

Volunteers



STATE VOLUNTEERS MEETING, GUADALAJARA

The swift developments of the society in general and the Roma community in particular account for the disappearance of some of the dramatic situations which were prevalent until just recently but these changes have also engendered new social, cultural and participatory needs. One of the potentially most innovative phenomena today is volunteerism.

While social volunteerism for intervention in social situations which affect Roma communities is nothing new, its evolution and current situation call for a reflection period to shed light on the current situation and to move forward. Therefore, volunteerism with the Roma community entails a deep analysis of the consequences of the Roma associative movement and its development and the necessary transition

from solidarity rooted in ethnic group to solidarity based on citizenship.

Within this framework, the FSG clearly wants to incorporate the volunteer dimension because it is well aware that despite any limitations or difficulties it contributes significantly to the Foundation's mission (holistic advancement of the Roma community based on respect for the latter's cultural identity) and its identity (at formal and structural level). In this connection we feel that volunteers bring new dimensions to the Foundation or enhance already existing ones such as:

- › Focus on solidarity and justice as fundamental values of the FSG.

- › Awareness that the “Roma issue” is everyone’s concern which must therefore be approached from different perspectives.
- › The intercultural dimension places special focus on social interaction and contact between different cultures, an area in which volunteers offer new contacts.
- › The opportunity to have a “citizenship school” for Roma and non-Roma.
- › The creation and/or enlargement of new areas of social participation in line with the guidelines furnished by the European Union, taking advantage of the creative and less “rigid” dimension offered by volunteers.
- › The more genuine contribution as a non-profit organisation to the construction and social transformation entailed in, on the one hand, striking a suitable balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives and, on the other hand, supplementing these flows of vertical relations with other more horizontal ones.

For all of these reasons, the FSG Volunteer Programme is rooted in the importance of creating a social fabric to boost our implementation and recognition in the Roma community and the general society although the main focus of our plan continues to be strengthening and continuing forward with our volunteers in order to raise the human component of our services.

As for the target of our volunteer initiatives, we must also stress the importance of Roma volunteers; in other words, *volunteerism on the part of the Roma population itself* as

an exercise in citizenship participation and social mainstreaming. This volunteerism can also be developed as part of the social participation strategy itself and the development of the Foundation’s social base. This would also be appropriate in other entities, both Roma and intercultural organisations, and not only as an exercise in social solidarity but also as specific volunteerism to approach what we refer to as the “Roma issue”.

Fruit of all of this are the different meetings and activities which have been carried out for and by volunteers in 2007 such as:

- › Volunteer collaboration in compiling the *Volunteer Training Manual* which will be presented in 2008 and which will be a fundamental guide for those responsible for the Foundation’s volunteers.
- › Networking with other organisations, regional offices, federations, forums, etc. to join forces and collaborate in all of the different facets of volunteerism.
- › The *Ideological Document* and the *Volunteer Management Manual* approved in May 2007 at the Board of Trustees meeting.
- › Participation in the different International Roma Day events in the month of April in different sites throughout Spain.
- › Participation in panel discussions, volunteer meetings, youth meetings, intercultural workshops, fairs, etc. to raise awareness about volunteerism and the Roma community.

- › Different school support activities, adult literacy, drug prevention workshops, entertainment and free time, health education workshops, mediation support, etc.
- › Participation with a stand at the X National Volunteer Congress on 4-5 December in Gijón which received a visit from the Princes of Asturias.
- › Celebration of the FSG's VII National Volunteer Conference on 14-15 December in Murcia entitled "Volunteer Training".

Fruit of all of the above was the incorporation of 177 new Roma and non-Roma volunteers into the Foundation bringing the number of this year volunteer collaborators to 273. With respect to last year it is plain to see that not only has the number of the Foundation's volunteers risen (172 in 2006) but their degree of commitment has remained steady with 40% having begun their collaboration with the FSG in previous years.



X VOLUNTEER CONGRESS IN THE PRINCIPALITY OF ASTURIAS