# Community Service at Catholic University of Portugal:
# A personal, social and academic development program for Psychology Students

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## Conceptual Framework

The Community Service Program (CSP) has been developed since 2004 at the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FEP) at Porto, northern Portugal. In this program first cycle psychology students are challenged to get involved in volunteer work at community organizations, tutored by FEP team. The Program is based on the definition of volunteerism as a long-term, planned, pro-social behavior that takes place in an organizational context (Penner, 2002). Community service has been considered an integral component to universities' mission (Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). Through community service, students have the opportunity to prepare themselves to adulthood and citizenship (Shiarella, McCarthy, & Tucker, 2000), being attentive to community needs. Additionally, recent literature emphasizes the fact that volunteerism lead to the development of many skills (Bartel, Saavedra, & Van Dyne, 2001).

## Community Service Program

### PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
- ACTION
Volunteerism in an institution
- REFLECTION
Training, supervision, monitoring and evaluation
- SUPPORT
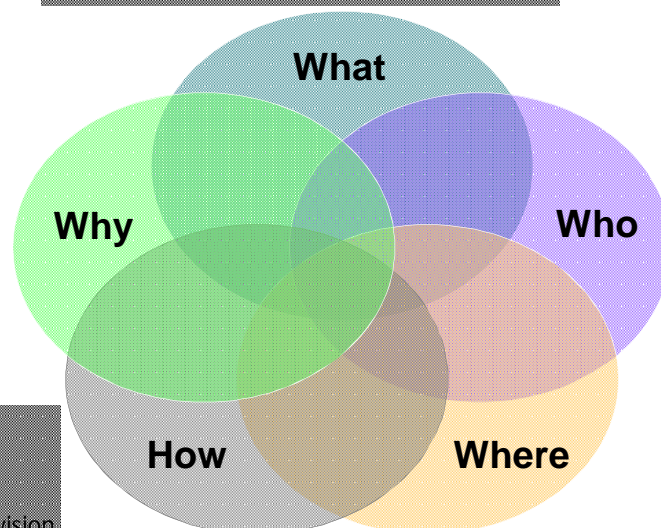Instrumental and emotional support

### PARTICIPANTS
- Psychology students (1st cycle) from the Catholic University of Portugal – Porto
- Community organizations

### Testimonials
"The volunteer donates his/her energy and creativity. But gets in return all the human bonding, the contact with different people, the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, the feeling of worthiness and usefulness..."

"With this volunteering opportunity I was able to develop my communication skills, knowledge on how to interact with children, and values like supportiveness to others, team work, humbleness, authenticity... These skills made me grow not only as a person, but also as a future psychologist."

"Volunteering facilitated for me enormous personal growth. It taught me that it's never about the desire to help the other one and wanting to change their world, but mostly about wanting to be part of that world."

### PROGRAM GOALS
- To promote student's personal and social development
- To strengthen values
- To allow a first contact of students with professional world
- To contribute to the satisfaction of needs of local institutions

What
Why
Who
How
Where

### ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS
- Foster care
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Elderly residential care
- Prisons
- Nurseries
- Special needs

### THE PROCESS
- Minimum required of 48h hours
- Weekly basis/intensive mode
- Monthly training and regular supervision
- Evaluation

**Program Dynamic**

Enrolment, recruitment interview, placement in a community context , ending, evaluation

Monthly group training
Regular individual supervision

Partner institutions needs assessment , regular contacts, final meeting with all institutions enrolled (evaluation)

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Results from systematic evaluation of the program show us that Community Service participants believe that they have improved significantly their personal and social competences and understanding about different and new realities. Some ingredients seem to be particularly important in designing community service programs: providing high quality experiences, where students can perform challenging and meaningful tasks, and the existence of moments of individual reflection and collective discussion, with the support of instructors and supervisors. It is important to provide opportunities for effective learning, combining service with reflection (Menezes, 2003; Harré, 2007). Our experience show us also a strong positive impact in participants' role as a student, as a person and as a future psychologist. Community Service program is constantly searching for the best adjustment between it's strategies and the changing needs and interests of students and partner institutions. In this sense the program is particularly interested in further developing it's impact on future psychologist's integral training, promotion of student centered learning, exploring the program's potential on teaching activity and it's impact on surrounding community.

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