together local young people and volunteers. This can bring out a lot of information about the volunteers' background and introduce them well to the reality of the host community. Later on you can also ask the volunteers to share some elements of their own culture with you: perhaps cooking for colleagues, or organising an evening about the situation in their country. Leave it to the volunteers' personality to decide if and when they are ready for this kind of event.

- Introduction of the volunteer and his/her organisation

You could give the volunteers a chance to speak about their background and organisation, but leave it to the volunteers how intensively they want to do this at the start. It is important to have a clear idea of the previous experience of the volunteers and the type of projects/organisation they have been exposed to, in order to understand what elements of the host organisation and project might be new or strange for them. Give the volunteers a chance to explain what it means in their country to be a "volunteer", a "leader", a "co-ordinator", a "board member". Let them explain what kinds of project their sending organisations run. Clarifying these questions will help you to avoid misunderstandings based on different concepts of volunteering.

4.2 Motivation

```
┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐
│  Needs   │ → │  Aims &  │ → │ Partner- │ → │ Budget & │
│ analysis │   │ concept  │   │ finding  │   │fund-raising│
└──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘
                                                   ↓
┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐
│On arrival│ ← │Preparation│ ← │ Specific │ ← │ Recruit  │
│          │   │          │   │  groups  │   │volunteers│
└──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘
     ↓
┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐
│Support & │ → │Conflict &│ → │Evaluation│ → │Recognition│
│motivation│   │  crisis  │   │& follow-up│  │          │
└──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘   └──────────┘
```

4.2.1 Motivating the volunteer

So your IVS is planned and set to go. It takes quite an effort to get everything on the road, and it would be a pity to lose your volunteers along the road. Therefore it is important to give some special attention to keeping your volunteers motivated.

What is motivation? Handy (1997) calls it the "E-forces": energy, excitement, enthusiasm and effort. But volunteers are not genuinely altruistic persons doing your work for nothing. Their E-forces are not given for free, but only in exchange for the fulfilment of certain needs of the volunteer. The volunteer (unconsciously) calculates whether the effort expected is appropriate in relationship to the hoped-for benefit. This perhaps sounds quite strong and opportunistic, but volunteers are mostly looking for a symbolic or social return for their contributions. Volunteer management means keeping volunteers happy to be volunteers. Either they like voluntary service or they will leave it; that is why an organisation has an interest in fulfilling the needs of volunteers in order to maintain their E-forces.

Needs

As already pointed out in Chapter 3.3.2 "Preparation of sending and hosting organisations", the hosting organisation plays an important role in satisfying the basic needs of the volunteers. If these basic needs, such as appropriate food and shelter, the necessary safety and security, relationships and social belonging to the group or to the project, are not met, it will be difficult for the volunteer to contribute freely and generously to the project. So, to achieve the ideal mixture in a voluntary project between personal development of the volunteer and a valuable contribution to the project, it is important to address problems of poor accommodation or "challenging" food first, to deal with feelings of insecurity in the new environment or with problems in communicating and making new friends. It is only after these important needs are met that the volunteers can really get into the job and achieve goals that are rewarding for them and for the project.

Volunteers have different motives for giving their time and effort to a project. By definition they will not do it for material benefits but more for symbolic ones (social, pragmatic and psychological benefits). Still, the occasional little present (a T-shirt of the organisation, a CD on the birthday of the volunteer) can do wonders for their motivation. Mostly volunteers are looking for social benefits: they want to get to know people and have a good time, they want status and recognition, they want to belong to a group. Also the pragmatic dimension should not be neglected: volunteers want to help people, do something useful, acquire skills, increase their employability. A voluntary placement can, furthermore, be part of expressing one's identity (psychological benefit): distinguishing oneself, acting out one's values, finding one's way in life.

> **Suggestion for training**
>
> Ask your trainees to think back to a moment in the past when they volunteered. Ask them to list a number of material, social, pragmatic and psychological benefits they received through volunteering. These could be compared and discussed between members of the group. Make sure you do not get stuck in a discussion of whether a certain benefit is social rather than pragmatic, for example. The aim of the exercise is to look at the symbolic benefits that you get through volunteering, not to be able to classify these benefits.

Matching needs

To motivate your volunteers and release their E-forces, you have to either address their needs or stimulate their needs with what you can offer. In the management of motivation it is important to know your volunteers and their needs, but also to know what the organisation wants of the volunteers and can offer them. The needs and offers of both parties can then meet in the middle. This process of determining the ideal mixture of giving and taking should be ongoing and it should be perceived as balanced by both parties.

Besides their different needs, volunteers also have different preferences of work. Some of them will be more skilled and/or interested in social tasks, others prefer creative activities, while some are happy with practical tasks. Providing the volunteers with work that is in line with their preferences is a plus for motivation.

Last but not least, ownership is an important factor in the motivation of volunteers. Therefore the project organisers should always involve the volunteers in setting the aims and determining the tasks, so the volunteers feel responsible for them. The project becomes their project, the organisation becomes their organisation.

Mapping the motives

Motivation, needs and goals are very abstract things that are difficult to explain, but you can map the motivation of your volunteers in a visual way by drawing two hands or stairs. These drawings could be the basis for a sort of "psychological contract" between the volunteer and the project, or serve intermediary evaluation purposes (see also Chapter 5.1 "Evaluation").
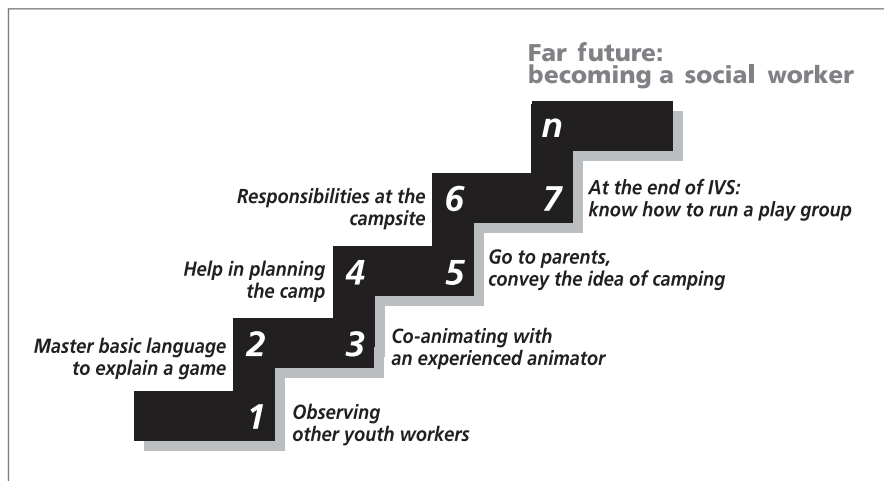
Two hands

Draw a "giving hand" in which the volunteers write or draw what they can contribute and a "taking hand" in which they put what they want to receive from the project.

The Giving Hand

will to reach goals
being a mirror to your project
information from home country
participate actively
6 hours/day
effort to communicate
try not to judge but understand
suggesting new ideas
being curious
...

The Taking Hand

meet other volunteers
learn website design
be integrated at work
someone to talk to
develop own initiatives
learn the language
see the country
support & recognition
...

The stairs

Draw stairs on a piece of paper with the final goal at the top of the stairs. Break down the final goal into different smaller consecutive steps that lead the volunteer to the top. You can ask the volunteer to write, draw or make a collage of different stages.

Far future: becoming a social worker

n

6 — Responsibilities at the campsite
7 — At the end of IVS: know how to run a play group

4 — Help in planning the camp
5 — Go to parents, convey the idea of camping

2 — Master basic language to explain a game
3 — Co-animating with an experienced animator

1 — Observing other youth workers

You are what you do

Another way to create a motivated volunteer is to start by creating a motivating job:

– The job should be real (the work really needs to be done – so volunteers feel needed).

– The job done should be appreciated by the staff (appreciation and recognition) – so it will help if you consult the staff to find out what is essential or really needs doing at this moment (see also Chapter 3.3.2 "Preparation of sending and hosting organisations").

– The work should be interesting, challenging and rewarding, while taking into account the specific needs and preferences of the volunteers (so get to know the volunteers before creating a detailed job description).

– Make the goals clear, constantly review them and ensure they are achieved. Increasing difficulty, complexity and challenge will keep the volunteers on their toes. Keep records of the results of the job and of the volunteers' performance – regular feedback sessions should be built in. Monitor the development the volunteers go through, both personal and professional (see also Chapter 4.3 "Ongoing support of volunteers").

– Share responsibility for results. The job description should be formulated in terms of hoped-for results and not just a series of activities to execute. Focus on a meaningful end product.

– Create space for symbolic rewards: socialising, fun or out-of-work activities, dinners, weekend outings, learning new skills, little gifts.

– Volunteers should have or share ownership of the work they are doing (involve them in drafting the job description). Put them in charge of something but give support when needed.

– Give the volunteers the authority to think for themselves and not just follow orders (they are not machines) – as a consequence, staff should delegate some of their responsibility but not without guiding the volunteer whenever needed.

Some practical tips that motivate!

Different things work on different people, but here are some suggestions that are very likely to keep your volunteers happy. You can add your own ideas.

- People like to feel good (a word of thanks, a little present, a genuine compliment, taking them into account as part of the team, asking their opinion).

- Make sure you give more positive than negative feedback.

- Make sure you base your feedback only on objective, observable facts, to avoid it being taken less seriously (giving compliments out of mere politeness).

- Negative feedback is best given by someone that the volunteer has good relations with or looks up to.

- If volunteers make a mistake, do not take it out on them; just explain and ask them to learn from it for the future.

- Deal with "dissatisfiers" in the work environment, such as stressful working conditions (noise, no access to computer, unusual working hours) or lack of interpersonal relationships (no time for talking during work, no coffee breaks).

Red flags

It is not always natural to talk about motivation and needs, so your volunteers might not always tell you if their enthusiasm takes a dip. Here are some "red flags" that could indicate that something is wrong. Keep an eye out for them and check them out.

- The volunteer is absent more often than he or she used to be.

- The volunteer starts doing excessive overtime for no reason.

- The volunteer starts surfing the Internet without any reason.

- Phone calls to the home country increase significantly.

- The volunteer is easily offended and takes things personally.

- The number of sighs per day soars to unknown heights.

- The volunteer remains silent and does not react any more.

- The work rate is slowing down.

- The volunteer breaks down and starts crying.

- The quality of the work of the volunteer hits rock bottom.

- Complaints from the client group start coming in.

- The volunteer's favourite home band/radio is constantly on.

- The volunteer does not join friends or colleagues for common lunches any more.

- Going for (alcoholic) drinks seems to be the only pastime of the volunteer.

- …?

4.2.2 Staff motivation – The forgotten dimension

> "Treat volunteers as you would the paid staff, and treat paid staff as you would volunteers" (YMCA Resource Kit)

After paying rather a lot of attention to the motivation of the volunteer, we run the risk of falling into the trap of forgetting the paid staff members who work side by side with the volunteer.

Most of the suggestions for motivating volunteers are also applicable to paid staff. Unfortunately there is one major difference: the employees of the hosting organisation are paid, which is often a bad excuse for neglecting to take care of their motivation, especially when they should be training, supervising or working alongside the volunteer. Their level of motivation will undoubtedly spill over onto the volunteer, either in a good way or in a negative way. (From here on, for convenience, "paid staff" will be referred to simply as "staff".)

Arguments for foreign volunteers

- They bring an intercultural learning dimension into the hosting organisation.
- We can provide someone with a life-changing experience.
- They have a different, fresh look on things we do.
- We can show them what we are doing and they can use it back home.
- They have chosen our organisation and they like the work we do.
- We can develop their skills and confidence, which they might not acquire otherwise.
- They are an extra pair of hands and a fresh head with new ideas.
- We can promote the idea of IVS.
- They are very motivated and eager to learn.
- We could become friends for life.
- They bring an international dimension to the work we do.
- We can learn how to manage and coach volunteers.
- The volunteers sometimes bring additional funding for the organisation or for staff time.
- We can become more culturally sensitive and skilled in intercultural encounters.
- …?

If your staff are convinced that having an international volunteer in their workplace has every one of these benefits, you can praise yourself to the skies. But this is not always the case. Staff might not much like the idea of volunteers coming because they fear that "cheap" volunteers could take over (part of) their jobs; or perhaps they are worried about the additional burden the volunteers might bring with them (preparing tasks for them, lots of meetings, supervision, paperwork for funding and evaluation); or the job they are doing is so close to their hearts that they do not want to share it or they are afraid that volunteers might be unreliable and not do the work as well as they would.

Even though these arguments are mostly irrational, it is a fact that these phantoms could wander around in the heads of some staff in your organisation. So it is paramount that you, as voluntary service organiser, deal with them.

— The first step is to find out the paid staff's attitude to volunteers. (Do/did they ever volunteer themselves? What do they see as the potential advantages of working with volunteers?). A simple questionnaire, interview or informal chat would do.

— A lot of resentment about working with volunteers can be avoided by involving staff in the entire process of getting volunteers, as we argued in Chapter 3.3.2 "Preparation of sending and hosting organisations". Involving staff from the very beginning, informing them of new ideas and asking their opinion could bring you an extra couple of shoulders to support the voluntary service. Imposing an idea or ferociously defending it, slapping staff down with arguments, usually drives them into a corner and makes them defensive.

— If staff are supposed to do some kind of supervision of volunteers or work closely with them, then this new skill should be recognised and valued (new job description, training future volunteer supervisors, new title, pay rise, etc.) because it does bring additional skills and responsibility.

