

Minna Pietilä (researcher, PhD) & Marja Saarenheimo (researcher, PhD) @vtkl.fi

*The **Active Age Programme** (2012–17), funded by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) and coordinated by the Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older People (VTKL), combined the power of 31 NGOs with their practice development projects to promote good everyday life among older people. Projects of various themes were carried out across Finland and participants comprised all kinds of older people in a wide range of life situations. The Programme’s research **studied the impact that participation in the projects had on older people’s everyday lives, sense of participation and experience of human agency, and on their psychosocial well-being. The primary data of the study were a quantitative survey (N=529, respondents’ median age 72 yrs.) and qualitative interviews (N=92, interviewees’ age 60–92yrs.).***

The Active Age research:
What happened to
participation
among older
people?

MAIN RESULT: Taking part in NGO activities promotes **participation** among older people when it fits their interests and personal characteristics.

Older people are motivated to participate in NGOs’ activities by:

- the wish to do things that are **important** to oneself and the community
- the desire to use the **skills and experience** accumulated over lifetime for the benefit of oneself and others
- the need for meaningful social contacts and **interaction**
- the effort to set a pace for the everyday life

Key points in developing activities to maintain and increase participation among older people:

- Diversity among older people should be the guiding star of activity planning: one model does not fit all
- Extroverted and active people are easy to get to come along, but arenas of participation must also be constructed for those who find it difficult to be in a group or who are shy in social situations
- The utilisation and development of older people’s skills act both as strong motivation to participate and as resistance to stereotypes surrounding old age

- It is particularly important to ensure the continuity of activities for people who are in difficult life situations

Currently volunteering attracts primarily people who are already active and extroverted – therefore, activities must be diversified

Older volunteers form an important resource in NGOs without whom it would be difficult to carry out many activities. People become volunteers for a range of reasons. The desire and opportunity to help others and work for the common good is often experienced as fitting one's own values. Simultaneously, volunteering provides rhythm and meaning to daily life. Altruistic motives coexist well with those that relate to the meaningfulness of one's own life.

- When recruiting volunteers, it is important to identify both selfless motives and those which relate to one's own well-being and meaningfulness of life
- People consider most natural for themselves the forms of volunteer work that best suit their own personal characteristics
- Supporting particularly older people in difficult situations through voluntary work requires the activity to have a good structure which allows for the coordination, training and ongoing guidance of volunteers, as well as ensuring their coping
- It is important to recognise the boundaries of voluntary work and the necessity for professional support when helping older people with, e.g., mental health issues

The study and participants with regard to the results presented here

These results are based on qualitative interviews of the Active Age research and some previous research results. Individual and group interviews were carried out with 92 people aged between 60–92 years who took part in the projects of the Active Age Programme around Finland during 2014–15.

Further information: Pietilä M & Saarenheimo M. *Ilmeikäs arki. Tutkimus ikääntyneistä ihmisistä järjestöjen kehittämistoiminnassa. (The expressive everyday life. A study of older people in NGOs' development activities.)* The Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older People 2017. (eloisaika.fi)