

THE NEW SHADES OF VOLUNTEERING



VOLUNTEERING THROUGH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



At the **Talentum Foundation**, we have been running a volunteer center since 2005. Over the past decades, we have carried out numerous volunteer actions, many volunteer management training, and volunteer programs in the hospital, theater, and museum, as well as multiple professional collaborations with civil organizations and institutions both in Hungary and abroad. During this time, we often worked for people living with disabilities, for whom we organized volunteers to help them. However, 2024 was different; our goal was to show through our volunteer programs that

**MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE
CAPABLE OF VOLUNTEERING.**

We did not only claim this; we also took direct steps to ensure that people with special needs would not only volunteer in organizations supporting their peers in something they have already been doing for a long time. We invited them to volunteer in actions where they helped others in completely new environments, often engaging in entirely new activities. In addition, we've had interviews with people living with disabilities who regularly volunteer alongside their non-disabled peers in various civil causes.

The experience and the results were beyond our expectations. After nearly twenty years of operation, our approach to volunteer management has been enriched with thousands of shades, and we gained real experience on how to include people with special needs as volunteers in a dignified and truly meaningful way.

After all these experiences, our aim is to show others this kind of approach and to motivate people living with disabilities. We would also like to encourage the organizations, institutions, and family members representing them, with the stories we have gathered. On the other hand, we also encourage volunteer-hosting organizations to open up in this direction too and to include people with disabilities into their programs with a thoughtful organisation.

The stories present various shades, motivations, experiences, and development through volunteering, after overcoming initial challenges and fears. If, after reading these stories, anyone is inspired to explore this new dimension of voluntary work, we would be happy if they share their experiences, questions, and good practices with us.

WE WISH YOU A PLEASANT READING!



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SEE WITH THE HEART

My name is **Ferenc Apci**. I lost my sight completely in 2010, first I used a white cane, then I got a guide dog, Natasa, with whom we have been traveling together for many years. Before, I would never have thought that a dog could do and help so much.

As a volunteer, me and Natasa go to many places to sensitize and chit-chat, from schools through child psychiatry to geriatrics. I love these meetings because I get to see that children are naturally open to animals. While they pet the dog, they tell us what is bothering them. At the same time, we also have deep conversations with the elderly.



There was an elderly lady in the geriatric ward of the hospital who had no family and lived alone. I visited her for an hour and a half every week, but even this little amount of time meant her so much that she once said she had always dreamt of having a child like me. For me, this is the reason why it's worth being open-hearted, communicating, being honest and making jokes. It touched me so much that an eighty plus years old woman, in such a short time, has recognized what was missing from her life. After this situation, I felt that I would like to bundle up all the elderly people and take them home to live as I do, actively, looking on the bright side of life even if they have some difficulties.

WITHOUT WORDS,

WITH ACTIONS

I am **Marika Bíró Ferencné** from the Siketek és Nagyothallók Országos Szövetsége (National Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing). I'm just getting acquainted with volunteering. I took part in a volunteer action organised by the Talentum Foundation, where we went to an elderly's home together with other people living with disabilities. We painted nails for the ladies and gave hand massages to the men.

At first I was very nervous because I had never been to a home for the elderly before, I didn't know how it worked and I was afraid if I'd be accepted there as deaf and hard of hearing. My initial reticence was soon overcome by the smiles of the elderly people, and I was able to talk to them through a sign language interpreter.

One of the women I was painting nails for, kept looking at me. I thought she was trying to tell me something, I tried to listen, and then she patted my arm and just said how grateful she was that we had come to see them. It was a great experience for me as a volunteer, and I would like to participate in a similar programme with my fellow volunteers again. It would be nice if more people could get to know us, because we are open to the world and we can help, just maybe in a slightly different way.



MORE AND MORE INDEPENDENTLY

My name is **Anikó Fődi**, I am a theater volunteer living with reduced working capacity. Initially, my psychologist suggested that I do some volunteer work to fill my free time, so that I could even get a job. I volunteered at the Talentum Foundation, then I applied to the theater volunteer group and the group of volunteers in the Fűvészkert, a botanical garden in Szeged. I tried out a lot of different things, I was given a variety of opportunities, but it took me time to discover what suited me and what I enjoyed.



