



Photo author: Gustavo Fring

Why this brochure?

POSITIVE SOLUTIONS: GERONTO HOUSEWIVES

WHO COLLECTED THE STORIES?

When working with the elderly, geronto housewives face various challenges. Old people can be limited in mobility, sick, but they can also be distrustful, closed and depressed. Also, their children can, knowingly or due to their obligations, neglect them. All this can make it difficult to work with users and make the job less pleasant. Some of the experiences of colleagues, which are collected in this brochure, can help you to face some of the challenges.

How were the experiences gathered?

The stories were collected during 2021 and 2022 among elderly housewives who work at the Centers for Social Work in Užice, Plandište and Valjevo. On that occasion, the method of *Positive Deviation* used, which recognizes those practices that are successful in solving a problem that those who wanted to solve the problem they were facing came up with with their inventiveness. Others who are in a similar situation can learn from them and apply a solution to help themselves and others.

Serbia / 2022

The stories were collected by a team of researchers from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in cooperation with colleagues from the Centers for Social Work in Užice, Plandište and Valjevo, and colleagues Lars Thuesen and Mads Fly-Hansen from Denmark helped in the work.

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GERONTO HOUSEWIVES IN
SERBIA ARE
REAL CHAMPIONS

Lars Thuesen



Author of the photo: Cadeau Maestro

I always make a little birthday present for my users.

"Most often, grandparents have no one, they are alone and isolated. There is no one to congratulate them on their birthday. That's why every time it's their birthday, I buy them or I'll make something for them. So last time I took one of my flower pots, and I wrapped it in decorative paper. They'll be very happy when they get a little sign of attention and tell everyone about it."

Jelena - geronto housewife

Smile on your face

Old people can neglect themselves due to very infrequent contact with others. Simple things can bring back their smile and zest for life – like putting on clothes they haven't worn in years or getting a little attention for their birthday.

I convinced her to wear a dress she hadn't worn in years and complimented her.

"I got to work with a grandmother. At the beginning of working with her, every time I came, I noticed that the grandmother was always in one and the same dress. She never changed it and I didn't know how to persuade her to change her clothes. One the day I came, grandma was in a different dress. I immediately complimented her on how nice her dress was and asked her to show me other beautiful dresses she had. She showed me other dresses in her closet and told her that she had so many beautiful ones dress and that she could wear a different one every day. Every time I came, grandma was in a different dress, and I would praise her and give her a compliment every time. So grandma started changing her clothes more often."

Milena - geronto housewife

Positive examples

Trust

Trust between the user and the geronto housewives is often necessary for the work to be done properly to mutual satisfaction. Old people can be distrustful as they have the feeling that a stranger is entering their house. In order to establish trust, it is sometimes necessary to have a very transparent relationship.

Let's do a trial

"I have an example of a grandmother who was very shy, she was skeptical and distrustful of everyone. She refused help. To get her to agree, I just told her to try working together for a month, and if she doesn't like it, we'll end the cooperation. Of course, my grandmother liked it and I come to her regularly."

Dragica - geronto housewife

Clean account, long love and excellent cooperation

"I have been working as a geronto housewife for 15 years and during all that time I have gained some experience and how to make some tasks easier for myself. For example, I carry the user's money, receipts, receipts and documents in a separate wallet with a lot of compartments, so that each user has his own compartment and thus I make it easier for myself not to mix up their money and documents, and they are familiar with it and are safe. In that I will do what needed to be done for them. Likewise, I reduce the time I need for administrative tasks in specific ways. For example, I pay bills in certain places where it knows me so that it is not crowded and in a certain part of the day when I know that it is not crowded. When there are pensions, all pensioners pay their bills then - I wait until it passes a little and only then do I pay, or at a certain time of the day around noon. Also at the health center, in order to avoid waiting in lines, I establish contact with the nurses, who lead me through the line to the doctor or they complete the instructions for me so that I don't even have to go to the doctor..."

Svetlana - geronto housewife

Positive examples

Network support is key

The elderly may have more or less support from the neighborhood. In any case, it is good if they socialize and help each other. Geronto housewives can use these networks, they can strengthen them or even help to create them. In this way, they can make their work and the users' lives easier.

A good support network around the users makes my work easier and makes the users satisfied

"For years I have been active in organizations that help people, so this is just a continuation of many years of activities. My experience tells me that helping the vulnerable requires good organization and the involvement of several people. That's why I always try to establish good communication with elderly neighbors who are entrusted to me. In two households, I have good cooperation with women who bring bread and even cooked meals to their neighbors every day. In the third household, it is a relative who lives nearby, and in the fourth, it is a neighbor who visits a grandmother with difficulty walking every day. We talk on the phone, they let me know if I need to buy something, so I don't waste time going to the store when I come to the customer. Make sure to stop by when I come, so we can talk about what has been going on in the meantime and what should be done. They often bring wood or make small repairs around the house as a neighbor. In a way, we make a division of labor. That way I have more time for the hygiene of the users and the household, because they are all people with difficulty moving, and it is planned that I will spend only one hour with them."