- When working with an international group of volunteers, intercultural training should be an integral part of the staff's preparation.

- You should also involve staff in creating the volunteers' job description, since the volunteers will need to be accepted and given space in what is the staff's traditional work territory.

- Last but not least, work with volunteers should not come on top of regular work, but should be carefully planned and therefore also budgeted for (financially and time-wise) in the overall work plan of the organisation.

Staff members have an important influence on volunteers, who will sense if staff are putting up with them reluctantly; volunteers will then try not to be where they are not wanted. Staff can also make a big difference on the positive side, through little signs of appreciation (for example, a thank you, a gift, an article in the newsletter/local paper, an invitation, a non-work-related chat) that make the volunteers belong, feel at home, respected and valued. That is why it is important to have staff on the voluntary service's side.

It is important that all actors involved know the framework of the voluntary service: why the organisation does it and who has what role:

- There should be a clear distinction between the volunteers' and the staff's role and status, which justifies one being paid and the other not, one that justifies paid staff being asked to do overtime but volunteers not (unless they agree), etc. If this "contract" is clear from the beginning there should not be too many hiccups in working together.

- The volunteers and staff that an organisation works with could be seen as a team with complementary roles.

- This team spirit can be increased by a common evaluation of the work team (volunteers and staff together) and not only an assessment of the volunteers by the staff worker.

- And when there are little rewards (for example: a dinner, a little gift) make sure you do not leave out the staff workers providing the vital support for the volunteer.

4.3 Ongoing support of volunteers

It is quite a challenge for young volunteers to go and have a taste of life and voluntary service abroad, even more if it is their first time, if the host culture is very different or if the stay is longer than most. Therefore volunteer support throughout IVS is vital for the well-being of volunteers and the success of the project. Especially with long-term voluntary service, there should be a support person (sometimes called a mentor, coach, volunteer manager or tutor) who guides the learning process of the volunteers and their contribution to the project. See the end of this chapter for some things to think about in support for short-term voluntary service.

GROWing

A framework for supporting volunteers is the GROW model developed by John Whitmore. The support person in the voluntary service is there to facilitate the "growth" of the volunteer within the project and into the new environment. Every letter stands for an area to address in work with your volunteers. Addressing these different letters of the GROW model one after another helps you structure the way in which you make the most of the volunteers' potential – both for your organisation and for the volunteers.
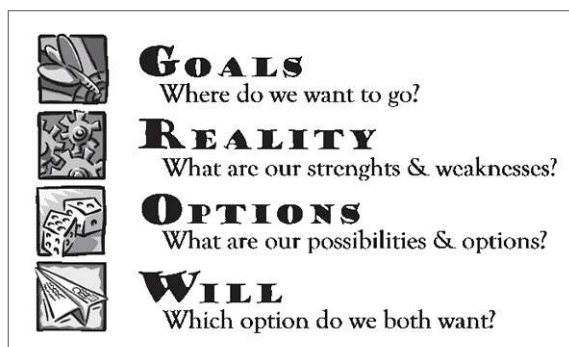
The **G** stands for Goals. It is essential to sit down with the volunteer to define the goals of their voluntary service, both for the hosting organisation and for the volunteer (the importance of this has already been mentioned several times in this T-Kit when talking about preparation). If you do not determine (in both the short and the long term) where you want to be heading, you will never be able to assess if you did indeed get there (see also Chapter 5.1 "Evaluation").

The **R** refers to Reality. Once the goals are set and clear to both parties (transparency is the mother of a good project), it is important to see how far the reality – the actual situation of the project and the volunteer – allows the goals to be reached easily. You need a description of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the project. What is the reality that you face in striving to reach your goals?

This will lead to a discussion of the **O** of Options – if you found in the previous stage that there are certain learning points for the volunteer or certain areas for improvement in the placement that need to be addressed, then you should also come up with different options and actions that will make things (even) better. Come up with a menu, with different specific actions to take, that will improve the voluntary service.

Finally, the **W** of Will refers to the will or decision to implement one or more of these options for improvement, one that both parties can agree on. Options that have been negotiated on an equal basis have more chance of success. You could also determine a time span after which you check on the progress made and decide either to continue with the chosen option or to try another or an extra one.

Sometimes you may get stuck at one stage of the model and then it may be necessary to take one step back and reconsider the goals you really want to achieve or to look realistically to the possibilities that your organisation or the volunteer can offer (back to reality).

4.3.1 The volunteer support person

Now, if you are (going to be) the volunteer support person in your IVS project, you should ideally ensure that someone is carrying out each of the functions described in the rest of this section (4.3). You can be superman or superwoman and do this all on your own, but in most cases you will bring in other people (colleagues, returned volunteers, your family) to fulfil parts of the full range of functions. You can only take on as many functions as you have time to do properly.

Within IVS, we want to highlight three areas – learning, culture and social life – that are particularly prominent and that need special attention from the support person. Since we are talking in this T-Kit about unskilled volunteers, often they need to adopt or adapt the work culture and develop some new skills first, to become more efficient in their tasks; well-planned learning or training support can promote this. But the volunteers do not only work; they also have to build a new life in their new environment. Part of this is coming to grips with the different culture (even if the culture at first does not seem different) and volunteers will usually benefit from intercultural support. Besides the intercultural component, there is also the need for a new social life, for which social support (varying with the independence of the volunteer) will be a great help.

Qualities needed in volunteer support

Besides these specific points of focus, the volunteer support person should have (or develop) the following qualities:

– First and foremost, a support person must be available. He or she is the person that the volunteers must be able to turn to when they need it most, so try to create a system and an atmosphere in which the volunteer knows when and how they can reach the support person. Volunteers should be made to feel comfortable enough to interrupt the support person in his/her normal work when necessary.

You could draw up an alarm-bell procedure. This can be any agreed signal (writing an e-mail with ALARM in the subject, giving a red card, pulling the support person into the meeting room or just saying you are fed up), to be used in agreed circumstances (when having personal problems, when you have had enough of it all, when depressed, when missing home, when having big worries or physical problems). When the volunteer or support person rings the "alarm bell", they should give each other their undivided attention, talk and listen, and work on solutions.

– The support person should follow up suggestions and keep an eye on needs. The people responsible for volunteers play a key role in the orientation and induction sessions built in at the beginning of the voluntary service. They should be the ones following up the needs, suggestions and expectations of the volunteers as discussed in these orientation sessions. It helps to record these needs and expectations, and check at regular intervals during the voluntary service if they are being met or not.

Perhaps you can visualise them on a flip chart on your "volunteer wall" in the office or on the volunteer bulletin board to make sure that neither you nor the volunteers will forget. Of course expectations can change so you might have to update your flip charts.

– The support person should also make sure that the volunteers get the resources and tools needed to accomplish their tasks but also for their personal needs. This can be obvious things related to the task, such as a work space in the office, sufficient and appropriate tools for the manual work the volunteers are doing, a computer for word-processing. But a job-related push in the back can also take the form of training, job shadowing, question-and-answer sessions, buying a new manual or reference book (in the volunteer's language) and so forth.

For personal needs you might think of checking they have e-mail to keep the link to friends and family back home, laundry facilities, contacts with a local sports club to keep in shape, or continuing a hobby (this is especially important for long-term stays) – basically everything that will ensure a pleasant stay in the host country.

– Another important task is monitoring or assessing the performance of volunteers, focusing on the positive achievements as well as the learning points (see also Chapter 5.1 "Evaluation"); this requires meetings at regular intervals, making volunteers feel respected and steering them. It is important to give volunteers the same treatment as

employees: consider volunteers as part of your staff and, for example, refer to the two as volunteer staff and paid staff. This extra recognition is the icing on the cake.

– Since the volunteers are coming to live and work in a new environment to them, giving feedback to the volunteer is crucial: it lets the volunteers know where they stand. A prerequisite to giving feedback is creating a "fearless" atmosphere in which both parties understand that the comments are only steps in a learning process and not a definitive judgment on someone's personality or capacities.

Often feedback or evaluation focuses on the things that went wrong, but you should not forget to mention the positive things as well. If there is reason to give negative feedback, it is important to focus on an objective description of the situation. Explain clearly why the action or behaviour of the volunteer was problematic and negotiate together how you could learn from this for the future – in other words, what the volunteer will or could do differently next time if something similar happens. Turn the problem into a constructive learning experience.

When giving feedback, it is best to use "I" statements clarifying that this is your position or feeling. "You" statements tend to put people down and blame them for something that happened. They are also more likely to cause a defensive response. (So, for example, say "I don't like the way you arrange your papers" instead of "You are a disorganised person".)

– Active listening is another skill that you will certainly need as a support person. First of all, the surroundings should be adapted to the seriousness of the conversation – do not have your meetings with volunteers in the middle of the office with other ears listening in, with the noise of copying machines or colleagues, or with a distracting computer screen within reach. Take your time instead of rushing to a quick-fix solution. Active listening is about making the other person feel comfortable enough to tell you his or her story; it is about letting the other person talk and, more importantly, trying to understand what the other person is saying (not only the obvious but also reading between the lines).

Show that you are listening through little nods, smiles and encouraging questions (without overdoing it!). To make sure you have understood the (hidden) message, rephrase it in your own words and ask for confirmation ("Do I understand correctly that you want …?"), but do not take over talking. If you do not understand, ask for clarification (do not guess). Do not judge, but try to understand the message.

– All these techniques are very useful but they rely a lot on a good command of a common language. So what can you do if there is a language barrier? Poor mastery of the language does not equal no command of the language. So sometimes it helps simply to repeat questions more slowly, use different and/or simpler words or allow more time to understand the question and phrase a reply. Take your time. If this does not work, you can make things more visual by drawing, using symbols or pointing at objects or acting it out. (Words can be used in parallel – do not stop talking altogether.) Or what about pointing out a word or sentence in a phrase book? If you have the skills or resources, you can use another language that the volunteer is more comfortable in (perhaps their mother tongue or English). What will not help is giving up and letting communication breakdown. Laughing generally does not make the volunteer feel any better either. Instead of embarrassing the volunteer, make him or her feel at ease and explain that it is normal in the beginning to struggle a bit with the language – "It will soon be better".

– Managing volunteers also means managing their motivation; this is crucial in the success of IVS, so there is a chapter just on this topic (see Chapter 4.2.1 "Motivating the volunteer").

4.3.2 Training support

As mentioned earlier, the support person has a role in determining the training of volunteers for their job. This benefits not only the host organisation, which gets its tasks done more efficiently and to a higher quality, but also the volunteers: setting up training will make them feel more integrated, more at ease in their job, more valued and recognised, and in the end more motivated. Even in short-term voluntary projects, such as work camps, it might be worth your while to include a workshop on the task you are doing, whether it is painting, fund-raising or cleaning techniques. It is rewarding if you do not just do what you are told to do, but get some explanation as to why things are done in a certain way.

In an orientation session with volunteers at the beginning of their IVS, a specific training plan can be negotiated. Obviously this plan should be monitored continually and you should be ready to change it according to the needs of the volunteer, which sometimes become apparent only in the course of the work. The plan can be made up of different activities, not only job-related training, but also observing or taking part in meetings, question-and-answer sessions with a colleague, one-to-one meetings, reading background manuals or using training material (CD-Rom, school books on the subject). Peer training by another volunteer is often very much appreciated because it gives the insight of someone in the same position. You are basically limited by your inspiration and by the resources you planned for this.

Example of a training plan

Going back to our example of ELKA, the ecological youth club that is hosting two volunteers to develop nature and adventure walks through the mountains (see Chapter 2.2 "The project cycle"), Jason, the support person of this project, developed the following training plan.

On their first full working day they will receive a half-day of induction training about the aim, work and structure of the ELKA youth club. They will be introduced to all the staff and active volunteers in the course of a common lunch. In the afternoon they will be introduced to the area. This day is organised and led by Susan, the project manager.

Within the first four weeks, the volunteers should attend a one-week course on outdoor education and adventure walks run by the National Association of Outdoor Education near the capital. They will also receive books on outdoor education techniques and reports from other organisations that have done similar things before.

They can participate in the annual meeting of the network of national environmental youth organisations that ELKA belongs to; there is always a three-day seminar on nature issues linked to it.

Within the youth club they can use Gerard as a resource person, because he has been to two adventure camps in the south of Europe before.

Besides this they should take part in the regular team counselling sessions (once a month, half a day) concerning the day-to-day work at ELKA.

The programme guide of the Youth in Action programme details minimum quality standards for European Voluntary Service. This could serve as inspiration for your IVS. Download the programme guide from www.ec.europa.eu/youth.

4.3.3 Intercultural support

We are mostly unaware of the importance of our own environment, our familiar neighbourhood, friends and family for our feeling of security and comfort, unless we have left it for a while. Living and working in a different cultural context leads to confrontation – between the familiar and the unknown, the regular and the first-time, the rituals and the new. After an initial phase of excitement with the exoticism of their new life, the volunteers nearly always reach a phase in which they experience reduced efficiency in their day-to-day interactions and absence of familiarity within the host culture. This is called "culture shock" (see graph of the adjustment cycle in Chapter 3.2.1 "Preparation of the volunteers").

The support person should keep an eye out for the symptoms of culture shock, which can be physical (lack of hunger, sleeplessness, tiredness, minor aches) or psychological (homesickness, anger, fear of being cheated, resentment towards locals, impatience, defensive or aggressive behaviour). The ability to handle culture shock varies from person to person (according to personality, but also according to previous intercultural experiences) but it also depends largely on the preparation for this confrontation before departure (see Chapter 3.2.1 "Preparation of the volunteers"), which can be developed and built on during voluntary service.

