POSTER ABSTRACT

Community elderly care enhances quality of life for peers
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Introduction: 14% of Bosnia and Herzegovina BIH population is over 65 years old. Strategies and action plans that address the needs of the elderly population have not been adopted. Traditionally the family institute in caring for its aged is very strong, but has been diminishing rapidly due to economic issues and young people leaving the country. Since 2013 up-to-date; 150’000 people 5% have permanently left the country. Because of this many elderly people have been left without any type of care. Therefore, older people’s volunteering is a tool that fights social exclusion and promotes elderly inclusion and cohesion.

In 2013, the Swiss Red Cross SRC started a project with the aim to increase the health and wellbeing of vulnerable elderly and disabled people in Tuzla Canton, BiH. In the frame of this project, participation and integration of the elderly was strengthened by building 20 Initiative Groups IG of over 1000 elderly people in two cities where the Red Cross RC Home Based Care HBC centres were opened.

Description: The project actively involves local communities, health and social institutions and the RC in designing sustainable community care services. About 100 elderly volunteers in communities are dedicated to visiting the vulnerable and fragile who, due to limited opportunities and financial concerns, have certain restrictions in relation to assisted living. The reduced presence of traditional family care givers initiated a coordinated response that was organized by older people who are community and care orientated. The response includes activities on strengthening neighborhood elderly groups in providing visiting, psycho-social and administrative support. The RC has trained the elderly volunteers in accordance with the International Federation of RC minimum standards for HBC volunteers in order to provide better quality care for their peers. The designed community care social services are monitored by responsible RC HBC staff.

Impact: The RC has been providing HBC services for up to 426 clients. 34% of clients are visited by elderly volunteers. This makes 27% of the total RC HBC services, amounting to 10’000 voluntary service hours. Elderly volunteers in conjunction with the RC provided the needed impulse towards community officials and authorities to respond and start co-financing services.

Through this approach, the RC and elderly volunteers, enable the most vulnerable to maintain their physical capacities and receive an affordable service. Among others this approach
increases the integration of marginalized elderly people in community life by re-establishing social ties.

**Conclusion:** Social and health needs of the targeted population are satisfied. The joint efforts of neighborhood peer volunteers and the RC contributes to effective care and reducing care costs making services affordable to a larger group of elderly and increasing their quality of life. The costs of these services are 20% of the full service price provided by professionals as it includes only the costs of training and motivation for volunteers.

Apart from providing care services, the community volunteers have a role in demanding and lobbying for the sustainability of HBC services.

**Keywords:** older people; empowerment; volunteering; community; care; sustainability