

III. SOCIALINIS DARBAS SOCIAL WORK

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE OF ACCEPTING THE OTHER IN VOLUNTEERING

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Abstract

Volunteering is always implemented through the time a person spends on volunteering, the duration of the commitment, the area in which they volunteer, and the age group of the volunteers. This research considers the long term and full-time volunteering of young adults in the field of social help. The object of this research is the volunteering experiences of young adults. The research question is: How do young adults experience volunteering in the field of social assistance? This article discusses only one finding of the study – the transformational experience of the acceptance of the Other in the field of social help. The design of the study was based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The study was conducted according to the methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis in order to analyze the significance and meaning of the volunteering experiences of young adults. One of the most promising aspects of the research participants' experience was the transformative experience of encountering the Other person, which became relevant to all research participants and needs to be presented separately. The experiences of the volunteers revealed not only their responsibility for the receivers of help, but also the relationship of dependence with those whom volunteers helped. The openness of the volunteers to the vulnerable, help-requiring Other become a deep and long-term educational process of self-

acceptance and self-becoming for the volunteers themselves. For volunteers, the otherness of the Other was the key to the acceptance of their own otherness. Volunteering creates an asymmetrical relationship, where the volunteer has more perceived power by providing help and the help-receiver is perceived as belonging away from the volunteer. In the process of volunteering, however, it is impossible to stay in these positions of perceived power, because the volunteer needs to learn how to coexist from the help-receiver. The help-receiver therefore becomes a teacher for the volunteer. This changing relationship with the Other taught volunteers to accept the weaknesses, disabilities, and failings of the Other, and at the same time to accept those within themselves. The volunteers started to see themselves as “not as nice as I thought of myself before”, which gave them a more realistic and acceptable self-view. By accepting themselves and their mistakes, volunteers were emboldened to live and act with their weaknesses and imperfections.

Keywords: *volunteering, Other, otherness, interpretive phenomenological analysis*

Introduction

The data of the study “Measuring Volunteer Outcomes: Development of the International Volunteer Impacts Survey” (Lough et al., 2009) substantiated the benefits of international long term voluntary service in terms of learning through volunteering, and showed that the learning outcomes were useful for the further choices of the study participants. Research by Kerka (1998) and Theodosopoulou and Papalois (2011) suggests that learning in volunteering takes place even if the learning process is not planned or organized during volunteering, and that while volunteering young adults engage in informal learning and experience personal, social, or professional change (Gedvilienė & Karasevičiūtė, 2013). Volunteering can encourage identity development in emerging adulthood, and can provide a protective environment for vocational identity formation – i.e., vocational learning (Marinica & Negru-Subtirica, 2020). In the learning paradigm, volunteering provides an area of experience which is multifaceted for the volunteer, and young adults enter an unavoidable learning area when volunteering – a “loop” of learning (Kėžaitė & Špokevičiūtė, 2006). Research (AVSO, 2007; Powell & Bratovič, 2007; Štuopytė, 2010; Wilson, 2000; Gedvilienė, Karasevičiūtė & Trečiokienė, 2010; Theodosopoulou & Papalois, 2011, Darley, 2018) has emphasized that learning takes place in the presence of intensive volunteering experience, in which some of the most important the components of learning are the longevity and continuity of the experience (Heublein & Zimmermann, 2016). The role of learning in volunteering is analyzed and described in Behnia’s (2021) research, where social-help-providing volunteers learned to accept borders and opportunities.

There is no phenomenological paradigm of qualitative research on young adult learning in volunteering that analyzes volunteer experience without the pre-determined framework of volunteering experience. The above-mentioned pieces of research describe various aspects of the benefits that volunteers receive in volunteering and claim that learning takes place while volunteering, but they do not name the specific types of learning that volunteers experience when they volunteer long-term and full-time in the field

of social help. On this basis, this study raises the question of exactly what volunteers experience in long-term and full-time volunteering in the field of social help. **The object** of this research is the experience of young adults volunteering in the field of social help.

The research question is: How do young adults experience volunteering in the field of social help? This article discusses only one finding of the study – the transformative experience of accepting the Other in volunteering.

The aim of this research is to reveal the phenomenon of young adults' experiences of self and Other in volunteering when acting in the field of social help.

1. Research methodology and research participants

The design of this study is based on interpretive phenomenological analysis (hereafter IPA) (Smith et al., 2009). "The main goal of IPA is not only to reveal the meanings of the unique research participants world (phenomenological part), but also the content and multilayeredness (interpretive part) of those meanings, which is usually not directly visible" (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is an ideographic attitude based on a particular phenomenon in a particular context, and is performed with a small group of research participants. "Leverage of subjective interpretation is an analysis of the author's idea. It gives unity to the whole work: in each work there is a 'inner core', from which all the thoughts of the author emerge" (Schleiermacher, cited in Smith et al., 2009). The role of the researcher conducting IPA is to understand how research participants try to understand their experiences.

Based on the IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2009), ex-volunteers were invited to participate in the research, ensuring the principles of voluntary participation and snowball selection. The strategy of selecting the research participants opened the possibility to participate in the study not only for those former volunteers who actively and boldly share volunteering experiences, but also for those who would not necessarily elect to respond themselves, but would gladly and voluntarily participate in the study when invited. According to IPA creator J. A. Smith's (2009) recommendation, this research involved the participation of a small number of volunteers – 6 ex-volunteer research participants; 3 women and 3 men. The homogeneity of the research participants by age was ensured – all research participants participated in their volunteering activity when they were young adults (18–30 years old). All research participants had previously participated in long-term, full-time volunteering within the field of social help. The intensity of the volunteering activities was a minimum of 20 hours and a maximum of 40 hours per week. The duration of the volunteering was no shorter than 6 months, and the interview took place at least 1 year after volunteering. All research participants volunteered in the field of social help with more vulnerable groups in society (such as addiction-prone, crime-prone, mentally and/or physically disabled individuals) or with less vulnerable groups in society (children in children's day care centers, young people in youth centers).

Research ethics in the IPA methodology ensure respect for the research participants and their life experiences. Upon invitation to the study, research participants were introduced to the purpose of the study and the possibility of using their interviews in data

analysis. Research participants were able to cancel their involvement within two weeks of the interview if they had reassessed or didn't want their experience to be included in the study data. To ensure the anonymity of the research participants, their names, countries of origin, and the names of the organizations in which they had volunteered were changed (Smith et al., 2009; Matulaitė, 2013). The last step was the ethical interpretation of research data. In order to analyze the research data using the IPA method, a constant reflection was maintained in the form of a diary. In the reflection diary, previous personal volunteering experiences and current experiences in conducting the research were reflected on. This involved the personal introspective analysis of the researcher, including assumptions, prejudices, stumbling blocks, and blind spots. For the data collection, a semi-structured in-depth interview method was selected based on the recommendations of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Interview questions were open and broad so that the research participants could speak freely and personally. The IPA research methodology is based on openness to the unknown, so the formulation of interview questions allowed the research participants to immerse themselves in all sorts of unlimited volunteering experiences. IPA primarily focuses on the phenomenological experience of the research participants, seeking to understand their perception of the experience by analyzing and identifying frustrating topics, clusters, topic clusters, and meta-themes. Only after did interpretation of the data follow, with possible theoretical discussions at the end.