The way of addressing culture shock should be adapted to each case, depending on the volunteers and the preparation they have had. Here are some suggestions as to what you can do as support person:

- Make sure that the volunteers know that there is something called "culture shock" and the way to recognise it (for example, by the symptoms quoted above). Culture shock is neither good nor bad; it is just a situation that many people go through when abroad for a long time.

- Take time for culture shock, some time to breathe and reflect: let the volunteers air their frustrations; listen to their stories. A day off work or an excursion (away from it all), with the support person to talk through things, could do wonders.

- Try to avoid judging cultures. Instead, explain them as far as you can. Give information about the culture, the country, the system, the people. Information takes away the uncertainty and lack of efficiency that the volunteers experience.

- Motivate and encourage the volunteers to see it as a challenging learning experience. Make a game out of interpreting culturally different behaviour and give feedback as to whether the volunteer is right, or add what the meaning really is.

- Put the volunteers in contact with former volunteers who have gone through a similar experience, perhaps in the opposite way (having been to the country of the volunteers), in order to get peer support from each other.

- Or give them a break from the different culture and different language, by arranging a meeting with a fellow expatriate (a friend, family, volunteer from that country) or possibly getting some magazines, books or videos from home, or phoning home.

- In order to reduce the feeling of missing home, try to find activities from home in the host country (for instance: sports, TV show, hobbies, fast food), probably in an adapted way (water-skiing instead of skiing, chips with mayonnaise instead of vinegar).

- Encourage the volunteers not to give up, but on the contrary to engage in even more social interaction with the host culture in order to decipher its different ways and become more fluent in intercultural interaction with others (trying out the new way of greeting, guessing what someone would find tasty or not, etc.).

- Encourage the volunteers to take the intercultural learning process as it comes and, if necessary, to review the objectives they had in mind for their voluntary service, if the intercultural component takes more time than expected, without it having to be a failure.

- Promote complexity in thinking, distinguishing between one person and the rest of the group, between a particular situation and all situations (because one person was rude in a stressful situation does not mean that all persons from that country are always rude).

- Focus also on similarities between the host country and the volunteers' country of origin so they realise that they already have a lot of cultural baggage with them. However do not play down the importance of culture shock or cultural differences.

- Value diversity and difference. The world is so much more beautiful and more efficient with different approaches to similar issues. The volunteers are going to have two approaches incarnated in themselves (their own and the host culture's – to an extent).

> – You can photocopy the box on culture shock in Chapter 3.2.1 "Preparation of the volunteers" for the volunteer to reflect on.

The development of the rest of their voluntary service depends a lot on the joint ability of the volunteers and the hosting organisation to overcome this first phase. If a good relationship based on trust and mutual understanding results from this phase, it is to be expected that other periods of emotional downs can be handled successfully.

For more details of the concepts of culture and exercises to raise intercultural awareness, see the T-Kit on *Intercultural Learning* available for download at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int.

4.3.4 Social support

Hosting organisations tend to overlook the fact that volunteers actually spend more time away from work than on the voluntary job. The satisfaction of volunteers in their free time is just as important (if not more so) for the success of the voluntary service as the tasks in the project. Staying in one's room, being reduced to watching television or reading books, despite the fact that there are so many exciting new opportunities outside, could lead to a feeling of isolation and wanting to return home.

For some volunteers it is sufficient to introduce them to some leisure-time facilities in the neighbourhood and invite them along to some social gatherings or events. Others, however, may need a bit more support to open up to new people and new opportunities – especially if the lack of language skills is still a barrier. The extent of support needed in this respect should become clear through talks with the sending organisation beforehand and with the volunteer personally during their voluntary service.

Measures to integrate volunteers into the local community

• Check the special interests and hobbies of the volunteer before arrival

Knowing the interests and hobbies of the volunteer beforehand can help you to be ready with some names of contact persons or addresses of clubs and facilities on arrival. This is certainly a sign that makes the volunteer feel very welcome.

• Organise meetings with other volunteers or exchange students in the area

If there are several volunteers in one area, they can share common on-arrival training at the beginning of their placement. Apart from the educational value of these events, they create an early small network of friends. Since they are all in the same situation, they can obviously relate well to each other. If there are too few volunteers in the area for such an event, you could also provide contacts with other foreign young people in the area.

• Introduce a peer system

Especially for volunteers who are not "high-flyers" in making contact with people and adapting to new situations, it can be very helpful to have a peer contact person acting as a bridge into the local community. This peer should be roughly the same age, ideally share some interests and understand the volunteer's situation. Using former volunteers is a good solution, because of their understanding of the situation that the new volunteers are in. At the same time they have an opportunity to stay in contact with the world of IVS.

As you can see, support persons have a lot of responsibilities on their shoulders, so they should get some support and training themselves in different fields. Have a look around to see which organisations deliver training on the topics mentioned in this chapter. One of the important issues certainly is intercultural learning. Possible providers of training courses on intercultural learning at an international level are the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/youth) and the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (www.efil.afs.org). In the framework of the European Voluntary Service programme there are regular courses targeted at volunteer

support staff (check with the national agency for the YOUTH programme in your country at www.ec.europa.eu/youth). Or you could check out some of the references given in the bibliography and webography.

> **Support on short-term projects**
>
> Obviously the extent of personal support needed on short-term projects is limited in comparison to long-term projects. Nevertheless there are a few aspects that organisers of work camps or other short-term projects should take into account.
>
> Dedicate enough time to an orientation session on the first day. Considering the relatively short duration of the stay, organisers tend to neglect this part of the programme where volunteers get the chance to become familiar with the board and lodging arrangements, the immediate environment, the local people involved in the project and so on. Do not start with the actual work right on the first day. The effects of travel and the volunteers' nervousness about meeting new people in a different environment is the same as for a long-term project.
>
> Plan for some ice-breaking and team-building exercises on the first day. Much more work will be achieved when there is a good team spirit.
>
> For this task the responsible support person for voluntary group projects should get some training in team-building, intercultural learning and conflict management. Conflicts in such groups are possible, but should not affect the whole group. As a responsible support person you should be sensitive to conflicts that arise and try to intervene carefully but in a determined manner (see also Chapter 4.4 "Conflict management").
>
> Support staff, especially in work camps, should be present at all times. Such a person will not be accepted as a responsible and trustworthy leader if he or she only shows up once a week.

4.4 Conflict management

IVS is a complex project which involves people from different backgrounds working together towards common goals, up to the moment that differences appear and then become conflicts. But differences do not equal conflicts. It is no problem if people have different opinions, values, wishes or aims. However, a conflict arises when people or groups that are (or have to be) working and living together act in different directions at the expense of the other because of their differences.

For example, the project leader might find punctuality very important whereas the volunteer does not. No problem, but they will probably end up in a conflict on the morning when they are about to leave on a field trip together, with the project leader waiting in the car and the volunteer surfacing an hour later. Or perhaps an organisation asks the volunteers to finish the

new meeting room before its general assembly on Monday, but the volunteers want to spend time at the lake nearby at the weekend.

Unfortunately, conflicts can evolve from little jokes into major crises. In a conflict where there are opposite points of view, what often happens is that one side wants to convince the other that they are right, that their option is better. The parties try to outdo the other, first by rational arguments, which may be reinforced by the appropriate body language and tone of voice. If no victory is in sight yet, irrational judgments and accusations that confuse the issue and the person can surface. The next step may be an escalation to physical violence. If at a certain moment one party outdoes the other and the loser cannot reciprocate any more, the escalation is avoided; but what often happens is that the losers take it out on themselves or on other people around them that are weaker, who then take it out on even weaker persons, and so on. This is also called the domino effect.

Escalation in conflicts
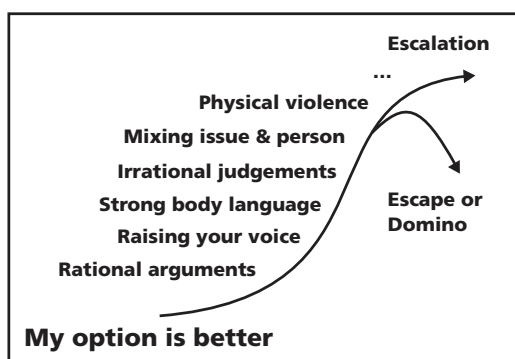
For example, one of the volunteers at a work camp in a village wears a nose ring at the renovation works of the little church. The work camp leader thinks this is not appropriate and argues that this will give the work camp and the organisation a bad reputation. The volunteer replies that the nose ring is part of his identity and that showing something different to the local people is good: it challenges their "narrow views". The voices get louder and fists are banging on the table. "You will not come to work if you do not take it out" threatens the camp leader. Instead of sticking to his opinion about the nose ring, the volunteer puts the work camp leader down as an authoritarian person. When they are about to leave for work, the volunteer with the nose ring follows, but is pushed back. After some pushing and pulling the work camp leader rips out the volunteer's nose ring. Furiously the volunteer takes his bags and leaves the living quarters, pushing over an old lady on the sidewalk.

As you can see from the examples, this chapter will focus more on social conflicts at a micro-level, meaning conflicts between individuals. There are also conflicts on a meso-level (between groups, for example workers and management in a factory) or macro-level (between big entities, for example between countries) but these conflicts need a more structural or political approach. We will stick to what you as a youth worker or support person can do in the event of conflicts at a voluntary project.

4.4.1 First aid in conflict management

As support person, you will often have to provide first aid to rising conflicts in the project but, when conflicts are too big or getting out of hand, you should consider getting (professional) support. The following scheme tries to give you a structured step-by-step route through a conflict, which allows you to deal with conflicts in a consistent way without having to be an expert in the field.

Steps through a conflict

Steps through a Conflict

0. intervene & calm down
1. see and acknowledge!
2. deal with it or run away?
3. information gathering!
4. possible solutions?
5. negotiation!
6. implementation!
7. evaluation?

0. First of all, if you come across a raging conflict (arguing or fighting) between two or more persons, the warring parties should be separated and time should be allowed to let emotions cool down. You, as a mediator, should take measures to prevent the conflict from getting worse, for example by giving the volunteer another task, giving them the day off, putting them to work with a different partner, calling upon other persons who can help (friends, director of the organisation, parents, etc.). When peace is restored you can move on to the next step.

1. The first step in managing conflict is to see and acknowledge that there is a conflict. All parties involved, individuals or groups, should be aware (or made aware) that something is wrong. You can point out some facts that for you could indicate a conflict, without judging or interpreting. It is up to the people involved whether they admit there is a problem or not.

2. If they indeed see the problem, the next step is to take the decision as to whether they want to deal with the conflict or run away from it. In most situations it is best to take up the conflict constructively, but in certain circumstances (such as limited time or energy, unequal power relation, violence) it is better the leave the conflict as it is, trying to put up with it or to escape from the situation. You can try to break up the conflict yourself, but you can also seek external assistance (a professional mediator, for example) when it is above your capacities.

3. When both parties realise that there is a conflict and want to do something about it, you move to the stage of information gathering. Sit down with the different parties separately first and try to get answers to the following questions.

What issues are at stake? How do the parties see the key moments in the development of the conflict? What are the roots or reasons of the conflict? – from the perspective of the different sides. What are the underlying differences causing the conflict?

Before starting the face-to-face meeting between the parties, it is important as a mediator that you negotiate a list of ground rules with the opponents. Some rules could be:

– listening to the other person and not interrupting (one way to see if they are listening is to ask them to repeat the other's message before having their say);
– always use "I" (instead of "You didn't listen" say "I think you didn't listen to me");
– no judging or blaming;
– no leaving the room until an acceptable solution is found;
– everything that is said will stay between those walls;
– …?

It is important that all the participants in your mediation meeting agree on these ground rules.

4. The next phase is generating possible solutions to the problem, as in a brainstorm. How could the parties involved imagine changing the situation for the better?

- Perhaps the whole situation rests on a different interpretation or understanding of the facts and clarifying the different visions of things can help the process forward (for example: explaining that the feedback given was not meant as a reproach).

- In conflicts of interest (for example: the project needs a report written – the volunteer wants to do creative work) compromises can be proposed as a sort of middle way (for example, do part of the administrative work but also some creative work).

- In conflicts of values, beliefs, opinions and the like, positions are difficult to negotiate so a non-compromising creative solution will have to be found (for example: the Muslim volunteer is asked to organise a cooking workshop so that local people know what he or she can eat and what not).

5. Once several suggestions for solutions have been proposed by all sides, the process of negotiation can start with different options. Which proposals are the conflicting parties most comfortable with? Which options are out of the question? One exercise that shows clearly people's preferences is writing the different solutions on a piece of paper and passing it around the table, asking the parties to underline the acceptable solutions in different colours: the most often underlined solution wins. This process highlights common ground, involves all parties actively in the solution and shows a way forward. You could even formalise the agreement by putting it in writing and have the parties sign it for extra commitment.

6. Next comes implementation of the proposed solution, by all the people involved. A way to monitor how well the solution functions is the red flag system. You ask the participants to define their "red flags" – situations that would increase tension again or move them back to a conflictual situation. For example, a red flag could be "the volunteer surfs more than an hour per day on the Internet for leisure purposes" or "the colleague does not speak to me for a whole day". The red flags should be exchanged between the different parties so that everybody knows what is considered "going too far". It is important to check that all parties are happy with the solution and that the solution is not considered a defeat, because this could lead to demotivation or disengagement of the volunteer or staff person, or they could take their frustration out on someone else.

7. After a predetermined period of time, you check the results: whether things have got better or whether red flags are popping up. If the evaluation is negative and if tension or frustrations remain, you should return to previous steps. So, even though this step-by-step approach seems linear (one step coming after the other), it might be necessary to go back on your steps when the process of conflict management is blocked at any stage.

Hot conflicts versus cold conflicts

These seven steps are based on a conflictual situation where the different parties are actively and openly involved in the conflict: this is called a "hot conflict" (because sometimes things get really hot). It is easy to find out what the issues are and who the opposing parties are because in general the different parties even want to convince you as a mediator of their point of view. Since the people involved seem comfortable enough to take up the confrontation with each other, it is most likely that they will also be willing to work together on conflict resolution on an equal footing and to engage in a process of open, fearless communication.

Sometimes, when there is no equal power relation between the conflicting parties, or when a party gives up retaliating at some stage in the escalation of the conflict, they may disengage from the confrontation completely. They will not fight openly for their cause any more but tacitly boycott or sabotage the other person or the work. This is a "cold conflict" where people stay cool (no arguments, no confrontation, no open fights). In this case it is necessary to work with

this person to gain their motivation again and to establish an atmosphere of trust in which open communication is possible (and only then can you start the steps through the conflict).

4.4.2 The mediator in the middle

You as a youth worker or project organiser might find yourself in the middle of a conflict, trying to make the best of it. The following tips might be of use when you are taking on the role of mediator, helping people to work through a conflict.

- First of all, the mediator should be neutral and accepted by both sides. If you are not in this position, then it is best to get someone else in to be the mediator.
- Listen to people and do not take sides (any side) – make sure that you address equal time and energy to both parties. Do not give the parties any reason to become suspicious about your relationship with their opponents.
- Encourage people to talk and let them talk (do not interrupt one person by telling them about your own experiences of conflicts and their outcomes). Be a sounding board.
- Ask open questions.
- Do not judge, nor give advice – just paraphrase the message to check if you understood all the details.
- Make sure that the opponents listen to each other. You could make them repeat the message of the opponent before they can make their own point.
- Make sure people use I-statements. Instead of saying "he has done a bad job" it is better to say "I don't like the job he has done".
- Involve all parties actively in the search for a satisfactory solution. Do not let people slip into a "cold conflict" situation.
- Do not try to find easy or quick solutions – take your time.
- Help the person to explore where the roots of the conflict could be: for example, different values, opinions, habits, norms, goals, cultural backgrounds.
- Try to understand how the parties feel and think.
- Try to find out what roles or strategy both parties are using in the conflict.
- Ask the conflicting parties if you could help in any way.
- Make a strict distinction between the particular issue and the person (for example, someone who comes late a couple of times is rapidly categorised as lazy, even though there were valid reasons for being late in most cases).
- Keep track of the progress of the conflict management in writing and check your notes with the conflicting parties.
- You could try to visualise the conflict in order to make the views of both sides (and yours) clearer – it also helps in focusing on the actual issues.
- Help them to clarify the situation – perhaps the conflict is based on a misunderstanding (intercultural?): avoid judging what you do not understand and promote tolerance of ambiguity.
- Do not impose your cultural norms, but try to understand the cultural rules on both sides.
- Ask the parties whether they have an idea of how the opposite party might be feeling.
- Encourage each side to talk to the other party in the conflict. If both are ready for this, help to establish a fearless atmosphere where open communication is possible (neutral territory, with an external mediator, etc.).

  – It is never too late to get other people in to help you get out of this situation. Do not feel you have to solve the conflict on your own.

  – …?

You may want to add your own golden rules.

There is more about conflict management in T-Kit No. 12 on *Youth Transforming Conflict*, available to download at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int.

4.5 Crisis management

One of the main issues organisations have to face when organising an activity is the capacity to foresee disaster and manage it effectively should it occur. We seldom think that things can go wrong, but crises do happen and being aware of that is the first step towards working out ways of preparing for and managing them. Our purpose is not so much to tell you how to prevent a crisis, since a crisis is in its nature unexpected. Instead, we will try to raise your awareness of the main elements that constitute a crisis and to give you some examples of successful strategies already used by other voluntary work organisations to deal with crises. In this chapter we look at crisis management from a global point of view and from an IVS angle.

Some of the examples in this chapter may seem far-fetched to you (for example fire, flooding, drug overdose) but, unfortunately, all our examples are based on true stories. Of course, in general, most voluntary service organisations show very small percentages of crisis situations.

> **Defining a crisis**
>
> You have a crisis if the situation is:
>
> • unexpected,
>
> • requires immediate attention,
>
> • is potentially serious and harmful to your organisation or people related to your project,
>
> • causes (or threatens to cause) one or more of your partners, or your organisation, to stop their normal activities to respond to the situation.

Note! As you can see, we are not talking about a misunderstanding that results in a problem or conflict, but an event that due to its proportions strongly destabilises the work of your organisation and forces you to stop your normal activities to respond to it. Of course, a misunderstanding, if not properly tackled, may lead to a serious enough problem to create a

crisis in your organisation: for example, a volunteer overhears his tutor saying how terrible his character is, the following day the volunteer refuses to show up at work, the tutor gets upset, the volunteer insults him, the tutor slaps the volunteer in the face, the volunteer sues the tutor for physical abuse and the project is closed down.

4.5.1 A few general features

It is often difficult to decide precisely on the contours of a crisis. A crisis may present interchangeable characteristics and you will seldom know when it all started, even if there were indicative signs that you could have read, or how the incident will evolve. A great deal of your intervention will be in terms of making sure that a crisis does not put your organisation and the people you work for and with at too big a risk, and that you can keep "business as usual". Of course, your response will always depend on the context and the resources that you have available.

Here are some examples of crises:

Case 1: a key staff member in a sending organisation ran off with the organisation's money. The bank blocked their account and a group of volunteers that was supposed to leave for their host placements in a week's time saw their tickets cancelled by the travel agency for lack of payment. The sending organisation was unable to pay its debts and was forced to declare bankruptcy, closing down all of its projects.

Case 2: a major flood destroyed the site where a host organisation had its work camp. The volunteers were not injured but an emergency evacuation operation was necessary. The entire region was under water for three days and the work camp was in a rather inaccessible spot. The volunteers and their tutors remained in the camp without food and clean water for two days until a helicopter was able to rescue them. Alarmed parents and relatives invaded the offices of the sending organisations looking for news and some of them flew immediately to the country where the flood took place and demanded the host organisation's support with logistics.

Case 3: a volunteer working in a kindergarten was accused by one of the families of sexually abusing their child. The volunteer was arrested and, though no evidence against the volunteer was found, the host organisation decided to stop all their IVS activities. The volunteer became extremely depressed and attempted suicide while in the host country. The family of the volunteer brought the host organisation to trial for emotional and psychological damage to their own child.

In some cases (natural disasters, riot) it is quite obvious that the hosting organisation cannot be held responsible, but the situation becomes a lot more tricky if there is reason to believe that the crisis stems from negligence and mismanagement by the hosting organisation or one of its collaborators (in the case of sexual abuse, fraud, etc.). In this case the organisation will get a lot of (negative) media coverage and they will be judged on the professionalism of their reaction. In general the speed of the reaction and the spreading of appropriate information to the relevant persons are crucial in dealing with a crisis. As a hosting organisation, you are responsible for ensuring the volunteers' safety in any situation and preferably the continuation of the IVS project.

4.5.2 Preparing for a crisis – Be sure to prepare well in advance

Preventing a crisis is something that most of the time we cannot do because of its unexpected nature; it is therefore best to be prepared beforehand on how to deal with it when it happens. An organisation can prepare its staff and volunteers by discussing potential problematic situations in advance. Below you will find some steps that can help you be ready for a crisis, but remember: no management tool is a ready-to-use solution. You must therefore adapt the steps below to your own organisational reality.

Step 1: create a special team to deal with crises

If you have a predetermined group of people in your organisation to deal with a crisis, when it happens you will be able to respond a lot more quickly. In this way you will avoid having to decide who does what; you just activate your crisis team. We recommend that you have in this team:

- a co-ordinator,
- an internal and an external liaison person (i.e. one person responsible for keeping the organisation informed and another in charge of all contacts with the outside world),
- a reporter (someone that writes reports on the crisis and makes sure that all documents are filed and easy to find),
- a media spokesperson (if necessary).

Please note that one person can have more than one role. Do these people need to have special skills to deal with different types of crises? Where can they get these skills? There is no point in putting together a team to deal with crises if you do not provide its members with the necessary training to do their job correctly.

Make sure that everybody in your organisation has the contact details of the crisis team members and that they can be reached at all times. One more point: dealing with a crisis can be psychologically draining, so sometimes it will be good to give your team a break. Therefore, make sure that you have a back-up group of people to allow for rotation of team members when the crisis becomes too prolonged.

Step 2: create a group of external experts

Many times you will realise that you actually need outside expertise to deal with a crisis (for example a lawyer, a psychologist, a conflict mediator, a translator). We thus recommend that you try to secure professional contacts with experts in advance of a crisis (they can either be paid or voluntary). Distribute among your staff and key volunteers a list of the names and addresses of these experts and a description of each person's role and skills, with clear instructions of how and when to contact them.

Step 3: create detailed contact lists

Many organisations find themselves in quite a bit of trouble when in the midst of a crisis they do not know how to get in touch with their staff, the volunteers, their families, the sending or host partner and other relevant organisations or people. To avoid this happening to your organisation we recommend that you create contact lists for:

- staff,
- volunteers,
- volunteers' families,
- sending and host partners,
- emergency numbers of hospitals, police, fire brigade, etc.,
- diplomatic contacts and other governmental authorities,
- newspapers and other media,
- sponsors of your programme.

Make sure that your lists have notes on how and when to contact these people and ensure that the lists are regularly updated. This is a must for your volunteers' list and for your sending and hosting partners. In a crisis situation, for example when a volunteer needs to be evacuated, the last thing that you want is to find out that your volunteer is not living at that address any more.

Step 4: create a communication protocol (a set of rules and procedures)

Who should contact the different parties involved? What are the preferred means of communication (e-mail, telephone, mobile, beeper, fax)? How fast must communication be? What should be the format and content of this communication? These are some of the questions

your protocol should try to answer. Make sure that someone is always available 24 hours a day to respond to a crisis.

Step 5: prepare a crisis headquarters

Select an alternative location for managing the crisis if your office is not adequate or available. This is particularly true in the case of a natural disaster that might make access to your premises impossible; during this time you must find somewhere else to do your basic tasks. This alternative office should have the necessary basic equipment (including a telephone) and this should be prepared in advance.

Step 6: prepare a media kit

Many crises attract unwanted media attention. In these cases you should have information on your organisation ready to use: a media kit. Sometimes a situation gets out of hand because people in your organisation do not know what to say to the media, or because they give conflicting messages to different media. A well-prepared media kit can help you in making sure that whatever is said about your crisis is what you want people to know and not something else. Update your media kit regularly and address the specific training needs of your media spokesperson and staff, namely on how to deal with media enquiries. In this way you will be able to use the media to help you solve the crisis and not to make it worse.

Step 7: create a crisis plan

Make sure that you write down in a single document all the steps to be taken and procedures to be followed when dealing with a crisis in your organisation and distribute this among the members of your crisis team as well as staff or key volunteers. A crisis plan should be concise and easy to read and, most of all, easy to find when needed.

Step 8: make appropriate copies of everything and store in a secure location

Copy the crisis plan and all relevant contact lists, and store a hard copy of these documents in at least one secure location in addition to keeping a hard copy in your office. If this sounds like a lot of work, once more it is up to you to analyse your needs and adapt these suggestions to your organisation. But remember, if your office falls victim to a burglary or a fire, the chances of retrieving vital information to keep on doing your work may be very slim. Having some files of basic information kept in a safe place outside your office can save you from a lot of hassle.

Step 9: get adequate insurance coverage

Having the right kind of insurance can save you a lot of trouble. Many insurance companies are used to providing services to IVS organisations and they will be able to help you to choose the insurance policy best adapted to your needs (for example, work-camp placements versus long-term voluntary work).

4.5.3 Responding to a crisis – What to do immediately?

Very well, we have looked at ways of preparing for a crisis, but what do you do when it happens? The following are some of the simple steps to take when dealing with a crisis.

Step 1: activate your communication protocol

Step 2: activate your crisis team

Step 3: designate the necessary external expertise to deal with the crisis

Step 4: get in touch with your insurance company

Step 5: document what is happening

Remember: having accurate records is the best way to respond to potential criticism and is crucial if you wish to evaluate your own response to the situation.

Step 6: update and co-ordinate the response

Identify people who should receive information on the crisis on a proactive basis. Do not let people come to you with questions about your handling of the situation; take the initiative of informing them of what you are doing and showing how professional you are.

Step 7: wrap up the crisis

Determine when the crisis is over and identify the follow-up to be taken. Do not forget to conduct a post-crisis evaluation.

The importance of post-crisis evaluation

How do you make sure that you have learned from your crisis and that you can prevent similar things from happening again – or, if they do, that you can handle them better and more efficiently? The answer is simple: you must evaluate your management of the crisis when it is over. The following is a concise but helpful checklist for your post-crisis evaluation:

1. How do you feel the crisis was managed (extremely well, well, fairly well, poorly)?

2. Did the members of your crisis team work together successfully?

3. Did the crisis team deal well with the internal and external contacts and with external expertise?

4. Did the crisis team deal well with the media?

5. Was a consistent crisis report available?

6. Is there a complete crisis file?

7. Was there any point at which the crisis seemed to have changed for the better or worse?

8. Were there any areas where you felt that management of the crisis could have been improved?

9. What procedures could you implement to incorporate these improved methods into future crisis-management situations?