

From Beneficiaries to Volunteers and Community Leaders

Name of the organisation

Asociația Cătunul Verde

Website of the organisation

<https://www.facebook.com/catunulverde>

Location of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Non-formal education/-learning
- Inclusion
- Community work
- Volunteering/voluntarism

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

The aim of this good practice was to foster a culture of youth participation in rural and disadvantaged communities by creating real opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities to get involved, learn, and take active roles in their communities.

We wanted to support young people in moving beyond the role of beneficiaries of educational activities and become active volunteers, contributors, and eventually community leaders. Through non-formal education methods and hands-on volunteering experiences, the initiative aimed to build their confidence, sense of responsibility, and key life competences.

Another important objective was to create a sustainable pathway of development, where young people could gradually progress from participants to volunteers, and further into mentors or professionals in the social field. By doing so, we aimed to break cycles of passivity and limited opportunities often present in rural environments.

At the same time, the practice aimed to strengthen local communities by involving young people in planning and implementing activities for children and peers, encouraging ownership, initiative, and long-term engagement.

Ultimately, the purpose was not only to empower individuals, but to create a self-sustaining model of youth involvement with long-term impact.

Good practice description

Cătuñul Verde Association developed this good practice as a long-term model of youth engagement in rural and disadvantaged communities in Bihor County, Romania. The practice is based on the organisation's experience of working with vulnerable children and young people in communities with limited access to volunteering opportunities, non-formal education, and structured youth work activities.

Many of the young people involved came from families with low incomes, single-parent households, or were raised by grandparents. Some belonged to Hungarian or Roma minority communities. A number of them had previously participated, as children, in educational and socio-emotional activities organised by our team. Building on this connection, we created a pathway for their continued development during youth.

Young people are involved through a gradual and participatory process. They are encouraged to express their interests and ideas and are supported to design and implement their own initiatives, especially for children and young people in vulnerable situations. They take part in workshops on volunteering and non-formal education methods such as Photo Voice, Forum Theatre, and Human Library, and later apply these in real contexts, including camps and local activities.

Participants are actively involved in planning, decision-making, and implementation. In some communities, such as Popești, young people have taken initiative beyond the project, engaging in local processes like applying for the European Youth Village title.

The implementation is based on collaboration with local stakeholders. Schools support participation and outreach, while social workers and child protection services help include young people with fewer opportunities. We also collaborate with local NGOs, such as Centrul Prietenia in Popești, and with public institutions such as the County Directorate for Sports and Youth (DJST Bihor) and local municipalities, including Salonta. Universities also play a role, as some participants continue their studies in socio-human fields and return through internships.

The initial project involved approximately 40 young people from rural and peripheral communities. Since then, the model has been integrated into the organisation's ongoing work and expanded across the county. Currently, around 40 young people are actively involved, with more engaged over time through different activities. In communities such as Săcuieni, stable groups of 15–20 young people organise regular activities for peers and children.

This practice is continuously evolving. Each stage included concrete activities that strengthened the group. The next step focuses on supporting young people to engage more actively with local authorities and community issues, taking into account the reality of rural communities, where youth groups change over time due to migration.

Good practice result & concrete effects

The implementation of this good practice led to significant personal, social, and community-level changes. One of the most visible effects was the transformation of young people from passive beneficiaries into active volunteers and contributors within their communities.

Participants gained increased self-confidence, communication skills, and a stronger sense of responsibility through their involvement in non-formal education activities and practical volunteering experiences. Many of them developed the ability to plan and implement activities for children and peers, taking ownership of initiatives and becoming more engaged in community life.

A key result was the creation of a sustainable development pathway for young people. Several participants who were previously involved as children continued their journey as volunteers, and later chose to pursue higher education in socio-human fields, particularly social work. Their decision was directly influenced by their experience within the organisation and their exposure to community-based activities.

Some of these young people returned to the organisation as interns, contributing to ongoing programmes and supporting new generations of participants. Notably, one former beneficiary is now employed as a volunteer coordinator, illustrating the long-term impact of the model.

At community level, the practice strengthened local engagement and created a culture of participation, where young people are seen as active resources rather than passive recipients.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice