

Facilitating intergenerational
solidarity and learning through
building friendships between
youngsters and elderly



Annex F

National Report



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Annex F – National Report Template

1. INTRODUCTION (Approx. 200 words)

The topic of providing support through various forms of voluntary to people in need is more and more common in Spain. The country offers a variety of befriending services addressed to different target groups. The word “befriending” is mostly used to describe services provided to promote the social inclusion of refugees, although through the desk research other types of befriending services were found too, even if they were named in a different way. The term “befriending” is not very common in Spanish, which is why the main terms used for the research were volunteering, support network, accompaniment and support services, and indeed various types of such services dedicated to elderly people were found. Anyway, the topic of youth providing support to the elderly seems not to be yet very common, in fact in both the presented good practices, volunteers are not specifically youth, but can be people of different ages, who lives close to elderly in need of support. Organizations undertaking this activity are usually private non-for-profit organizations, which in some case are supported by the city council. They operate in different regions of Spain.

2. REPORT FROM THE GOOD PRACTICES

Good Practice no.1

Title	“ <i>Barrios Amigos</i> ” (Friendly neighbourhood)
Location	Spain, Zaragoza
Organisation	Foundation “ <i>Amigos de los Mayores</i> ”
Website	www.barriosamigos.org
Overview	The work of the organisation focuses on preventing loneliness and social exclusion of older people. Therefore project “ <i>Barrios Amigos</i> ”, which English translation is “friendly neighbourhoods”, aims to fulfil the organizations mission by creating a network of friendships in the neighbourhoods of elderly, and by establishing cooperation with nearby resources and organizations. The Foundation's work is based on volunteering and emotional accompaniment. Support is provided by volunteers living near people in need. The volunteer's task is a weekly two-hour visit of an elderly person, or in the event of inability, a telephone conversation. Bearing in mind that there are also lonely people who need companionship in hospitals, visits are also organized there. That way, by being in regular contact with an elderly person, gradually a bond of sympathy and trust is established with the volunteer. In order to increase the impact and reception among the target group, regular social events are also organized in their neighbourhoods. In this way, the participation in the sociality and social

	<p>value of the elderly increases. The project aims to encourage the creation of spaces for socialization and networking through recreational activities. In addition, the work they do with other organizations allows elderly to participate in more social projects and create an even stronger social network. Taking an elderly person out of their house, encouraging to attend a party, workshop or class, is the perfect opportunity to break their loneliness, rediscover the joy of making friends and rebuild their self-esteem or sense of purpose of life. The main values of this projects are closeness, simplicity and exchange.</p> <p>The project has a twofold objective: on the one hand to offer support to elderly people, on the other hand, to restore neighbourhood links by putting the elderly at the heart of the process, thus generating benefits for the whole community.</p>
Impact	<p>According to the 2020 “<i>Amigos de los Mayores</i>” Annual Report, in Spain, 66.2% of men and 69.4% of women over the age of 65 suffer from loneliness. In 2020, “<i>Amigos de los Mayores</i>” was at the side of 2,709 elderly people thanks to the support of 2,689 volunteers. At that time, 702 new volunteers joined the community action team. Moreover, the organization spread its initiative in 43 new municipalities and carried out 554 socialization activities, as well as many other activities.</p> <p>2,709 elderly people forged a bond of friendship with 2,689 volunteers, sharing 583,320 hours of good companionship in 106 municipalities in Spain, with the support of 4,955 members and donors.</p>
Innovation	<p>The Barrios Amigos project is an innovative citizens' initiative. Its aim is to foster intergenerational relations and neighbourhood solidarity through easy and cost-free actions between neighbours in the neighbourhood. Each person intervenes at their own pace, according to their possibilities and preferences. Barrios Amigos is a project that aims to offer other forms of citizen participation adapted to the new rhythms of life. It makes volunteering available to everyone, turning flexibility into its main strength. Barrios Amigos, indeedm is conceived as a tool in which not all activity depends on a single person. This kind of compromise makes more people approach volunteering.</p> <p>The practice concept has been thought out in a very accessible and easy to implement way. Everywhere around the world in the neighbourhoods of older people live younger ones who have the opportunity to help without any bigger effort. By dedicating two hours a week to a conversation or activity with a lonely elderly person who lives just around the corner, volunteers have the chance to improve their life without much difficulty or giving up their own plans. What is more, young volunteers not only help to overcome loneliness and social excusion of the elderly, but also gain the opportunity to improve their own social skill, ability to listen, create a bound with a person who perceive life from such a different and sometimes unimaginable</p>



