

Evaluation report for volunteers' engagement and experience within the *Older Brother, Older Sister* program 2023/2024

Below, we will present the profile of the volunteers involved and describe their experience working with children and volunteering in the "Older Brother, Older Sister" program during the 2023/2024 program cycle.

Volunteer Profile

During the 2023/2024 program, a total of 161 volunteers were involved, of which 144 completed the initial questionnaire and 122 completed the final evaluation. For the volunteer profile, we will use data from the final evaluation, as it is the most recent, and the comparisons in the subsequent results will be presented in accordance with the actual number of volunteers who completed the program evaluations at both measurement points:

- 107 female volunteers (87.7%)
- 14 male volunteers (11.5%)

The average age is 23 years.

The number of volunteers who completed the final evaluation in partner organizations is as follows:

Organization	No. of volunteers
Association for addiction prevention NARKO-NE, Sarajevo	39 (32%)
Center for psychological support Sensus, Mostar	17 (13.9%)
The Association for the Care and General Rights of Children "Naša Djeca," Zenica	17 (13.9%)
Association New Generation, Banja Luka	12 (9.8%)
Association for Assistance to Children and Youth with Special Needs "Tračak Nade," Foča	11 (9%)
Youth Education Center, Travnik	11 (9%)
Association Children of Earth in Bosnia and Herzegovina,	9 (7.4%)
Center for children, youth and family Laktaši	6 (4.9%)

The current highest level of education completed by the involved volunteers is as follows:

- Bachelor's degree: 72 (59%)
- High school: 32 (26.2%)
- Master's degree: 18 (14.8%)

The majority of volunteers (N = 62; 50.8%) are enrolled in one of the humanities fields at universities (Psychology, Pedagogy, Social Work, Special Education, etc.). The second-largest group consists of students from social science fields (N = 26; 21.3%) such as Economics, Law, Political Science, followed by students from technical and technological fields such as Mechanical Engineering, Architecture, Electrical Engineering, and Computer Science (N = 14; 11.5%). They are followed by students in health-related fields (N = 11; 9%) and volunteers with completed high school education.

The majority of volunteers still have student status (N = 89; 73%); 21 (17.2%) volunteers are employed, and 12 (9.8%) are unemployed.

Regarding volunteer experience in the "Older Brother, Older Sister" program, the data are as follows:

- Beginner volunteers: 38 volunteers (31.1%)
- One year of volunteer experience: 60 volunteers (49.2%)
- Two years of volunteer experience: 14 volunteers (11.5%)
- Three years of volunteer experience: 7 volunteers (5.7%)
- Four years of volunteer experience: 3 volunteers (2.5%)

Relationship Between Children and Volunteers

- At the beginning of the program cycle, 103 volunteers stated that it was important to them that the children be of the same gender. However, the results at the end of the cycle show that 55 volunteers were paired with a child of the same gender, while the majority of volunteers (n = 81; 66.4%) by the end of the cycle considered this to be a less important criterion.
- The number of volunteers who initially considered it important that the child be of the same nationality as themselves increased to 8 volunteers, compared to 4 volunteers at the beginning of the cycle.
- At the start of the cycle, 96 volunteers considered it important or very important to meet with the child every week, and by the end of the program cycle, 78 (63.4%) volunteers maintained this level of interaction. Simultaneously, 74 (60.6%) volunteers stayed with the child for at least two hours during each meeting. Additionally, 116 (95%) volunteers stated that they made an effort to organize engaging activities with the child.
- Furthermore, 74 (60.6%) volunteers reported that they tried to involve the children in planning each meeting.
- When it comes to trust, 95 or 77.9% of volunteers stated that they felt the child confided in them about everything important and that they kept their secrets.

- By the end of the program cycle, 100 (81%) volunteers believed they had successfully helped the child make new friends.
- Support with school responsibilities was actively provided by 69 (56.6%) volunteers.
- 115 (94.3%) volunteers believed that the children could talk to them about any topic and express disagreement.
- 109 (89%) believed that they had managed to establish a very close relationship with the children and that they were compatible. Additionally, 117 (95.9%) volunteers felt that the children had successfully accepted them.
- At the beginning of the program cycle, 56 volunteers stated that it was very important to them that the children did not have severe difficulties beyond the volunteers' capabilities. By the end of the program cycle, 77 (63.1%) volunteers stated that they were able to handle the challenges the children had.

Areas of Child Development

- 113 (92.6%) volunteers believe they have succeeded in at least slightly helping the child improve their self-image.
- 112 (91.8%) volunteers stated that they believe they have helped the children better manage their emotions, while only two volunteers feel they did not succeed in this at all.
- 111 (90.9%) volunteers believe they were successful in helping the children spend their free time in a more meaningful way.
- 115 (94.3%) volunteers are satisfied with their contribution to supporting the children in becoming more communicative with others, especially with peers—at the beginning of the cycle, 85 (69.6%) volunteers believed they would achieve this goal.
- 97 (79.5%) volunteers believe they achieved the goal of helping the children visit at least 10 new places they had not been to before—at the beginning of the cycle, 80 (65.5%) volunteers believed they would achieve this goal.
- 102 (83.6%) volunteers believe they were relatively successful in improving 10 life skills or socially desirable behaviors—at the beginning of the program cycle, 76 (62.3%) volunteers believed they could achieve this goal.
- 80 (65.6%) volunteers at the end of the program cycle believe that children can change, compared to 34 (27.8%) volunteers who held this belief at the beginning of the program cycle.

Beliefs and Attitudes About Children at Risk

- At the beginning of the program cycle, 81 (66.3%) volunteers believed that negative experiences have a lasting negative impact on a child's life—by the end of the program cycle, this belief was somewhat retained by 70 (57.4%) volunteers.
- At the start of the program cycle, 7 (5.7%) volunteers fully believed that their efforts would have little impact on the quality of the child's life—by the final evaluation, this view was held by 14 (11.5%) volunteers.
- At the beginning of the cycle, 142 (98.6%) volunteers believed they could change at least one unacceptable behavior of the child, and by the end of the cycle, 106 (86.8%) volunteers were confident that they had positively influenced at least one behavior.

- At the start of the program cycle, 119 (82.6%) volunteers stated that they were quite good at understanding behaviors that were personally unacceptable to them—by the end of the cycle, this view was held by 97 (79.5%) volunteers.
- 70 (48.6%) volunteers at the start of the cycle believed that working with children would not have a positive effect unless the root causes of the problems were changed—by the end of the program cycle, this belief was observed in 75 (61.5%) volunteers.
- At the start of the cycle, 56 (38.8%) volunteers believed that they should be lenient with the children and provide them with everything they did not have—by the end of the cycle, 42 (34.4%) volunteers held this view.
- 68 (55.7%) volunteers retained the belief that it is important to unconditionally accept the child without attempting to correct them.
- There was no change in the following beliefs between the start and end of the program cycle: 70.1% of volunteers maintained the view that pitying the children is a harmful behavior, and that volunteers should focus on changing harmful behaviors in children. Additionally, 68% of volunteers retained the belief that a child's calm behavior is not necessarily a sign of a lack of problems, and 37% of volunteers retained the belief that volunteers know better than the child what is good for them.

Who Has the Greatest Responsibility for the Quality of Interaction with the Child?

At the start of the cycle, volunteers had the view that the hierarchy of responsibility was as follows:

- 113 (78.5%) volunteers believed that the volunteers have the greatest responsibility—by the end of the cycle, this view was supported by 93 (76.2%) volunteers.
- 15 (10.4%) believed that it is the parents' responsibility.
- 14 (9.7%) believed that it is the responsibility of the specialist.
- 2 (1.4%) volunteers believed that it is the child's responsibility—by the end of the cycle, 7 (5.7%) volunteers attributed this responsibility to the children.

The results show that by the end of the program cycle, volunteers had a similar view on the hierarchy of responsibility. The only difference is that, by the end of the cycle, responsibility was more evenly distributed between parents and specialists. In both measurement points, volunteers assigned the greatest responsibility to themselves and the least to the children.

Personal Values and Motivation of Volunteers

Primary motivations and reasons for staying in the program remained fairly consistent throughout the cycle. In the final evaluation, volunteers listed the following primary motives at both the beginning and end of the cycle, in accordance with the following hierarchy:

- Supporting children at risk (42 volunteers; 34.4%)
- Gaining experience in working with children (26 volunteers; 21.3%)
- Feeling satisfaction from doing good (18 volunteers; 14.8%)
- Developing personal skills (14 volunteers; 11.5%)

- Making good use of free time (11 volunteers; 9%)
- Learning new skills and having fun (11 volunteers; 9%)

Reasons for staying in the project were cited as follows:

- Visible changes in the child's behavior and functioning (46 volunteers; 37.7%)
- Clear expression of the child's desire to continue interacting with the same volunteer (26 volunteers; 21.3%)
- Developing personal and professional skills (24 volunteers; 19.7%)—at the start of the cycle, this motivation was second on the list of reasons (30 volunteers; 20.8%)
- Meeting new people (10 volunteers; 8.2%)
- Responsibility towards the commitment made in the project (10 volunteers; 8.2%)—at the start of the cycle, this reason was more pronounced among 28 volunteers (19.4%)
- Feedback from others that I am important to the child (6 volunteers; 4.9%)

Regarding qualities for working with children, volunteers had the following views at the beginning and end of the cycle:

- 77 volunteers indicated that they had enough time for volunteering.
- 117 volunteers believed they were good role models for the children, and this belief was also held at the start of the cycle.
- 115 volunteers felt they had enough patience.
- 117 volunteers believe they now better understand children and connect with them more easily.

Self-Assessment of Volunteer Skills and Traits

The self-assessment of volunteer skills and traits at the beginning and end of the program cycle is presented in the following table:

	Program Start		Program End	
Trait/Skill	More present skill (no. of volunteers)	Less present skill (no. of volunteers)	More present skill (no. of volunteers)	Less present skill (no. of volunteers)
Constructive acceptance of feedback	140	4	119	3
Skill to give assertive feedback	135	9	113	9
Personal boundaries	142	2	117	5
Sense of humor	130	14	109	13
Ambivalence tolerance	119	25	103	19
Authenticity	139	5	116	6
Frustration tolerance	127	17	105	17
Non-intrusiveness	123	21	100	22
Care vs Form	139	5	119	3
Sensitivity	121	23	99	23
Shyness	55	89	53	69
Curiosity	133	11	115	7
Self-awareness	140	4	113	9
Conflict management	130	14	110	12
Focus on benefit of others	141	3	121	1
Empathy	139	5	121	1
Flexibility	137	7	116	6
Emotion regulation	132	12	110	12
Lack of interest	10	134	9	113

Although there are no statistically significant differences in the change of traits across the entire sample between the two measurement points, the table shows that the number of volunteers who feel they possess most of the aforementioned positive traits to a greater extent decreased by the end of the cycle. These results should be interpreted with caution due to the smaller number of volunteers who completed the final evaluation. This trend may indicate that volunteers have become more self-critical and aware of the need for continuous development of each trait through their work with children. The same trend was observed in the evaluation of the previous cycle, 2022/23.

Program Support

Regarding program support, at both time points, all volunteers indicated that all forms of program support were very important to them, with particular emphasis on the following:

- 117 (95.9%) volunteers were satisfied with the introductory training.
- 113 (92.6%) volunteers felt well-prepared and understood their role.
- 114 (93.4%) volunteers were satisfied with the clarity of the guidelines received from the coordinator.
- 97 (79.5%) volunteers were satisfied with the quality of communication with parents/guardians.
- 119 volunteers were satisfied with the quality of communication with the professional consultant.
- 119 (97.5%) volunteers were satisfied with the support from the coordinator.
- 83 (68%) volunteers frequently managed to attend advisory meetings twice a month.
- 103 (84.4%) volunteers were mostly responsible for recording reports after meetings and justifying monthly expenses.
- 117 (95.9%) volunteers considered the content of the meetings useful.
- 91 (74.5%) volunteers were generally satisfied with the amount of their allowance.
- 116 (95%) volunteers successfully connected with other volunteers.
- 80 (65.5%) volunteers frequently attended the seminars and training sessions designated for them.

Recommendations and Additional Comments from Volunteers in the Final Evaluation:

- Improve communication between the project coordinator and caregivers from institutions for abandoned children to better motivate children for program participation.
- Plan group activities in a way that is acceptable to children regardless of their age.
- Plan group activities according to the age of the children.
- Volunteers need more details about the child's family situation as there is a possibility that the child may share this information at some point. It is important to prepare the volunteer for what they might learn from the child.
- Increase the number of group gatherings.
- Use one of the monthly advisory meetings more frequently for specific thematic workshops focused on practical techniques such as assertive communication, stress management, etc.

Conclusion

Relationship Between Children and Volunteers

At the beginning of the program cycle, 103 volunteers expressed the importance of children being of the same gender, but by the end of the cycle, only 55 volunteers were paired with a child of the same gender. Meanwhile, 81 volunteers (66.4%) changed their view and considered this criterion less

important. The number of volunteers who considered it important for the child to be of the same nationality as themselves slightly increased from 4 to 8 volunteers.

Throughout the cycle, volunteers maintained a high level of engagement with the children. Of the 96 volunteers who initially considered it important to meet with the child every week, 78 (63.4%) continued to do so until the end of the cycle. Most volunteers spent at least two hours at each meeting, and 116 (95%) volunteers made an effort to organize interesting activities. Additionally, 74 (60.6%) volunteers involved the children in planning these activities.

Regarding trust, 95 volunteers (77.9%) reported that the children shared all their important secrets with them. By the end of the cycle, 100 volunteers (81%) felt they had successfully helped the children make new friends, while 69 (56.6%) volunteers actively assisted with school-related tasks.

Most volunteers (115, or 94.3%) believed that the children could openly discuss any topic with them, and 109 (89%) volunteers reported having established a close and compatible relationship with the children. Furthermore, 117 (95.9%) volunteers stated that the children had successfully accepted their roles. By the end of the program cycle, 77 volunteers (63.1%) reported that they had managed to handle the challenges the children faced, despite initial concerns about their ability to do so.

Areas of Child Development

The conclusion based on the collected information shows that most volunteers achieved significant success in meeting the program's goals. By the end of the cycle, 113 (92.6%) volunteers believe they have at least slightly helped the children improve their self-image, while 112 (91.8%) volunteers feel they successfully assisted the children in managing their emotions. The majority of volunteers (111, or 90.9%) are also satisfied with their contribution to helping children make better use of their free time.

Volunteers' satisfaction with their contribution is particularly highlighted in supporting children to become more communicative, with 115 (94.3%) volunteers believing they succeeded in this, compared to 85 (69.6%) volunteers who believed they would achieve this goal at the beginning of the cycle. Similarly, 97 (79.5%) volunteers feel they successfully helped the children visit 10 new places, compared to the initial 80 (65.5%) who expected this.

Additionally, 102 (83.6%) volunteers believe they have relatively successfully improved 10 life skills or socially desirable behaviors in the children, while at the beginning of the cycle, 76 (62.3%) volunteers believed they could achieve this goal.

By the end of the cycle, 80 (65.6%) volunteers believe that children can change, representing a significant increase compared to the beginning of the cycle when only 34 (27.8%) volunteers held this belief.

Overall, the data indicate a positive effect of the program, with volunteers achieving most of their goals and showing significant growth in their belief in the possibility of change in children.

Beliefs and Attitudes About Children at Risk

The conclusion based on the collected information indicates changes in volunteers' attitudes throughout the program cycle, as well as the persistence of certain constant beliefs. At the beginning of the cycle, 81 (66.3%) volunteers believed that negative experiences have lasting negative effects on a child's life, whereas by the end of the cycle, this belief was held by slightly fewer volunteers, 70 (57.4%). This decrease suggests that some volunteers came to believe during the cycle that negative impacts can be overcome.

On the other hand, the number of volunteers who believe that their efforts have a minor impact on the quality of a child's life slightly increased, from 7 (5.7%) at the beginning to 14 (11.5%) by the end of the cycle. Although most volunteers at the start believed they could change at least one unacceptable behavior of the child (142, or 98.6%), by the end of the cycle, 106 (86.8%) volunteers were confident that they had successfully positively impacted some behavior, which still represents a significant outcome.

A reduction in the belief that volunteers are quite good at understanding unacceptable behaviors was noted among 119 (82.6%) volunteers at the beginning of the cycle, whereas by the end, 97 (79.5%) volunteers maintained this attitude.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the number of volunteers who believe that working with children will not have a positive effect unless the causes of the problems are addressed increased, from 70 (48.6%) at the beginning of the cycle to 75 (61.5%) by the end. This indicates a growing awareness among volunteers about the importance of addressing the root causes of problems rather than just alleviating their consequences, likely fueled by the empathy they developed for the children.

Regarding leniency towards children, the number of volunteers who believe that children should be given what they did not have slightly decreased, from 56 (38.8%) at the beginning of the cycle to 42 (34.4%) by the end. Although the majority of volunteers (68, or 55.7%) maintain the belief that it is important to unconditionally accept the child, there is stability in the attitudes that pity can be harmful (70.1%) and that calm behavior in a child does not necessarily indicate the absence of problems (68%).

Overall, changes in attitudes reflect greater reflection and adaptation among volunteers in their work with children, but they also show the persistence of deeply rooted beliefs that remained unchanged throughout the cycle.

Self-Assessment of Volunteer Skills and Traits

Although there are no statistically significant differences in the change of the assessed traits at the overall sample level between the two measurement points, we can observe that the number of volunteers who believe they possess most of the positive traits mentioned to a greater extent decreased by the end of the cycle. The results should be interpreted with caution due to the smaller number of volunteers who completed the final evaluation. This trend may indicate that volunteers,

through their work with children, have become more self-critical and aware of the need for continuous development of these traits. A similar trend was observed in the evaluation of the previous cycle 2022/23.

Program Support

The conclusion based on the collected information shows a high level of satisfaction among volunteers regarding various aspects of the program. Most volunteers were satisfied with the introductory training (117, or 95.9%) and felt well-prepared for their role (113, or 92.6%). Additionally, 114 (93.4%) volunteers were satisfied with the clarity of the guidelines provided by the coordinator, while the quality of communication with parents or caregivers met the expectations of 97 (79.5%) volunteers.

The quality of communication with professional collaborators was rated very positively, with 119 volunteers expressing satisfaction. Similarly, 119 (97.5%) volunteers were satisfied with the support from the coordinator. Furthermore, most volunteers (117, or 95.9%) found the meeting content to be useful.

Volunteer responsibility in documenting reports and justifying monthly expenses was high, with 103 (84.4%) volunteers regularly performing these tasks. Additionally, 116 (95%) volunteers successfully connected with other volunteers, indicating good social dynamics within the program.

The majority of volunteers, 83 (68%), were able to regularly attend advisory meetings twice a month. Overall, these data indicate a high level of volunteer satisfaction with various aspects of the program, including training, support, and communication.