

# Volunteering

## Of the happiness of selflessness



Live To Love in action:  
Warm clothes, drinks and food  
are distributed to homeless  
people in Hamburg.

Commitment to the well-being of people, animals and the environment, investing time and energy without expecting anything: The "Live To Love - Germany Foundation" is a positive example of voluntary work. Live to love - the name is motivation, is the root of action and a spiritual path across all religions.

In the Himalayas, the symptoms of climate change became clear at an early stage. In 2007 the rapid increase in glacial meltdown with its dramatic consequences in the region, prompted the Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the Buddhist Drukpa lineage, to launch the international movement *Live To Love*. "Live To Love" - acting out of compassion and love for people, animals and the environment - started on an international level with extensive tree plantings in the Indian mountain region as a contribution to climate protection. Nearly 10.000 people took part in the process and within a very short time they put nearly 100.000 trees into the ground. Every single one experienced the joy to be able to collectively do a great deal and to make a lasting contribution to the future and life of future generations.

The Gyalwang Drukpa invited his students worldwide to implement more and more actions in the sense of "Live To Love". This was the birth of the secular international humanitarian network.



Planting trees for climate protection:  
The Gyalwang Drukpa at a tree planting in  
2018 at the Osterbek in Hamburg-Steilshoop.



Gianna Wabner (left) heads the Hamburg Drukpa Center and is the president of the "Live To Love Germany" foundation. Agnes Forsthuber (right) coordinates the teams and projects.



### Working together as a team

Gianna Wabner, head of the Drukpa Center in Hamburg, also began in 2007, together with Agnes Forsthuber and team, to initiate the first actions under the umbrella of *Live To Love*. First, the team visited homeless people on the streets of Hamburg to bring sleeping bags, clothing, blankets, toiletries and food. This well-established annual visit was immediately put under the umbrella of *Live To Love*. As a natural health professional, healer, consultant, executive coach and teacher in holistic medicine, Gianna Wabner has trained people for decades. The grown connection with many students became the bridge for their individual motivation to volunteer for grassroots activities. "Right from the beginning, there was a lot of interest of some students in attending and transferring the knowledge they had already gained." Through their long relationship with each other a lot of trust had already developed, which was the perfect basis for building a *Live To Love* volunteer team. "This initiative cannot be realized without a team," says Ms. Wabner. "Without the energy and creative power of Agnes Forsthuber, who leads the design and coordination, and without the individual capacities of the individual team leaders, our common success so far could not have come about!"

Agnes Forsthuber also works as a natural health professional and is an art photographer ([agnes-forsthuber-fotografie.de](http://agnes-forsthuber-fotografie.de)). She donates one third of the proceeds to *Live To Love* projects.

In preparation for the establishment of the "Live To Love - Germany Foundation" in 2014, a professional team structure was needed. Taking individual abilities, talents and living conditions into account, tasks have been assigned in the areas of coordination and organization of projects and fundraisers, as well as for office, finance, logistics, media, catering, design, translations and much more.

From the very beginning, Gianna Wabner was aware to not let the team get too big to build up a stable base in order to ensure continuity in the development of the respective project leaders and the individual activities and to also promote cooperation. She was very aware of this special context. "Volunteers may tend to say, 'I give so much already now and I also have to work full-time.' These are constants that have to be respected, but they can also be big obstacles which can block the process," says the president of the foundation. To motivate the individual team members requires a lot of patience and tact again and again - an attitude which in this context and also for other foundations very likely is a fundamental topic.

## Compassion and meaningfulness

How are homeless people on the streets in winter at temperatures of minus 15 degrees? What do they need? In connection with the fate of those in need, the impulse to act arises and creative ideas develop. Some in the team knit scarves and gloves for the homeless, others bake cakes, prepare sandwiches or organize donations in kind. Compassion becomes the root of action, the motivation for a selfless commitment.

Your own problems can definitely take a back seat or dissolve if you refer to larger topics. This can be deeply healing and also liberating. "This form of motivation is like a light that has dawned in oneself, that enlivens you, that convinces you of meaningfulness and makes you happy," says Gianna Wabner.

"Passers-by are regularly inspired by the role model of the respective actions. There are people who will see what is being done, and watch the joy with which we all are at work. The loving gestures - just the sandwiches that are packed so nicely, or the self-knitted garments. In every gift there is so much attention and love already within the preparation. In this way, very nice connections have already been made," says Ms. Wabner.

This is also something that the participants of the actions always become aware of. She tells the story of little Piet, who joined with his mother on the street in winter: "Piet was very animated the evening after our last homeless action and said: "Mom, you can really give away happiness..."

## Fulfillment in selflessness

But he who is determined by the expectation to get something back, can become tired in the long run. Acting on motives, such as recognition and confirmation in voluntary work, can lead to dissatisfaction and out of excessive demands to a misinterpreted self-sacrifice that weakens body and mind.

"At first, we all want to be selfless, but we usually do not know how to do it, and self-centered parts are always weaving in," says Ms. Wabner. Selflessness is the ability to engage with people, a group of people, animals, the environment, a club, a movement or any other important purpose without expecting any reward.

"Self-sacrifice corresponds to the increasing maturity of a person to do something good and meaningful and no longer just to circle around oneself. In reality this shows our true nature.



Joyfully busy: Plastic waste is collected at the Elbe. The "Mutiny on the Elbe" action involves many families with children.

## LIVE TO LOVE

Our humanity fulfills itself in selflessness, fulfills itself in the ability to perceive this indescribably beautiful planet, the lovable people, all the animals and the biodiversity with gratitude and to ensure that all this is preserved and treated with respect - that is the expression of our inherent spiritual nature," sums up Gianna Wabner.

A poem by Rilke puts it in a nutshell: "Always give away your beauty without reckoning, without talking" - *this is voluntary work* - "You are silent" - *that is selflessness* - "she says for you: I am! And in a thousand fold sense, finally comes over everyone." - *That's spiritual*.

### Self-responsibility and self-care

Gianna Wabner describes the importance of self-responsibility for every single member of the volunteer team. In order to stay active, breaks as well as healthy food and exercise are vitally important. If you want to row in the front of the boat, you need a strong initiative. Those who cannot muster this by their constitution, get tasks in the team, which do not require so much energy.

"The core team, for example, meanwhile has given up on having regular free weekends, because on many weekends there is the time for text work, team meetings, the preparation of letters and correspondence - in addition to the after work hours, where each of us sacrifices a piece of his or her freedom," she says with a smile on her face.

### To broaden one's horizon

A study by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth shows that the greatest motivation of volunteers is to enjoy giving others time and broaden their horizons. The latter is another point that promotes one's own motivation and at the same time is a factor in the success of the projects. Gianna Wabner emphasizes: "The educational factor in *Live To Love* results quite naturally in the doing." What does this mean? In the preparation for the actions, coherences and interdependencies are studied. An example is the tree planting project *Elms for Hamburg*, which was launched in 2017.



Six elms for the Sven-Simon-Park in Hamburg-Blankenese. Little Mika joins almost all treeplantings with his parents.

"If you capture the signature of a tree alone, you can see that the crown looks like a lung, and the leaves resemble the lung's alveoli, which convert carbon dioxide into vital oxygen, and this alone creates a personal relationship with the trees," explains Gianna Wabner.

The other interdependencies are explored as well: "The roots of the trees give the earth stability and shape. If too many trees are felled, landslides are the result in heavy rain. Trees thus fulfill a vital function in the overall cycle of the earth as well as for us humans and animals. Trees store water and release it into the evaporative cycle; the elements of water, fire, wood and wind condition and regulate each other, and step by step, an increasing and very valuable general knowledge develops during our actions."

In addition, the team members also learn a lot of practical knowledge on the required logistics, which lead to the success of each project. Just to plant a tree requires many steps. Starting with the right planting time and knowing how deep a hole actually needs to be dug out for a tree to thrive, and much more. As part of the project *Elms for Hamburg*, the team learned, for example, that planting trees with root balls makes much more sense than planting very young trees, just alone for economic reasons. The latter have far more challenges to survive than bigger trees, because in our culture hare and deer eat the bark of the young trees, especially in wintertime.

### Strong experience for children

The actions are a regular highlight for everyone. "Our actions lead us again and again into the satisfying experience of being able to move and shape things together," says Gianna Wabner. The voluntary work of the adults is also a strong and nurturing experience for the children. Facing the problems of our time, they are developing many insights and skills to make a difference. How deeply children already perceive the environmental problems, is shown by the example of little Mika, who asked his mother after the drought last summer to also include the request for rain for the trees in their bedtime prayer, so they would have enough to drink.



In Wandsbek as in Hamburg's Schanzepark: "For many volunteers, joy is an inexhaustible source of strength".

"Above all, the voluntary commitment in making people happy, making people successful, not only for this generation, but also for future generations, is a great investment," the Gyalwang Drukpa said in 2014 in his talk "The Gross National Happiness". And further: "It is a great source of joy for yourself; and this is not only the joy of this life and of the temporary. It also costs a lot of effort, which can result in effortlessness. In a sense, one will be greedy, to get more of that joy. "

The joy, the happiness of the success of the actions, for many volunteers is an inexhaustible source of strength which flows into all projects, such as plastic garbage clean-ups on the Elbe, the support of animal sanctuaries in Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia or the creation of butterfly flower meadows. For Gianna Wabner, who herself often works around the clock, volunteering means: "Fulfillment! The result of this meaningful life is a profound gratitude for life in general."