

Executive Summary Motivation

Volunteers represent 71.5% of human resources available to nonprofits and are relied upon to establish a genuine community, ensure efficiency, and assist with program outreach (Ortiz, Hager, & Brudney 2022; Almas S. et al 2020). Specifically, nonprofit organizations that work with disabled individuals provide social opportunities such as community engagement, and inclusive activities as well as life-skill workshops intended to promote the integration, self-esteem, and social skills of disabled individuals (Carney, 2021; Meriah, 2022).



Figure E.1: Drasi Gia to Kati Allo's logo

Drasi Gia to Kati Allo (SFA) is a nonprofit organization in Thessaloniki, Greece that provides skills and support to individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities tend to have few close relationships as physical disabilities can exclude people from interactive games while mental disabilities may require additional stimuli in social situations or can impinge communication, creating social exclusion for those who are disabled (Cruz et al., 2023; Park & Kim, 2018). Through workshops and community building, SFA creates a healthy, productive, and inclusive environment for the disabled community.



Figure E.2: Image of volunteer assisting participants during a workshop

Although SFA has a 14-year history, in the past four years they have lost 50% of their volunteer force. To address the decline in volunteers at the organization, the goal of the project was to assess volunteering at Drasi Gia to Kati Allo to determine effective strategies to improve volunteer recruitment and retention.

Approach

To achieve this goal, our team established the following four objectives:

1. Assess the Current Structure, Organization, and Role of Volunteers at Drasi Gia To Kati Allo
2. Assess the Relationship between Volunteers and Staff to Determine Effective Strategies to Recruit and Retain Volunteers
3. Analyze External Factors that May be Contributing to Fewer Volunteers
4. Determine Effective Advertising and Recruiting Tactics

To assess the current structure, organization, and role of volunteers at SFA, we conducted observations and distributed surveys. By attending nine morning sessions from March 11th to April 22nd, the team focused observations on the role of volunteers and their interactions with staff and

participants. In these sessions, our team actively participated as volunteers, allowing us to observe

Collecting a total of 29 responses from March 19 to April 2, the team distributed a survey to volunteers at SFA asking about their engagement, satisfaction, and style of participation. This helped us understand the volunteer experience at SFA.

At SFA, we also interviewed six volunteers about their roles and responsibilities, what they enjoy about volunteering, and the challenges they face to get a more nuanced understanding of each volunteer's experience. In these interviews, we also aimed to establish a greater understanding of the connections, social dynamics, and communal experience at SFA. The questions asked to describe their relationship with other volunteers and staff members within the SFA community.

We also distributed surveys to the public onsite in high-traffic areas and 40 youth groups by email. We collected 71 responses in total from March 19 to April 2. We also interviewed 5 survey respondents. These methods gathered data on volunteering history motives, and perspectives on disabilities to understand if the lack of volunteers is specific to SFA or indicative of a larger societal issue.

Lastly, we reviewed and analyzed Drasi Gia to Kati Allo's current advertising strategies in comparison to other successful non-profit organizations to determine how SFA could strengthen its recruitment tactics. We interviewed three non-profit organizations from March 20 to April 9: Indigo, YMCA, and Irida, asking questions focused on their current recruitment strategies and retention rate of volunteers.

We analyzed three of Drasi Gia's to Kati Allo's social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. We documented the content of each post and the number of likes.

We split the content of posts into the following categories: volunteer/staff posts, workshops/activities, celebrations, bazaar, sponsors/donations, promotional seminar/outreach, job/volunteer recruitment, and infographics. We used this data to determine which posts gain the most traction and understand how SFA could better appeal to the public through social media.

Results

Workplace connections are one of SFA's greatest strengths

Our findings revealed that volunteers are very satisfied with workplace relationships and that they feel respected by the staff. All seven volunteer interviews agreed that workplace connections were one of SFA's greatest strengths- allowing them to connect to other like-minded individuals in the field of disability, but also be introduced to new perspectives within the field of special education and experiences working with a disability.



Figure E.3: Staff members and participants dressed up and enjoying each others company

Staff can utilize volunteers to a greater extent

While volunteers are satisfied with the relationship, they do believe they have greater skills that the organization could utilize to lessen staff burdens and further assist participants. From our interviews with volunteers, 83% agreed that staff put too

much responsibility and pressure on themselves to organize workshops and keep participants engaged. Volunteers conclude staff can delegate more responsibilities to the volunteers, instead of assuming more tiring responsibilities. On the other hand, staff members indicated that some volunteers are reluctant to help participants eat or use the bathroom with adults in the morning shift, but will gladly help the children in the afternoon. This small disconnect between staff and volunteers may indicate a necessary change in volunteer structure to utilize volunteers' full capabilities.

The younger generations are more open to volunteering and aware of disabilities

Through observations when distributing our survey and onsite observations, we found that the younger generations are more open to volunteering and aware of disabilities. When approaching individuals for our survey, an older man showed disinterest in taking the survey after being told it was about volunteerism. Additionally, all but one volunteer we met at SFA is a college-aged student.

Our interviews with public survey respondents as well as interviews with staff members and volunteers at SFA supplement these observations. Nearly all interviewees explained that volunteering is not popular with older people in Greece. Several interviewees, including a retired volunteer at SFA, speculated that the older generation would rather spend time with their family than volunteer.

Economic insecurities restrict one's ability to volunteer

Our public survey responses show that 20% of those who don't volunteer and 40% of those who stopped volunteering cite a need for paid employment as a reason why. With a 20% increase in the cost of living (Trading

Economics, 2024), people must get additional jobs to survive, explaining the high rates of discontinued volunteer work. This aligns with how three interviews with nonprofits in Thessaloniki and four interviews with members of the younger population in Thessaloniki agree that economic challenges in Greece have a negative impact on motivation to volunteer. Moreover, our public survey responses reveal that 40% of those who don't volunteer and 65% of those who stopped volunteering cite a lack of time as the reason. Analyzing these findings, lack of time and a need for employment are consistently the reasons for not volunteering or stopping volunteering.

Consistent social media posts and those that depict interactive workshops are most effective

Instagram and Facebook have continued to be the main platforms of communication and outreach to the general public and are also SFA's second most effective method of recruitment. With staff members requesting advice on how to reach a broader audience through these platforms. After extensive analysis of the social media pages, there has been

SFA's social media accounts focus on posting all aspects of SFA's daily work, and not just specifically volunteer and staff recruitment. SFA's Instagram performance has been increasing drastically, garnering almost 50% more likes every year from 2016-2022. SFA's Instagram success can be attributed to the consistent posts about volunteering, celebrations for holidays and birthdays, and pictures of participants actively engaged in workshops. Although Instagram and Facebook have steadily been growing, there are still areas for targeted improvement. In 2023 SFA posted 50% more than the year before, yet their average likes dropped almost 30%. This suggests that followers may have

felt overwhelmed by the flow of posts, as well as Instagram restricting how many posts reach their target audience.

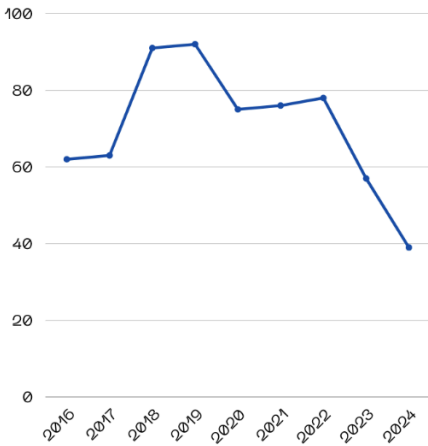


Figure E.4: Facebook likes per all types of posts per year over time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The team concluded that the sudden decrease in Volunteers was not due to internal factors and changes, but rather a consequence of many country-wide issues such as economic insecurities. Although these issues may be harder to combat, there are still tactics that can be employed to better SFA's growth, and volunteer recruitment.

Utilize volunteers more effectively

After reviewing the current volunteer experience and interaction with staff, it is evident from numerous responses that staff believe they cannot fully rely on volunteers to assist the association, while on the other hand, volunteers believe the organization is not utilizing them as volunteers to the fullest extent. We believe SFA could benefit from distributing the staff's high expectations and responsibilities to willing and qualified volunteers who are currently overlooked. This

can be solved by assigning volunteers to staff and their respective teams. Currently, SFA delegates each staff member to a consistent team of participants whom they create workshops for, as not every workshop is done together in a large group. By associating volunteers with these teams, and creating a clear volunteer hierarchy, the volunteer may be delegated more responsibilities in line with their staff members' needs resulting in better volunteer-staff relations.

Consistent and effective use of social media

The team's findings suggest that SFA could benefit from posting promotional fliers advertising SFA's public events regularly and consistently, then later posting candid images from the events highlighting the community at SFA. In the last 8 years, posts that have followed this style have been more successful in garnering likes and comments.

Additionally, using hashtags to highlight the main goals of SFA and posting about partnerships with other organizations could result in more engagement, expanding SFA's online engagement to include the sponsor's audience.

Enhance training techniques

For almost two decades, non-profit organizations have been utilizing online training courses at volunteers' convenience (Lysakowski, 2005). Many non-profit organizations introduce people to the organization through training to gain people's interest and persuade them to volunteer (Renz et al., 2024). Tactics like uploading training videos to the website could enhance the knowledge and skills of volunteers and allow them to complete the training at their leisure.

Develop partnerships with other nonprofits

Due to the external factors that contribute to low volunteer rates across all of Greece, our team recommends establishing connections with other organizations to attract a wider variety of people from different backgrounds. Reaching out to hospitals and physical therapy centers could attract volunteers since those who work in the medical field know personal interactions. Other organizations we would recommend are the YMCA and Indigo, two large, well-connected organizations that could provide SFA with consistent volunteers. Connecting with other nonprofit organizations allows Drasi Gia to Kati Allo to spread its name, informing more people about the organization as well as recruiting volunteers.

Determine new avenues of funding

The cost of living in Greece has increased by 20% (Trading Economics, 2024), yet there has been no increase in SFA's funding. Greater financial support from sponsors or the European Union could cultivate a more lively and productive atmosphere for staff, volunteers, and participants by adding new puzzles and games or making the 'living' areas more enjoyable. Furthermore, increasing pay could potentially remove the need for a second job and consequently raise the energy of staff. Our team recommends beginning the process by appealing current European Union funding and requesting any possible additional funding to help combat the high inflationary times. This recommendation can also be applied to partnerships with other organizations through grants and donations.

References

- Almas, S., Chacón-Fuertes, F., & Pérez-Muñoz, A. (2020b). Direct and indirect effects of transformational leadership on volunteers' intention to remain at non-profit organizations.
- Cruz, S., Ferreira, M. R., Borges, A., & Casais, B. (2023). Barriers to volunteering in the field of intellectual disability: a cluster analysis. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 20(2), 341–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-022-00343-5>
- Carney, M. (2021). Social and Self-Concepts for Students with IDD about Inclusive Programs. *Bridgewater State University Virtual Commons*.
https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1505&context=honors_proj
- Linda Lysakowski, A. C. F. R. E. (2005). *Nonprofit Essentials: recruiting and training fundraising volunteers*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Meriah. (2022, November 28). The Disability Organizations Doing the Best Work These Days. *Meriah Nichols*. <https://www.meriahnichols.com/disability-organizations/>
- Mya Pronschinske Groza & Mark D. Groza (2022) Enhancing Volunteer Pride and Retention Rates: The Role of Organizational Reputation, Task Significance, and Skill Variety, *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 34:3,351-370, DOI: [10.1080/10495142.2021.1926043](https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2021.1926043)
- Ortiz, Mark A. Hager & Jeffrey L. Brudney (2022) What Do Nonprofits Value in Their Volunteers?, *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 46:1, 96-110, DOI: [10.1080/23303131.2021.1967246](https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2021.1967246)
- Park, Y. K., & Kim, J. H. (2018). The effect of the disability awareness educational program of university students in the Department of Physical Therapy on reducing prejudices against people with disabilities and increasing positive attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Journal of Physical Therapy Science*, 30(8), 1030–1033.
<https://doi.org/10.1589/jpts.30.1030>
- Renz, D. O., Andresson, F., & Brown, W. A. (2024). *The jossey-bass Handbook of nonprofit leadership and management*. Jossey-Bass.
- Susanti, Raini Diah, et al. “A Systematic Scoping Review of Motivations and Barriers in COVID-19 Volunteering among Health Students: The Potential for Future Pandemic Volunteers.” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 17 June 2023, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10284154/.