	<p>perspective for a young person. This way young ones can get a little closer to old age and understand it better.</p>
Sustainability	<p>The “<i>Barrios Amigos</i>” project is based on easy and cost-free actions between neighbours in the neighbourhood. Each person intervenes at their own pace, according to their possibilities and preferences, which makes it easy for young people to get involved for a sustained period of time.</p> <p>The project idea was firstly launched and promoted in France by the association “<i>Les Petits Frères des Pauvres</i>” with the implementation of the project “<i>Voisin-Age</i>”. This French organization has promoted the development of this project among the members of the International Federation to which it belongs. The Spanish Federation “<i>Amigos de los Mayores</i>” decided to set up this service in Zaragoza to complement other supporting activities carried out by the organisation, offering an alternative to traditional volunteering and allowing other forms of citizen participation. This practice, then, has already proven to be successful in different contexts, even during the Covid-19 confinement situation when the service continued to be active.</p> <p>Volunteers are asked to incorporate information about their agenda and activities on a digital platform in order to facilitate coordination between the neighbours and with the intention of ensuring the safety and well-being of the elderly. A network of “Neighbourhood Leaders” (neighbours who coordinate and supervise the functioning of the project in each neighbourhood), in addition, support the technical staff of the “<i>Amigos de los Mayores</i>” organization, creating a highly functional and sustainable system and providing continuous support to the volunteers involved.</p>
Transferability	<p>This practice can be applied in any country and in any community. Volunteering is a widely available and flexible tool for bringing needed changes in the society. The working mechanisms used here can be easily adapted to the needs of other organisations working to combat loneliness and social exclusion among older people, and beyond. “<i>Amigos de los Mayores</i>”, as a member of an International Federation which brings together associations and other types of not-for-profit organisations that work to combat loneliness and social isolation among older people through their mission and activities, is a widely recognised organisation whose work contributes to the spread of this mission throughout the world. In this way, their working tools and ideas reach out to places where this theme is less developed and where they can be used in the same way.</p>
Additional info	

Good Practice no.2

Title	“ <i>Madrid Vecina</i> ”
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Location	Spain, Madrid
Organisation	“Grandes Amigos” with the support of the Madrid City Council
Website	www.grandesamigos.org/madrid-vecina/
Overview	<p>“<i>Madrid Vecina</i>” is a project promoted by the Spanish NGO “<i>Grandes Amigos</i>” in collaboration with the Madrid City Council that seeks to improve the well-being and health of the elderly, by regenerating neighbourhood ties and involving the whole neighbourhood to detect and prevent loneliness. The developed neighbourhood support network brings together neighbours, companies, public administration representatives, neighbourhood associations and many more. Together they form a network to keep an eye on older people in the environment, to find out if they are or feel lonely, to help them with everything they need to facilitate their socialisation and participation in neighbourhood life. Through simple, everyday gestures of good neighbourliness, “<i>Madrid Vecina</i>” want them to always feel accompanied and supported in whatever they need. In this way the project contributes to improve their well-being and health and to build a friendly neighbourhood that cares for its neighbours.</p> <p>The whole neighbourhood can participate in “<i>Madrid Vecina</i>”: a pharmacist, a shopkeeper, health centre’s workers, the neighbours themselves etc. As well as being a detection network, they inform older people about the different options for companionship, socialisation and support they need, such as volunteers, neighbourhood associations, social care, municipal health centres, etc. In this way they make available to each older person the most appropriate resources nearby, based on their needs and preferences. Through this neighbourhood network, the project also promotes awareness-raising activities to spread the reality of older people, fostering their integration and the dignified treatment of older people.</p>
Impact	<p>In accordance with the 2020 Grandes Amigos Annual Report, 1168 older people took part in various programmes offered by the organization, 23% more than the previous year. 86% of older people participating in the organisation's programmes are women, men represent 14%. The older people they accompany are increasingly diverse, although this profile is most often that of a woman aged 84, living alone, receiving emotional support at home. In 2020, 1407 volunteers took part in projects, 31% more than in 2019. They have mobilised volunteers through 27 action teams. These self-managed groups are a catalyst for the participation of volunteers and older people in the neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Neighbourhood networks such as “<i>Madrid Vecina</i>” were crucial during the pandemic to provide support to elderly who were suffering from loneliness and isolation. Telephone support programmes were indeed launched to provide support during the hardest phase of the pandemic, although face-to-face activities were resumed as soon as possible. Thanks to the project 1200 elderly received support by around 1500 volunteers during that period.</p>



Innovation	<p><i>Briefly elaborate any innovative aspects the practice has. What are the main characteristics that are innovative? In which area lies the innovative aspect and why (e.g., social innovation, technological innovation)? (Approx. 150-200 words)</i></p> <p>“Madrid Vecina” developed a set of tools to involve the entire neighborhood in the project. People can easily participate in different ways: spreading the word about the project, learning to detect loneliness, mapping the neighbourhood. All these actions finally increase the number of people, entities and companies willing to help older people.</p> <p>These tools are available on the website of the organization but they are also spread as brochures everywhere in the neighbourhood. In this way, all the people with whom the older person comes into contact (the shopkeeper, the post office worker, the pharmacist, the baker, etc.) can help identify if an older person feels lonely, has lost a loved one, if their physical or mental health seems to be deteriorating, etc.</p>
Sustainability	<p>“Madrid Vecina” is a project tailored to the needs of lonely elderly people but also aimed at the creation of intergenerational bonds. Young people involved in the project, as stated in a video of the initiative, are aware that being integrated into their neighbourhood means more than just hanging out with people of their same age. They are aware that old people can be interesting friends, can provide them with new points of view, and can also be considered just as friends who go to water their plants when they are on holidays. Of course, all cases are different, but many older people are independent, they just need to have meaningful relationships in their lives. The sustainability of the project lies in the fact that all parties involved are aware that it is not a question of performing an act of charity but of promoting the well-being of the entire neighbourhood.</p>
Transferability	<p>This practice can be easily used in different contexts. Initially, it has been established in three neighbourhoods of Madrid. Then, to meet the needs of older people living in villages and small towns, in 2020 the organization also started the project in rural areas of the region of Cantabria too. So, it is possible that it will be extended to other areas.</p> <p>The tools developed in the framework of the project can be also adapted to various needs and contexts.</p>
Additional info	



3. FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS (Approx. 600-800 words)

a) Findings from the interviews with youth

Table 1 Young participants' details

Age	25	20	24	25
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female
Educational background	Tertiary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	Tertiary Education
Occupation	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed

Each of the respondents has previous experience in providing voluntary work. Two of them worked before with migrants, from which one additionally worked with children and youth at risk of social exclusion. The other two study participants helped people with mental health issues and one of them also has experience working with the homeless and unemployed jobseekers.

Two of the respondents have experience in volunteering with elderly people. Both have good memories of that time, describing it as enriching and realizing, that this group of people needs more support than the young. Additionally, one of the participants talks about how special elderly people are with their age and a wealth of experience they have, and at the same time very often maintaining spiritually young. Moreover, the respondent emphasizes how important it is to help older ones with fear to maintain this energy, especially when they face health problems related to age.

None of the respondents heard of “befriending” services described with this word, although one of them is familiar with this kind of help providers named differently. Another of the participants shows his big interest with this word seeing it as connected with creating a bond of friendship important in his opinion to fight the loneliness of the elderly.

Regarding the question of experience in providing help based on the idea of befriending, each of the respondents understands this type of support in a slightly different way. One of the respondents replied negating, admitting that he had never been involved in anything like this. Another participant claims that he took part in a similar project keeping the elderly company in activities such as going to the theatre, cinema or exhibitions. Third participant confessed that during the pandemic he helped elderly people with shopping and had short conversations with them when leaving it, but did not consider this to be a kind to “befriending”. The last of the respondents admits that he thought to apply for a similar project, but believed that special competences were needed for this, and therefore he resigned.

Two of the respondents assumed that there are some kind of befriending practices in their neighbourhoods in some civic centers and associations or other with regard to the pandemic, although neither of them is sure. The other two never heard of anything similar.



The things that, according to the respondents, would encourage young people to participate in befriending programs are to guarantee accommodation and nutrition, build awareness about the situation of older people and pay attention to intergenerational similarities rather than differences, build relationships slowly and persuade young people to try the first familiarization meeting to better understand older people and see the positives that they can learn from this experience, the fight against the social stigma associated with the feeling of young people as being negatively evaluated by the older generations.

Participants believe that young people can take a lot of personal benefits from a similar experience, such as ability to emphasize more, know more about their origins, culture and traditions.

According to the respondents, the greatest difficulties in involving older people in this project are admitting to themselves that they are in a situation where they can no longer rely only on themselves and need help, fear of being misunderstood and not having common interests with the volunteer, as well as a lack of awareness about the options of receiving help.

According to the research participants, the interpersonal skills needed to be part of the befriending project are emotional intelligence, patience, empathy, respect, sensitivity, sense of humor and positive attitude. One of the participants claims that this project does not require any special skills, it is enough to be willing to help and be aware of the mutual benefits.

The things that participants consider as possibly increasing the attractiveness of the service are advertising the project in youth centers, universities, bars etc. In addition, proposing something encouraging, which will benefit both parties, as well as relying on the creativity of young people and using their ideas for creating collaborative activities.

The subjects proposed by the respondents, which in their opinion should be covered in training for future volunteers, are how to take care of an elderly person, communication skills, hygiene management in the elderly and management of emotions. One of them also thinks it might be helpful to complete the training with handing a certificate.

The below statements have been assessed as followed:

Table 2 Young participants' evaluation of the following statements on a 1 to 7 scale (1= Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly Agree)

I like to help older people	5	6	5	4
volunteering with older people can help me develop my skills:	6	6	4	4
volunteering with older people can help me meet new people and socialize	5	4	5	4
volunteering with older people can increase empathy and active listening	6	5	7	5
I would like to learn more about "befriending" services	5	4	5	3
I would like to participate in "befriending" services	3	3	5	4

The above results show that despite the great interest in the project and the positive reception of this type of services, the willingness to take part in befriending practice is relatively low compared to other responses.

b) Findings from the interviews with the elderly

Present the key findings from the interviews with youth. Outline the number of participants, their demographic characteristics and background (including, age, education, experience etc). Participants' direct quotes can be used to illustrate some of the findings.



Table 3 Elderly participants' details

Age	73	72	70	73
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male
Educational background	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	Primary Education	Secondary Education

The elderly people interviewed stated that they were not aware of what befriending services are, that they had heard of something similar during the pandemic, but they thought it was an emergency-generated service that was limited to the time of the pandemic. As for their community, they do not know if similar services are offered, they think they are by ONG as the Red Cross, but they are not sure about it. They have not heard anything about them, but they have not sought them out either because they say that are not in a situation where they need support at the moment.

It was very interesting to discuss this point because according to what he said during the interview, until they see the need to access such services, they tend not to care about them, despite the benefits they know they could have in terms of intergenerational exchange.

What would motivate them to participate in such services is to be able to spend quality time in the company of young people who are genuinely interested in their company. They say they would prefer to have an organisation behind the young people involved to ensure the safety of the activities and the good intentions of the young people involved - they state that they are afraid that some young people may take advantage of older and vulnerable people.

They have no doubt that such services could be very beneficial for both older and younger people to learn from each other. Such services can offer the opportunity to share realities and points of view that sometimes seem to have nothing in common – this is considered very important to reach mutual understanding.

They tell us that they think that there are many older people who need these services because they feel very lonely, especially those who are widowed.

They themselves believe that in the future they could get involved in such services, but not now because they believe they have a well-developed family and social network and do not feel such a need.

For their future involvement in such services, they tell us that they would like to start with group activities, which can offer the possibility for friendships with young people to rise in a more spontaneous way and considering possible common interests, similarities and sympathies. In order to promote the participation of both elderly and young people, they say that playful and entertaining activities; they mention among other things playing cards. It would also be important to ensure that the activities are interesting for both groups and that both can learn something during the activities.

They do not believe that the implementation of these activities is very complex as long as the young people involved are truly committed. They believe that there are many young people who want to get involved in such activities, although it is true that flexibility must be ensured and also that the participation does not become an obligation.

As for the type of communication they would like to have with young people, while preferring face-to-face contact, some of them do not discard the use of the Internet. One of the participants, in particular, tells us that a very important part of her network of contacts is maintained thanks to social media platforms such as WhatsApp, that give her the chance to stay in contacts with many people, to re-establish contacts with



old friends and have a closer contact with family members who live far away. During the pandemic, this was essential and is likely to remain so for all those people who for one reason or another cannot easily leave their homes and are at high risk of loneliness and isolation.

Table 4 Elderly participants' evaluation of the following statements on a 1 to 7 scale (1= Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly Agree)

Befriending will stimulate companionship and conversation	7	7	6	5
Befriending will be a chance for new leisure opportunities	7	7	5	6
Befriending can help me meet new people and socialize	7	6	6	7
Befriending can increase empathy and active listening	7	6	6	5
I would like to learn more about befriending	5	7	6	5
I would like to be part of a befriending service	7	4	6	5

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (Approx. 200-300 words)

The above information on the already existing befriending services shows that they are getting more and more popular and possibly got a boost thanks to the health emergency due to Covid-19 during which loneliness and isolation worsened for many people (the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.), but were experienced by the rest of the population as well, perhaps making the need to help people who suffer from them, more evident. The proposed good practices highlight that these befriending services can only be put into practice with the active participation of volunteers, which is what also makes them sustainable economically and over time. It is not just a question of dedicating time to people who feel lonely, but above all of investing in the well-being of their neighbourhood, creating a network that benefits all its members, in terms of learning and mutual support.

However, despite such positive effects that are brought by already operating services, the interviews with both the young and the elderly show that the awareness of this form of help and the interest in them is rather low. Among young people, the offer of befriending services and their provision of voluntary support for the elderly was more likely to be received positively, but at the same time awareness of the already existing organizations and the desire to participate in them were relatively low. As for the interest in this type of project among the surveyed older people, their responses show that they are not aware of the existence of this type of services and possibly, because of the way they imagine them, they do not seem to be really attracted to them at the moment, possibly because they do not feel the need of support. However, the above interviews show that, according to the respondents, this interest in mutual cooperation can be stimulated. From the information obtained and the statistics carried out, it can be concluded that befriending services among elderly people with the support of young volunteers have great potential. With the appropriate advertising and encouragement of target groups, as well as by spreading awareness of the problem of loneliness and the existence of this type of support services, befriending services can be successfully introduced in this context.

Key policy recommendations:

- Provide more spaces in the community for intergenerational learning activities, through the implementation of programmes to promote the intergenerational sharing of experiences and solidarity, where befriending services can be also introduced so as to become better known.



- Raise awareness about how intergenerational and befriending activities can be beneficial both for elderly and youth.
- Raise awareness about the needs of the elderly and the support they need to avoid situations of unwanted loneliness and emotional distress.
- Promote volunteering as a priceless form of solidarity towards others, offer spaces where young people can share their experiences, motivate and support peers.





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