2. Research results and analysis

Otherness in volunteering is revealed in several aspects: the experience of a different, misunderstood, and unexpected self; an encounter with an Other who does not submit to the rules of the personal world; and exchanging with an Other, testing boundaries and changing roles. As outlined by the research participants, being misunderstood is normal in volunteering, even if it is difficult: *People didn't understand it (researcher's remark – an event) – I explained it well to my circle, they understood what the idea was, but the government didn't understand much, which is why they didn't allocate enough permits* (Viktor, 84). [...] *there have actually been difficult moments when you don't talk to another person – he's here next to you, you talk, but he's so far away. And it's not clear whether it's just because of the language, or in general; he was just so far away and it was difficult sometimes* (Eimantas, 216–218). When the volunteers felt that they weren't being understood and they couldn't understand others, it led them to feelings of recession and isolation: *They know their system, as they say, and so on. And from that it's like the jokes were born there or [...] verbally funny phrases that I can't understand, so to say, because I don't have that experience of where there is; because I don't understand them* (Eve, 141–142). A situation where volunteers are misunderstood and they also do not understand others takes place as a dialogue, in which to be misunderstood and to not understand constantly exist together; when one appears (to be misunderstood), the other (the misunderstanding of others) also reveals itself. Both can manifest themselves first and then attract the other – the misunderstanding of others can invite the presence of being misunderstood, and vice versa.

For the volunteers, a negative experience with an Other revealed a different perception of themselves. Much as in the photograph production process, when a photograph emerges from a negative (reverse) image, a negative volunteering experience with an Other similarly revealed a new, different self-perception of the volunteer: *I created (researcher's remark – prior to volunteering) a social circle that I liked, that understood me [...] aaand... even the same people with the same interests. Like I said, music and those forest things, just when I came here (researcher's remark – to the volunteers) every Friday there were parties until morning and alcohol and such superficial communication; it was not that I was discouraged, but I did not make good friends there, close ones (Victor, 115–117). I'm not a vegetarian or a vegan, I eat bacon, and for me it's a delicacy aaaand... like... mmm... I say for some Greek people, or, I don't know – but for Spanish and Portuguese, this is not necessarily acceptable, and then follows that we did not like each other and we had mmm... conflict, but maybe not straight conflict – such a little... aaah... search for distance (Eve, 135–137). They accept me as much as they can, but I don't belong here, here is not my life. And then you think, too – do I want to take over and infiltrate myself around here like them, or am I okay with where I am? It was such a moment, too, that I did not infiltrate so deeply, although there was an effort, but I decided not to infiltrate (Eve, 143–145).*

Elements of the volunteers' usual and normal pre-volunteering lives caused tension and even conflict when, during volunteering, they encountered Others and otherness. Volunteers felt confused, but they were aware of their choice of how to react to it – to adapt to the Other or to remain themselves under tension. Most research participants, some more than others, chose to experience tension with the Other and the otherness, and because of this decision volunteers strengthened their personal characteristics and hobbies and revealed abilities in themselves. In their relationship with an Other, volunteers freely chose behaviors that encouraged asking questions such as: Who am I and how do I want to be? Encountering the otherness of the Others encouraged the research participants to stay true to themselves and reinforced their self-awareness, and so the otherness helped them to meet their own selves.

Being with the Other's otherness came as a surprise, and allowed volunteers to overcome personal limitations when the Other was weaker, needed help, or was more helpless than the volunteer. *[...] youngsters come from orphanages or from highly conflicted families and so on – they're abandoned, and... and... and... there are a lot of such very painful stories out there really, and that loneliness, and a lot of everything. And well, I somehow felt that every day, I don't know. I somehow identified myself with those stories, I actually lived the lives of those other members there (Sun, 99–101).* Approaching the otherness of the Others allowed volunteers to go beyond the topics of taboos, and to discover within themselves, as in a mirror, a reflection of the other with acceptance. *I've made a lot of friends there, with a few of them (exhales) crim(...) ...well, they're **criminals**, they just weren't behind bars at the time, that is. It's me, I'm from Panevėžys, it's probably because of that. (inhales) Sooo... (Eimantas, 213–215).* Eimantas pronounced the word “criminals” strongly and loudly; at first, the word “criminals” got stuck, as if in doubt, but he soon highlighted this word in his narrative. The pronounced utterance of this word reinforces