For me, the biggest experience was starting to get around the city on my own. At first my mother accompanied me everywhere because I had difficulty finding my way around. Then I started volunteering more and more, she couldn't always come with me anymore, so I started to go on my own on the routes I was used to. Through the many and varied volunteering activities, I noticed that I was getting braver and more and more comfortable in the city without help. This gave me the motivation to take on more tasks and to dare to travel independently.

THE WORLD OPENS UP

My name is **Anikó Károlyiné Márta**, I work for the Nem Adom Fel (I Won't Give Up) Foundation. I was born with an open spine and have been wheelchair-bound for twenty years. I joined the Foundation in January 2023. Unfortunately, my husband died soon after. I'm not a very social person, but now the world is opening up to me. I've grown a lot in the last year, I've become more independent. At the Foundation, I am mostly involved in craft projects and we also go to schools to sensitize young people. I have more experience in informal volunteering, as I took care of my elderly neighbour for many years.

Recently, however, I went to paint the fence of a home for the elderly in Szeged together with several of my colleagues living with disabilities. Apart from it being a super social experience, I was surprised how well I started to chat with the people living in the institution, even though I am not a person of words. The elderly said they would always wait for me to come back to talk, which was a great experience for me. In the future, I would like to volunteer not only in an elderly's home but also in an animal shelter, because I love animals very much and currently I live with three dogs and two cats. For me, volunteering means being myself, trying myself in new situations.



MY FIRST PROJECT



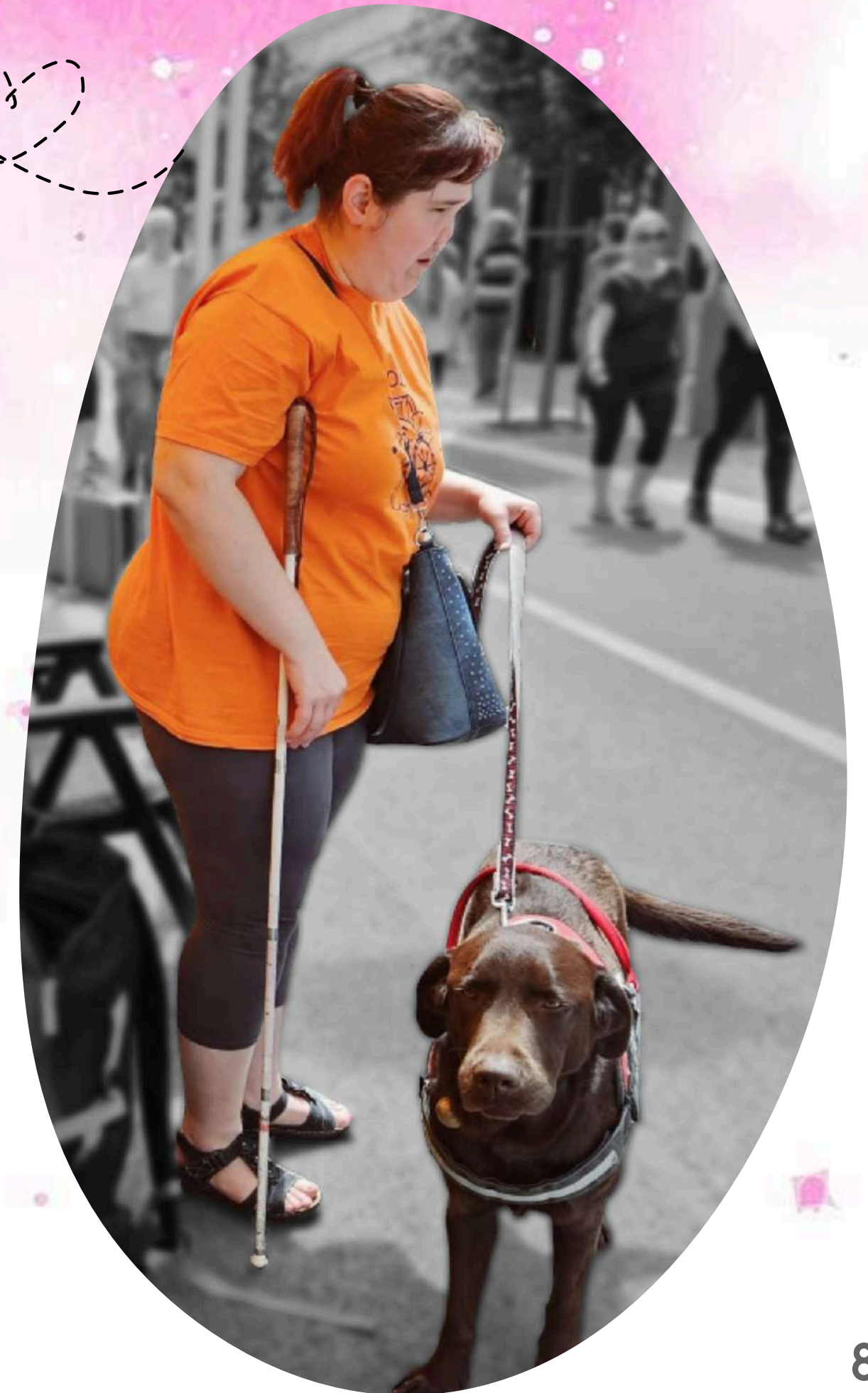
I am **Judit Kisfaludi**, disabled since birth. I am from Slovakia, I first came to Hungary for my rehabilitation, and after graduation I wanted to start an independent life here. To do this, I needed an accessible flat and a job. While I was looking for these, I started to volunteer in the Here We Are project of the Együttható (Coefficient) Association, so I could travel and try many activities that were out of my comfort zone. I learned a lot from them. Since 2022, I have been working for the association, responsible for social media.

I have a solidarity project that I wrote and I am now implementing based on my own idea. Of course we work as a team, but it's me who coordinates the programme. It's called Majdnem szombat (Almost Saturday), and it's for young people living with and without disabilities. We organise inclusive community activities with them on Friday evenings. Each session is run by a different member of the team. One girl, who first joined as a participant, later organised a board game night, another organised a film club, but there were also sessions for storytelling and painting. The programme was put together based on the interests of the five initiating members, but it is constantly being adapted to the new people who join. Volunteering through Here We Are and the association's other programmes has given me much more than I thought I would get before. It has given me extra motivation to persevere and to strive for as much independence as possible despite my physical limitations, because I can help other people to achieve self-fulfillment.

TRUST

My name is **Zsuzsanna Kácsor-Macska**, I work as a social worker at the Napos Oldal a Sérült Emberekért Alapítvány (Sunny Side for the People Living with Disabilities Foundation). During college I started looking for volunteering opportunities to practice the theoretical knowledge I had acquired. Since then I have been volunteering regularly, trying my hand at different volunteer tasks in many different fields. I love a challenge, which is why I volunteered for a year in Sweden in 2012, where I was very proud to find out that I could manage abroad on my own as a visually impaired person.

One of my most memorable volunteering experiences was in an institution for people with multiple disabilities. There was a little boy there who came from very difficult circumstances, often arriving hungry and thirsty. He had serious difficulties both in his movement and in his communication. I went there many times to sit with him and talk to him. I tried to engage with him as much as possible, playing games, singing songs, reciting poems. One morning when I went in to see him, he said my name. He could communicate at some level, but it was very difficult to understand, so it was a big deal that he came to me for help and said 'dish' and 'firsthy'. I was so touched that he came to me for help and he developed a trust in me. I will never forget this experience as a volunteer.





FEEDING ALSO THE SOUL

I am **Tomi Berki**, born with Down syndrome in 1999. I graduated from two schools, I studied computer data entry and park maintenance, and I am currently working. I've been playing the flute for a long time, I love sports, mostly hiking with my family. I've been a volunteer at my local parish since 2017, I am responsible for the Sunday morning duties and Monday evening services as ministrant. Initially, it was not easy to join the team of altar servers, but I have proven that I am up to the task.

There is also a kitchen for people in need in the parish, where I went several times after the Monday service - with a little encouragement - to help. I used to think of preparing and serving the table as a woman's job, and I didn't know if I was capable of doing it. The more I went, the more I liked it. My duty was to set the table, take the orders and then serve the warm food. I was surprised at how happy the people in need were to be served a delicious meal. Their smiles always make me feel good, and I am happy to continue volunteering there.



BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

My name is **Beáta Nagy**, I had a brain tumour when I was five years old, and as a result I was diagnosed with various diseases. Although I completed an adult training course as a nanny, I was not able to find a job and I am currently not working. I started volunteering at the Horizont Rehabilitációs Alapítvány (Horizon Rehabilitation Foundation) in 2017, where I have been a regular member of the volunteer team ever since. I have been on several outings, children's day celebrations, I often get craft assignments as I love to paint. I find it harder to make connections with my own age group, but I get on well with older people.

Not surprisingly, my favourite volunteering experience is playing board games at the senior clubs, where I love to see the enthusiasm and happiness that just a few hours of attention brings to people. When I arrive, I am always welcomed. Most of the time we are playing games with people they know from a young age, they often explain the rules of the game to me. It brings out their child-side a bit, it makes them feel excited to play, and that's a heart-warming feeling for me. For me, volunteering is a matter of 'better to give than to receive', and at the Horizon Foundation I can always feel this, as I am given tasks that are suitable for me, but also varied.

A SPECIFIC SERVICE

I'm **Szabolcs Papp**, spokesperson and member of the board of trustees of the Nem Adom Fel (I Won't Give Up) Foundation. I have a wonderful, lovely wife and three children. I currently live in Szeged and have been disabled since I was five months old, now I use a wheelchair.

I first started volunteering at the Reformed parish in Gara, where I worked for a year with people with intellectual disabilities. I didn't get paid for it, but it was a big step towards living independently, because I wanted to work and live on my own. I think that if you walk in the world with an open heart, you'll be able to see the opportunity to help.



It was a hot summer day... I saw a young lady, presumably with her mother, standing helplessly next to their broken car in the car park of a shopping mall. I went over to them. At first they were completely floored that I was trying to help them as a disabled person. Then I asked them to put aside the fact that I was in a wheelchair and let's see what was wrong. They showed me that the coolant was leaking, I looked at it, and luckily I saw the problem could be fixed. It turned out they were from Vojvodina and had to get home anyway. It was Saturday afternoon, all service or car shops were closed. I told them that I would go home and get some wide adhesive, a plate that we could add to the crack, and if they could replace the coolant every fifty kilometers, they could probably get home. So we did it, filled it up and off they went. Four hours later, I received a message that they had arrived safely. They wrote that it was a great experience for them that I, as a wheelchair user, went and helped them. Most of the world doesn't see us as an opportunity because they don't know us, but we are free to reach out to each other and do our best, we can do miracles.

MAKE THE VISIBLE

AUDIBLE



I am **Zsigmond Péter**, visually impaired since the age of 13. My connection to volunteering dates back 20 years. Initially I was active in the Hungarian Braille Committee, promoting the possibilities of braille. My religion is important to me, and at one time my wife and I were learning Persian so that I could introduce the Bible to Muslim believers. During the great wave of refugees, the language skills proved useful and we were able to help many refugees as volunteers. I am currently volunteering with the Videó a Vakoknak Alapítvány (Video for the Blind Foundation), our aim is to make the ever-increasing visual information available to our blind peers. My job is to describe what others see in the videos.

A good example is one of our fellow Transylvanian women who was given a synthesizer as a gift, but was unable to use it. We searched Youtube videos teaching how to use a synthesizer. We translated the English video and made a detailed description of each scene: which button is where and what sound it represents. This was a great help for the blind lady, because she learned to play her instrument at a basic level. On another occasion, she wanted to make knitting patterns, and we searched for instructional videos, and my sighted colleague described the visual content of the video exactly. I was very pleased and satisfied that we were able to help her to have a fulfilled life as a visually impaired person.



