



## **How volunteers perceive the association's service users**

One of the most important characteristics of anybody who wants to work as a volunteer in the social sector has to do with the way in which they perceive the people who use the service they are helping to provide. That is to say, the volunteer must have an open mind and completely accept the service user that they meet.

### **Crisis situation**

One of the service users, who also contributes to the functioning of the association in one of its centres, is offered soap, deodorant etc. by one of the volunteers who is in charge of the cleaning supplies cupboard. The volunteer has not advised the service user's assigned social educator. The service user complains to the educator as she is worried that when they find things missing from the cupboard, she will be accused of robbery. Also, she buys her own products – the ones that she prefers... this makes the service user unsettled.

### **Crisis situation**

A volunteer who knows that a service user sleeps on the street asks the service user to get drugs for a friend who has cancer. The service user refuses, but one night, the volunteer insists and hands over some money. The service user, when seeing the money, becomes scared and upset by the situation, and takes the money to his allocated social educator because he doesn't want any problems and doesn't understand what exactly is going on. The social educator confronts the volunteer with the facts. There has been a break in confidence with the volunteer.

**“To believe that as a volunteer I am aware of the whole situation is a mistake.”**

The service user has lots of information about him or herself and their surroundings that the volunteer does not.

### **Crisis situation**

A service user leaves a flat after an argument with a flatmate. It is not the first time that he has reacted to a problem with his flatmate like this. The social educator finds him and attempts to mediate the situation, eventually arriving at a conclusion. But a volunteer who has known the service user for a long time becomes desperate at the idea that the service user will spend the night on the street as it is expected to rain. The volunteer rings various social educators to try and get them to find the service user, without considering that the allocated social educator had already spoken with the service user. The volunteer has caused a mess for the flatmates and their social educators.

**“I need to accompany rather than direct.”**

As a volunteer I will never be able to know all the details of a service user's life, and as such, my personal opinions and advice are unlikely to be correct. This is why working in a team, together with the service user and a professional, is important.



The service user has his or her own channels and the association has the resources to manage the situation.

### **Crisis situations**

An open centre service user decides not to accept some options that a social educator proposes for somewhere to sleep for a few nights, as part of a longer-term plan that is being worked on with the service user. The volunteer decides that the most important thing is that the service user doesn't sleep on the street, without being aware of the possibilities that the educator had suggested and the fact that they had been rejected. So the volunteer decides to pay for a night in a hostel for the service user, without knowing that, for just one night's lodging, he has provoked a rift between the service user and the social educator.

A volunteer considers that there are service users who are able to do work, which would be a good solution for some people that he knows. As such, he proposes to some of the service users that he generally talks with that they paint his flat, without sharing the proposal with relevant social educators. Only one of the service users accepts to go and paint the flat, without being certain of when he would be paid, of the hours of work involved, etc. The volunteer is disappointed with the other service users as, he believes, his proposal is what they need and he cannot understand why they did not accept. He is even more disappointed later on as the service user who accepted didn't respond in the way that he had hoped. This has created a circuit of disappointments, misunderstandings, rifts between service users and with the volunteer. The social educators try to mediate but without much success.