Eimantas' decision to accept Others as they are – with all otherness, in this case as criminals, without beautifying or avoiding their role. At the same time, Eimantas appears to be in danger of being seen as a criminal, according to the Lithuanian saying “su kuo sutapsi, toks ir pats tapsi” (“we conform with people that we spend time with”). But, using the meaning of this saying, Eimantas emphasizes his similarity with Others with whom he has made friends, by saying that *I am from Panevėžys, it's probably because of that*. He shows how much an individual's inner image of themselves can enable them to repel an Other by fearing their own image, or can enable them to accept the different image of themselves created by the Other. Eimantas's story reveals how accepting the Other opens the door to self-acceptance, and how self-preservation is possible while maintaining a relationship with the Other: *All these criminals/such locals, they shoot, it seems (inhales), and it was very interesting with them. In that sense, it is interesting for them and it is interesting for me, too. Not in the sense that I was spending time with them there doing something wrong, but in the sense that they were coming and asking 'why, you know, why are you here? Whaat? Well, they've seen that we live differently, you know (319-323).*

The otherness of the Other, as revealed in age, behavior, living conditions, or lifestyle, was accepted when volunteers created an open relationship with them. When talking about the people who were important to them, the research participants highlighted their otherness and the significance of their relationship with them: *The fact that, mmm... through... through... friendship became what was very important [.....], my friend is... she is a sixty-year-old woman (Eimantas, 325–327)*. A person being sixty years of age is not a hindrance to friendship for Eimantas, but it is also not usual for him, so when discussing this friendship he continually emphasizes the age of the woman that he befriended.

I brought, so to say, part of myself, my culture; I told them (researcher's remark – people with mental disabilities) where I am from. They will never go there, to my home country, and I really felt that it was interesting to them if you were sincere with them, not just spending hours there[]. But if you stay sincere with them, you look at them, you're not afraid to look at them (...), you talk to them, they feel it very much, strongly. This is the meaning (Eve, 183–86). Eve does not mention the otherness of people with mental disabilities, which is obvious, but frequently discusses opening up for relationships with people with disabilities, and later summarizes the priority of equal relationship by giving special meaning to “staying sincere with them”. Eve's narrative reveals the meaning of a personal presence with Others after overcoming her fears – she is *not afraid to look at them*.

When encountering Others, the personal boundaries of volunteers were considered an obstacle: *There was no way I could just sit down and talk to that girl, she refused to just talk to me. This was very, very difficult for me (Eve, 124–125)*. Research participants perceived awkward and difficult personal limitations in meeting Others. At the same time, they accepted that they could not do everything, and that they must accept that they are not able to do or to change some things: *And, in fact, it was the most difficult moment of the day; it was necessary to get in touch with those people again, because there were really some misunderstandings, and there was enough miscommunication during the day (Eimantas, 221–223)*. Volunteers experienced Others' personal boundaries and their differing treatment of them. Some volunteers tried to behave in an unusual way, as if pushing Others or

the people responsible for them into danger, but at the same time not perceiving this test of boundaries as presenting harm to Others: *Since I was bored there often (...), not that I would skip out from volunteering, but I started to do my own things there, see where the limits are, how long can I do it, and when will I be stopped?* (Victor, 185-186); *But there were adventures with Internet theft from a neighbor, [...] they say, 'Lithuanians are coming to England, you have already stolen something', and we are here (laughing) stealing the Internet* (Karolina, 179-180; 186- 187). Other volunteers tried to look at situations from the outside, evaluating the experience of boundaries as a personal opportunity: *I've seen, so to say, juridical clichés as to how I can get into another country illegally. There are some crossings and I could go there as a tourist (...) and in that sense there will be nothing, because [...] you don't have to pay for a visa, just a symbolic fee, and in that sense I... I... [...] I saw a hole where you can enter and there is a border point in the alley, but there is nothing there* (Kęstas, 264-268).

Volunteers also experienced having to transcend their boundaries, acknowledging personal vulnerability: *Well, you just had to be, like, at full attention all the time, you know, well ... be careful, it's ... because, I say, there was a camera stolen from me, this and more situations like that [...] with such a, maybe I've already exaggerated, but it's anxious, maybe you know (researcher's note – here the respondent whistled and rotated), I contained myself in this space* (Eimantas, 264-267); *There were incidents in the summer when in the apartment we lived in many things were stolen... only then did we realize how unsafe it was in the area where we lived* (Eve, 102-103). Finally, boundaries were experienced in meeting Others as an unavoidable necessity: *And you know, it was forbidden for me (...) – by both their organization and the organization that sent me – to express my views [...]. I felt ambiguous because I just wanted to stay in that project, so I didn't say anything more because I really, really wanted to be there – it was my big contribution* (Kęstas, 291-192; 303-304). Experiencing personal boundaries in meeting Others in different ways increased awareness of the astonishing personal and tangible limitations of the Other. Speaking about the experience of personal limitation through the Other, some volunteers discussed how they achieved better self-perception – sometimes painfully and sometimes happily: *[...] I'm very limited, not as fanatically as I usually think, but sometimes, I think. And you know, you can see yourself very much in truth there [...] when you can't be completely there with the other person, you just can't in any way understand each other (deeply inhales)* (Eimantas, 602-604); *I said to myself while I was still there (researcher's remark –volunteering) that it would not be my future, it would not be my path, that it was too difficult and too emotional for me* (Eve, 215).

The test of boundaries and the experience of limitations in meeting the Other opened up the perception of the need for boundaries: *From this perspective, it's very important, these boundaries ... it's important to understand who you are, what you do, and where you go, to somehow think about your way rather than immerse yourself in just being with those kids* (Sun, 217-218). Sun, in avoiding defined boundaries and wanting to be without any certainty, fell into the trap of limitless commitment, which greatly exhausted them and led to the discovery of the need for boundaries. In her attempt to do all she could, Sun began to blame others for exploiting her, became disturbed by her current activities

and her purposefulness, and felt extremely tired by constantly trying to empathize with and respond to the needs of the Other: *Boundaries are very important, because when they don't exist, you just drown and... and... and... volunteering then becomes so that you feel exploited, although no one is exploiting you for real there* (Sun, 215–216). Meeting with Others and understanding personal and role boundaries was not an easy experience for any of the volunteers in the research. However, the personal perception of boundaries, new aspects of self-perception, and the recognition of personal needs opened up to all of the volunteers through encounters with Others. Paradoxically, self-awareness and the meaning of the relationship with Others occurred within research participants after they overcame prejudices and stereotypes and opened up to Others by accepting otherness as an integral part of their relationship. For the volunteer, their relationship with the Other became the answer to the question of what it means to be a volunteer and where the meaning is in volunteering. Others became teachers for volunteers, helping them to discover and accept personal flaws and weaknesses and to accept themselves as different through the otherness of each Other. The relationship with the otherness of the Other seems to have become a condition and an opportunity for the acceptance of the unknown, undiscovered, or hidden self.

3. Discussion

Volunteers' experiences of change after encountering the Other were expressed from the perspective of an asymmetrical relationship. The relationship of the volunteer with help-receivers, from a hierarchical perspective, is unbalanced, as volunteers are perceived as hierarchically higher, whereas help-receivers, due to their dependence on the help of the volunteer, are perceived as hierarchically lower. This asymmetrical relationship was analyzed from a hierarchical perspective by Levinas (1979), who presented a broad perspective of the relationship between “me” and the “Other” which we cannot objectively understand only by describing it. The vast majority of interactions and relationships with the Other take place in such a way that the Other is part of *my* totality, *my* economy, and *my* sameness with *me*. Being in the world with Others gives preference to an egocentric presence when the Other, being *me*, is part of *myself*. From the perspective of the research participants, the volunteer is the first person to whom the help-receiver initially appears as the Other, as part of their totality, economy, and sameness with the volunteer. As long as the help-receiver is *me*, volunteering doesn't happen. From this perspective, research participants tend to control volunteering time, activities, and relationships, and predict what volunteering and helping people should look like. For some time, the volunteers understood help for the Other only if they were part of the volunteer's *me*.