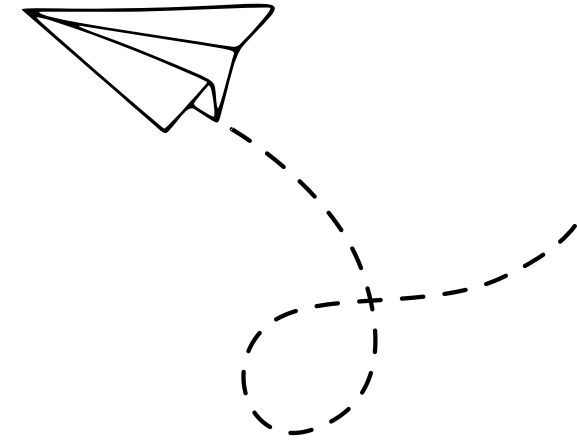
WE CAN ALSO BE FUNNY

My name is **Sándor Dr. Szabó**, I am the president of the Horizont Rehabilitációs Alapítvány (Horizon Rehabilitation Foundation). The rehabilitation of a serious accidental injury gave me the idea to start the Foundation, which became a reality in 2008. It was at the Talentum Foundation's volunteer management training that I first understood what volunteering is, who can help whom. This also helped us to build our Foundation. We wanted to have a place where people with injuries could go for physiotherapy in the morning and their relatives could go and handle other cases. We also started a programme where people with disabilities can meet each other and be in community.

We have created 'Csak azért is' (Just because) parties where people with disabilities sing, dance and party just like anyone else. I'm joined by lots of volunteers who come to the event to help, organize the transport to the party venue, lead the games and dance. One of the jobs of the volunteers is to make sure that a disabled person never sits alone, to go there to talk, to play games, to help them. Of course, this doesn't apply to me, or at least that's how I felt. I was surprised when three girls came up to me and asked what they could do to help. All I could suddenly say was 'I don't need it because I am the president of the foundation.' The girls were a bit startled, but then we burst out laughing. Humour is the key to survival, we joke about our own situation because without it there is more pressure. Perhaps the volunteers who help us don't think we can be funny, so it's good to have a party where everyone can show their new side.

A POINTED STORYBOOK

My name is **Gabriella Huszár**, I am fifty-five years old, visually impaired since birth. I am a Hungarian teacher, but I have also passed the English language exam, so now I mainly teach English online. I have administrative tasks at the Association of the Blind in Bács-Kiskun County. I am passionate about reading, listening to music and chatting with friends.



This summer I was pleased to be asked to go with several visually impaired people to kindergartens to give activities to children as part of a voluntary action. In the kindergarten I introduced Braille, as I had learned it in school. I explained to them that the dots represent different letters, I also showed them how to line up the letters. Then I read *Bogyó és Babóca*, a Hungarian fairy tale from a Braille book. They really enjoyed it, but it was also strange for them to see only a completely white page. They were cute as they wanted to feel the writing. And I enjoyed it so much that they applauded me at the end. What I notice about the children is that they are open and warm-hearted towards people with disabilities so I also was struck by this. I'm always keen to volunteer with them in the future.

LOVING PRESENCE

I am a **hospital volunteer** at the Talentum Foundation. I have lived with sclerosis multiplex since 2007, but it does not define my life. I have two children, I work eight hours a day and I am currently part of the Foundation's team of hospital volunteers, but I am also actively involved in outreach of the Foundation. Due to my illness, I go to the neurorehabilitation ward a lot, as I can give strength to my fellow sufferers and listen to them as a volunteer.

One of my most memorable experiences is related to my volunteering in the child psychiatry ward. One little boy really got a hold of me when we sat down to play cards and paint, and then together we sharpened pencils and glued pictures from the shavings. We had a good chat, although we only spent an hour and a half together. At the end he came over and kissed me and said 'I love you'. Even though the child thought he was a bad child because he had to repeat first grade. I think that these children just need a little attention, and I was touched that I could be the one to give love as a volunteer.



SPECIAL GREETING

ON MOTHER'S DAY

My name is **Kata Takács**, living with reduced working capacity, chair of the board of trustees of the Napos Oldal a Sérült Emberekért Alapítvány (Sunny Side for the People Living with Disabilities Foundation). The foundation was established thanks to voluntary work. I first went to a children's home in Szeged to give a handicraft workshop at the invitation of a friend. Then the idea came up that we could hold the workshops and camps outside the institution. And so the foundation was born. My most touching experiences are also connected to the young people in the institution.



There was a girl at the institute who didn't have a phone, because she had no hands, she couldn't use it. She wanted to call me after the camp. She begged the receptionist for three days to call me. The doorman rang me and spoke in a monotone voice, to which I suddenly became frightened that something was wrong. But it soon became clear that it was her, looking for me to greet me on Mother's Day and to recite a poem. These are the moments that make volunteering worthwhile.

IMPRESSUM



2024
Talentum Foundation for the
Support of Volunteering



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VOLUNTEERIN'
THE CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU