



ONLINE VOLUNTEERS' SUPPORT TO KNOWLEDGE-SHARING INITIATIVE FOR IRISH CHARITIES WORKING IN EASTERN EUROPE

Eight online volunteers transcribed more than forty hours of audio interviews with development workers and volunteers, who over the past twenty years have dedicated themselves to helping the most vulnerable citizens in Eastern Europe. These interviews formed the basis of a book that was produced by the Eastern Europe Aid & Development Network, a knowledge-sharing initiative for Irish charities working in Eastern Europe coordinated by the Comber Foundation.

The book, which was published in February 2011, features the story of the Irish relief effort in Eastern Europe since the early 1990s and provides case studies and good practices. The interviews highlight different approaches to aid and development work over the years – the highs and lows, the success stories and the lessons learnt.



According to Frances Haworth, project coordinator at Comber, the book has been overwhelmingly well received by volunteers and organizations working in Eastern Europe, motivating them to continue their work. “This was an extraordinary team of online volunteers, which delivered on an amazing project that will have long-lasting benefits. Transcribing is time-consuming work and needs to be carried out by dedicated individuals with commitment to detail and accuracy. The volunteers’ interest and passion for the project was staggering, and their energy and enthusiasm was infectious for those involved from the Irish end. I would value the opportunity to work with any of them again.”

The stories of ‘ordinary’ men and women who were moved to help in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Bosnian conflict and the collapse of the Soviet Union were also a source of inspiration for the online volunteers, who transcribed the interviews.

An online volunteer from South Korea, for instance, was so moved by the stories she listened to that she applied to volunteer in Albania. Another online volunteer, Marta Jankovic, who is a native of Serbia, states: “The ability to contribute to an organization from a distance and significantly impact the lives of others is a tremendous feeling that has influenced my life in many positive ways. During and after my experience at Comber, I found myself increasingly looking for creative ways to use my time and my skills to assist others. My experience at Comber was only a preview of what I hope will be a lifelong contribution and career in human rights law and development cooperation work.”

Kari Kitiuk from Canada is equally determined to continue volunteering online. “I am looking at taking grant writing courses in the fall with a view to apply what I learn in the course to other volunteer opportunities. Being able to be part of giving a voice to the volunteers who had worked in Eastern European orphanages was a true honour and certainly provided me with an opportunity to learn about people and places in a way I would not have access to outside of this project.”



Kari Kitiuk



Marta Jankovic



Mary McKeown