

UPF Moscow, Russia's Web Conference Discusses the Future of Volunteerism

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Moscow, Russia -- More than 100 participants discussed the future of volunteerism during a web conference co-organized by UPF-Russia.

The all-Russia video conference, which was held on April 20, 2020, under the title "Spring Week of Goodness 2020 and a New Reality," was co-organized by the Russian National Volunteer Center on Relief Action. The online format was made necessary by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The participants were representatives of public associations and NGOs, and local authorities from different regions. In connection with the spread of the new coronavirus, they related their experiences in volunteering and discussed the prospects for developing volunteerism in the post-quarantine period, in the context of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The moderator of the meeting was Dmitry Samko, the secretary general of UPF-Moscow. The keynote speaker was Galina P. Bodrenkova, president of the National Volunteer Center and a member of the Coordinating Council for Development of Volunteering in Russia under the Russian Federation's Civic Chamber.

At the beginning of her speech, she explained that the video conference was timed to coincide with the volunteer action "Spring Week of Goodness," which these days was being launched for the 24th time in many regions of Russia, bringing together hundreds of thousands of volunteers and thousands of NGOs.

But in this difficult period for everyone, organizations and volunteers participating in Spring Week of Goodness events, together with doctors, are at the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus epidemic.

Mrs. Bodrenkova presented statistics to outline the scale of involvement of volunteers and the principles of scheduling their work. She emphasized that in the future, the NGO sector will find it difficult to restore the "pre-quarantine" resource potential, taking into account serious financial losses of business partners, among other things.

Under these conditions, the demand from NGOs, social and medical institutions for volunteers is likely to increase even more. Therefore, she invited the participants, in the course of their activities, to concentrate on what is essential in the experience of volunteer work during the coronavirus period in the future. What new approaches and forms of volunteerism support should be introduced into the practice of NGOs using the work of volunteers that will increase their work efficiency?

The next to speak was Nikolai Romanenko, a volunteer and organizer of volunteer aid to needy residents of the Tver region, director of the Tver regional public civic initiative movement "Good Deed." He spoke of his personal experience in helping elderly people and large families in the Tver region. The most striking feature of his activities was that he established interaction with initiative citizens, local administration and business representatives who volunteered to help the city of Torzhok and the entire Tver region. Such a lively and practical experience was very useful for many conference participants who face similar challenges in the regions.

Dmitry Samko of UPF described his experience of volunteering in the Moscow-region city of Lyubertsy,

where, almost daily, together with other caring neighbors, he brought food, medicine and essential goods to those in need. His experience was interesting, because being already in the list of the federal base of volunteers, he did not wait to be called; he just turned to the local Civic Chamber and got in touch with the Lyubertsy Aid headquarters.

Yekaterina Taylakova, an advisor to the president of the Trajectory of Hope Charitable Foundation in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area in western Siberia, described her experience of transitioning to online work and spoke about modern approaches that make it possible to quickly find volunteers, spread reliable information, and join forces with partners on different levels. Through social networks, they connected bloggers and opinion leaders, analyzed international experience, and created their own formats. Thus, in the Perm Territory, Tyumen Region, and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area, where the Trajectory of Hope Foundation operates, their work is very actively carried out within the framework of the Spring Week of Goodness, despite all the difficulties.

Khmailra T. Zagladina, a leading researcher at the Institute for the Study of Childhood, Family, and Education of the Russian Federation Academy of Education, the head of the Socialization Center of the Russian Word Publishing House, and a member of the Coordinating Council for Development of Volunteering under the Russian Federation's Civic Chamber, spoke about the important role of voluntary social activity for younger schoolchildren, among whom only 2 percent are involved in volunteer activities. She presented literature on this topic and innovative programs: "We Are on the Road to Goodness," "Social Theater," the electronic course "Learning through Care," and "Good Deeds at Home." These materials can be very helpful in many regions, especially in isolation mode and in the long term, she said. At the end of her speech, she called on the audience to work more closely with the school community and teachers.

More than 400 families of different generations are participating in the project "School for Volunteers of Local History," said Marina Balashkina, the head of this project, who represents the Kemerovo regional public organization "Center for Development of Youth Initiatives." She said that this project is dedicated to creating a voluntary family clubs network involved in the local cultural and historical heritage of the Kemerovo region of southwestern Siberia. Many activities within the project are carried out online, which is especially in demand now when a lot of people work on the Internet. Volunteers, both local and from other regions, who are interested in the history of their homeland have been participating enthusiastically.

At the end of the program, the participants pondered on the global concern of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Peter Jansen, a Forbes Advisory Board coach, explained that changes in the world should be in line with the SDGs. He emphasized Goal No. 17, "Partnership for Realizing SDGs," because, in his opinion, this is exactly what is really needed now.

Galina Bodrenkova, a member of the Global Network of Volunteer Leaders of the International Association for Volunteering, dedicated her concluding presentation to integration of volunteerism for the SDGs. She emphasized that revising the role of volunteerism in society as a powerful resource and tool for achieving the SDGs is a challenge for the entire world community and the most important task of the UN-2030 Global Agenda for the next decade.

As important steps in Russia, she proposed that interested organizations unite their efforts to analyze the types of volunteer activities carried out by Russian volunteers in conjunction with the relevant SDGs. She suggested that they form a new understanding of volunteering in Russia, in a broader sense than charity, and develop appropriate standards for revising legislation in the field of volunteering.

At the end of the official part of the program, the participants proposed -- taking into account the scale and significance of the SDG theme -- to continue discussion at the next video conference, including some issues of concern such as fundraising, crowd funding, and motivating volunteers. The participants supported the proposals for creating in Russia a general system for assigning volunteers to activities, dividing them into search bases for finding volunteer opportunities in regions and cities, so that every caring volunteer who is willing to help can find a place to apply his or her efforts at the local, regional or federal level.