Levinas (1979) invites a deeper look, beyond this egocentrism, into the relationships of people who may also have priority but who are less recognizable. At the farthest pole, another person, according to Levinas (1979), is the “Other”, and is not at the near pole nor part of *my* totality, economy, or the sameness of *me*. The “Other” at the far pole must not be *me* – the Other must be a person who does not fit into *my* standards of totality. The totality in Levinas' (1979) conception is the place of comfort for *me*; all of which belongs to

me. The Other is not only the Other, one who is not like *me*; that person is strange, different, and alien in their own way. The Other doesn't fit into *my* categorizations and expectations, nor into *my* totality, *my* economy, or *my* sameness. The Other is a stranger who *I* invite into *my* home. From the perspective of the volunteers, the concept of "*mine*" was left in the period before volunteering – *my* mother, *my* friends, *my* family. When volunteering began, the near pole, *my* totality, remained in a vacuum, and research participants moved from their usual concept of *mine* when meeting and encountering the Other: *That person, you live with, and if you can't communicate it's then very difficult, really very difficult (...)* (Eve, 134); *And, in fact, it was the most difficult moment of the day; it was necessary to get in touch with those people again, because there were really some misunderstandings, and there was enough miscommunication during the day* (Eimantas, 221–223).

The Other – whether another volunteer, a help-receiver, or an employee – with their otherness, diversity, and alienation, pushed the volunteers out of their usual presence at the near pole into a situation where they started to take responsibility for the Other: *[...] somehow, every day, I felt more and more meaning, and more just 'being'. Because I didn't hesitate, somehow I didn't want to change something there anymore, I just started being there with those people. (deeply inhales) I made great friends there with a few such (exhales) criminals there* (Eimantas, 311–314). An encounter with the Other is the transcendence towards infinity; taking responsibility for it. The abstract idea of infinity is not in the essential, but in the social plane (Levinas, 1979). To the extent that it arises when confronted with the Other, through the face of the Other, in Levinas' (1979) philosophy this "leads to an intersubjective social relationship" (Saldukaitytė, 2013). An ethical relationship based on responsibility is, for Levinas, an opportunity to preserve otherness. This relationship is reflected in the research participants' experiences of the preservation of otherness from the perspective of the receivers of help, in the development of an ethical relationship, and from the perspective of personal introspection, revealing self-otherness to the Other as the ethics of self and self-otherness: *I thought about how to help her, well very often I not only thought about how to help, but I looked and felt like her. There I felt all sorts of feelings for her as well, it seems I have taken over her feelings somehow* (Sun, 105–106).

Help-receivers who were weaker were inaccessible to volunteers, were unrestricted, were unsuitable for volunteer perspectives, and did not build a relationship of obedience towards volunteers because of their otherness. The relationship of the volunteer with the help-receiver began from the first-person perspective, in encountering the Other, when the otherness of the help-receiver opened their vulnerability. The vulnerability of the help-receiver created the volunteer's indifference, which Levinas (1979) defines as "responsibility for the other who looks at you." The volunteer becomes responsible for the help-receiver by opening up to their vulnerability, and cannot escape this responsibility. The weakness of the help-receiver and their obvious needs inevitably oblige the volunteer in a different way to become responsible for the help-receiver as the Other: *But if you stay sincere with them, you look at them, you are not afraid to look at them (...), you talk to them, they feel it very much, strongly. This is the meaning* (Eve, 183–86).

The phenomenon of a volunteer giving help to the less able Other is, from a first-person perspective, the presence of an irreplaceable teacher through an encounter with

another, different, and strange Other. From a volunteer's first-person perspective, the vulnerability of the person in need leaves no choice for the volunteer as to whether to be responsible or indifferent. The volunteer becomes responsible by looking at the vulnerable person, with the responsibility of building a supportive relationship.

