

City Volunteering Service keeps older people safe in Łódź



Łódź, POLAND

When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in 19 day-care centres for older citizens closing their doors in Łódź, Poland, many of the city's older people with limited functional ability lost their access to family, friends and the local community, and their ability to care for their pets and animals. Older people also found it difficult to get information on the internet, and to access medicines and hot meals.

Safe, secure and supported – the power of volunteer carers

In response, the City of Łódź launched its City Volunteer Service for Senior Citizens, enabling older residents to remain at home and not risk their health. The City Volunteering Service focused on preventing the spread of disease, for example by distributing hot meals and shopping for those most in need. By the end of June there were almost 170 volunteers actively involved in the service, responding to the needs of 485 citizens – 65 of whom were in constant contact with volunteer case managers.

The City Volunteering Service – coordinated by city employees who could not do their usual work due to the epidemic – was accessible to all older people, and users could check the credentials of volunteers by contacting the City of Łódź Office to check their ID.

Older people entrusted cash to the volunteers to do their shopping, while volunteers helped organise e-prescriptions and medicines. Over 20 000 hot meals were delivered (450 meals a day) by the volunteers, the Municipal Guard and the Fire Department; animals were taken care of through food deliveries or taking dogs for a walk; and a dedicated helpline was launched, through which older people could get support with daily tasks as well as psychological and legal support.

The service proved successful, as during the initiative there were no COVID-19 cases reported among the older citizens being reached by the volunteers. It is estimated that the initiative prevented the spending of 1 042 750 PLN of taxpayers' money on potential hospital costs had these citizens been diagnosed with COVID-19 as a result of going out for groceries and medicines.

The benefits of building public trust were also noticeable. Older people supported by volunteers praised highly the action taken by the City of Łódź, often calling to commend specific volunteers for their help, and writing letters of thanks to the Mayor. And the volunteers also benefited from participating in the initiative, indicating that they felt

great joy in helping older people and feeling needed. In addition, mutual bonds were formed between the older people and volunteers, and some have been in constant contact since.

A model for the future: citizen support and a strong city volunteer culture

The swift response and commitment of local people in Łódź resulted in the willingness of the City of Łódź Office to continue developing the city volunteering programme, and is preparing an action plan for the coming months involving training new volunteers and broadening its cooperation with NGOs.

"As a society we did a great job with the municipal volunteering programme for seniors, for people who are most exposed on COVID-19. This initiative united and mobilized everyone to act for a common cause and integrated so many people of good will. I am proud of the civic attitude of the citizens of Łódź, which is confirmation of the energy and real strength that our community has. In a very difficult time of isolation, it was important that there was someone to call." Hanna Zdanowska, Mayor of the City of Łódź.



Photo: City of Łódź Office