Nevena - geronto housewife

I manage to connect well with the neighborhood

"This job is very specific, because I work with people who often don't have anyone of their own, they don't have children, relatives... the only people they have are neighbors, with whom I manage in most cases to somehow connect and get closer to these people. When I start working with a new user, I slowly get to know the neighborhood. First I just call, and then when I have a chance I talk to the neighbors. If they don't hang out, I try to connect them a little. If necessary, I also do some small favors for my neighbors, for example, when I go to the bank, I also pay their bill. Then I can invite them to check my users and be sure. a. In a way, I also facilitate a situation for myself when the users need their neighbors to be there for them at all times, to be able to call them if they need something, a doctor or something... to bring them bread, or food that they need is required. In return, I do something for them, say I pay their bills when I'm already going to pay the bills for the users as well."

Ana - geronto housewife

Positive examples

It is important that children get involved to a greater extent

If children neglect their parents, they sometimes do it without realizing how their parents feel it. If they find out about it, they can get involved to a greater extent, but it is usually necessary that someone in whom they have trusted for many years informs them.

When children are not interested, it is good that someone close to them (relatives or neighborhood)

"I have been a geronto housewife for more than 10 years. The hardest thing for me in this job is when I see how old people are left to their own devices. It is the family that leaves them. They have their own responsibilities, so the old ones are kind of neglected. Of my users, maybe 50% are neglected that way. Old people mostly justify them, they don't see it as a problem. Maybe at some point they want to confess, but mostly they justify them. I try to explain to them that it's not right, that it shouldn't be like that. I tell them that they should turn to their children or close relatives for help whenever they need something, to ask them to come. I rarely address the children directly, because then a problem arises. Then they ask to change the geronto housewife. It sometimes happens that someone from the neighborhood gets involved, to talk to both of them. Children react differently when someone they have known for a long time draws their attention to their behavior, and when it is someone from the side they find themselves quite offended."

Marija - geronto housewife



"Many of them feel lonely, children they live in Belgrade, Novi Sad or abroad, they work a lot and don't have time to come. They have no one to talk to, and they don't know how to use new technologies. I just had the case of a grandmother, whose children were abroad, she rarely heard from them, and since the corona started, they couldn't come. I felt sorry, so every time I came over via Viber call, I called her children, then they would apologize. It became a practice for us, and it meant a lot to my grandmother because she was able to see her children."

Milana - geronto housewife

Help with new technologies

One of the ways in which it is possible to help the elderly to maintain contact with their children and at the same time interest their descendants in becoming more measures include, if possible, helping the elderly with new technologies.

I help them with Viber, send a picture or call so they can see each other.

"I have been working as a gerontologist in Užice for several years. The work I do involves daily communication with service users (they are usually women). Often with their housemates, relatives and neighbors. In some cases, elderly people have family members who do not live in Užice. The only way to see them more often is through digital devices. Unfortunately, elderly people are often unable to use computers, tablets or smartphones independently. In such situations, my help is necessary for their mutual communication. I believe that more frequent communication between the user and her family members contributes to a better psychophysical condition. The conversations they conduct in this way also make my work easier because the users of the services are happier and more satisfied."

Dragana - geronto housewife

Positive examples

Boundaries



Boundaries with users imply both directions of cooperation. Users can sometimes behave inappropriately and offensively. Setting clear boundaries is a feature of professional work and when you notice that they have been violated, it is perfectly fine to re-establish the boundaries in a clear and direct way. This then makes the work easier and makes the relationship predictable.

Photo credit: cottonbro

"With some, it is necessary to set clear boundaries

"At a regular joint meeting, in I got a blanket because no one could deal with him. He is known to everyone from before, many elderly housewives have changed, but he did not accept or let any of them into the house. The specific thing was that the blanket was always in the lower During my first few visits, I found him in his underwear every time and tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to change clothes. they learn. One day I decided to turn the page because of his behavior. I told him that he has to get dressed from now on, and that every time I come, I will first ring the doorbell, wait a while until he gets dressed, and only then will I enter, if he is dressed. The next time I arrived, I did the same, I rang the bell, waited a few minutes and entered, and the blanket was on."

Milana - geronto housewife

Positive examples

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