From Levinas' (1979) ethical perspective, both sides of this asymmetrical relationship are necessary – between the volunteer and the person in need and between the person in need and the volunteer. The experience of the volunteers shows not only their responsibility for the help-receivers, but also the relationship of dependence on the help-receivers – *I was a volunteer, but in reality, I was like that person (researcher's remark – the person in need that they were assisting)* (Sun, 94–95). The acceptance of the Other introduced an ethical imperative both to accept oneself and to remain oneself with the Other while accepting the Other. The meaning of the relationship with the Other arose for the volunteers when they opened up to the vulnerability of the Other by accepting otherness as an integral part of both the Other and themselves.

Conclusions

Volunteers discussing personal boundaries acknowledged personal vulnerability and accepted the confrontation with boundaries in meeting the Other as an unavoidable necessity. Experiencing personal boundaries in meeting each Other increased awareness of the astonishing personal and tangible limitations of the Other and of themselves in different ways.

In experiencing the otherness of the Other, the research participants also experienced a changing relationship with the Other. In a changing relationship, when control shifts into a relationship of trust with nearby co-existence, volunteers realized the experience, discovered the meaning of volunteering, empowered themselves through trust, and based their existences on personal freedom through creativity.

The openness of the volunteers to the relationship with the vulnerable Other became a process of deep self-learning. Through their relationships with the Other, volunteers were taught to accept personal flaws, disabilities, weaknesses, and other personal struggles that did not exist before volunteering. This led the research participants to perceive a more real self-image and to become more courageous to live with their personal flaws.

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Summary

Since the start of the 20th century, volunteering has been named and recognized as an area of learning, but the scope of research related to learning in volunteering is limited to the acquisition of competencies through volunteering, employability, the ability of volunteers to act in society, and the social commitment of volunteers. There is a lack of sensitive research on volunteering without pre-existing prejudices, which could reveal the

authenticity of the volunteering experience. This would be seen as a learning experience in the analysis phases of the research. This study is distinguished by its open-minded view of volunteers' experiences by asking: What do young volunteers experience in providing long-term, full-time volunteering assistance to vulnerable people? This article reviews and presents one part of the study – the transformative experience of the acceptance of the Other in volunteering. The methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was chosen for the implementation of this research, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect the research data. The interpretive phenomenological analysis methodology allows the researcher to deeply and authentically analyze the data and interpret it using the experience of the research participants at all stages. This includes phenomenological analysis, interpretive analysis, data presentation, and theoretical discussion. The selected methodology requires that the voices of the research participants are not lost at any stage of the research, and that the statements presented in the research are based on these voices. The findings of this study allow for the conclusion that the experience of an encounter with an Other revealed volunteers' personal experiences of their own limitations and their inability to control situations, and also allowed them to explore their inner understandings of themselves in the context of otherness. For the volunteers, experiencing their own boundaries was difficult and revealed flaws in their previous experience, which at the same time drew the volunteers' attention to their incomplete self-perceptions and, in the end, their own self-acceptance. Different Others thus emerged in volunteering – other volunteers, help-receivers, and employees of the organization. In themselves, none of the Others sought the volunteers' experience of otherness, just as the volunteers themselves did not. However, in the process of volunteering, the encounter with the otherness of the Other became an inevitable and, ultimately, rewarding experience for the volunteers themselves. By accepting the otherness of the Other, volunteers accepted themselves with their character flaws, disabilities, and weaknesses, and opened themselves to a relationship of trust, especially with help-receivers. Help-receivers became teachers to the volunteers, without whom volunteering would become an impossible experience. Accepting personal boundaries and personal character flaws, the research participants sought help from the Others – help-receivers – with whom they experienced closeness and acceptance after building a relationship of trust. An asymmetrical relationship that was initially perceived in terms of the power of the volunteers over help-receivers changed into one that was power-giving for help-receivers as they taught volunteers how to provide help. In the process of volunteering, the volunteer went from being the one who controlled the relationship to the one who asked for help, and in this position the help-receiver became a teacher for the volunteer. By varying this asymmetrical relationship of unequal power levers, volunteers learned to accept themselves with all of their differences through the otherness of the Other, and, relying on this experience, they built a relationship of trust with the Other and with themselves.

Keywords: volunteering, Other, otherness, interpretive phenomenological analysis.

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