



Annual Report 2020



Serve the City ASBL

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Foreword

Kindness cannot be cancelled!

2020 was a fulfilling yet extremely challenging year for Serve the City Brussels.

We began the year looking forward with excitement and renewed ambition to mobilise volunteers and be agents of transformation in our neighbourhoods through simple acts of kindness.

I was fortunate to be named Executive Director of our organisation, with some big shoes to fill as Carlton Deal, our Founder and Executive Director for the last 15 years, moved up to become our Board Chair.

But in March 2020, the world as we knew it was put on hold as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of strict lockdown measures forced us to put most of our volunteering projects on hold and our funding model collapsed, given our

dependence on corporate volunteering activities, international volunteering programmes and fundraising events. At the same time, we were faced with a growing and urgent demand for humanitarian aid in the city of Brussels and beyond. In fact, 80% of Belgian organisations fighting poverty saw their target audience increase as a result of the pandemic, according to a survey by the King Baudouin Foundation¹.

We wanted to respond to these demands and to do so we had to quickly adapt to the new normal. Our team leaders and volunteers found new ways to bring their projects forward while continuing to provide much-needed support to people in need. And thanks to many of our donors, who exhibited a heart-warming and unprecedented level of engagement with us, we were able to create a solid financial base for continuing our work.

From this extraordinary engagement, many new projects and activities emerged, including meal preparation and distribution, online meet and greets, correspondence via postcards, activities with children, and many others. We also launched our ServeNow app, taking advantage of digital opportunities to connect volunteers. We multiplied the possibilities to continue spreading kindness and love to underprivileged people living precarious lives in our community.

So despite its challenges, 2020 was also a year full of new opportunities. We were able to further increase our reach and community engagement, professionalise our actions, and deliver on our values of humility, compassion, respect, love, courage and hope.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank our volunteers and team leaders for

¹ Septembre 2020: <https://www.kbs-frb.be/fr/Newsroom/Press-releases/2020/20201016NDPovertyDay>

their relentless support and daily investment; and thank our donors, who gave us the possibility to continue to expand our actions.

As I look forward to 2021 and beyond, I can only hope that we will continue to show the same resilience, drive and commitment as we have in these past 12 months. This past year has clearly reminded us that simple acts of kindness can make a big difference, so I can only encourage everyone not to be afraid to make a start, no matter how small your action!



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Torrini'.

Nathan Torrini
Executive Director



2020 highlights

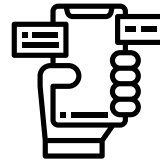
We served



60 000

people in need

We launched



ServeNow

our mobile app

We mobilised in average



100

volunteers per week

We dedicated



9 207

hours to our projects

We distributed



12 600

Warm meals

Served at our project Le Phare



4 350

Lunch bags

Prepared by our volunteers at home



52 095

Hot drinks

Served at our project Lunch 4 Refugees



45 075

Desserts

Served at our project Lunch 4 Refugees



Essential

Products

*COVID-19 Kits, blankets, warm clothes,
shoes, sleeping bags*



Other

Goods

Board games, toys, books and computers

”

From the very start of our project, Serve the City Brussels has worked alongside our team to enable our vision to serve our neighbours in Brussels. They have become our valued partner in countless areas. From helping secure disposable cutlery and ensuring our meals are delivered to connecting us with families in need, STC has empowered our work across the board! Most recently, they have helped set our project up on the new app, which has made volunteer management a dream. Beyond our partnership, we've built friendships through our work together.

Haven Hightower, Community Kitchen ASBL



Who we are

Serve the City (STC) is a global movement of volunteers. We connect those who want to serve with meaningful opportunities to support people in need. Our movement was born in Brussels in 2005, and has now expanded to over 45 countries and 65 cities around the world, from Ireland to Australia.

At Serve the City Brussels, we recruit, welcome, and connect volunteers with volunteering projects around the city. We offer our help and support to anyone in need, including homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees, the elderly, disabled people, victims of abuse and many others.

We work with local and international partner organisations such as Red Cross Belgium, the Salvation Army, the Plateforme Citoyenne's Porte d'Ulysse and Sister's House, G4S Care, Petites Soeurs des Pauvres, Oasis, Community Kitchen and Hama 4. We also organise training and awareness events, fund-raising and corporate team building activities, among others.

"Kindness Starts With Me!"

Serve the City Brussels' 2020 motto

Photo by Marie Laure Sorbac



Our mission, values and vision

Our **mission** is to mobilise volunteers and be agents of transformation in our neighbourhoods through simple acts of kindness. Many people doing small things can make a big difference.

Our **values** guide us in this endeavour:



Humility



Compassion



Respect



Courage



Love



Hope

Our **vision** is everyone serving. We strive for a society that recognises the societal value of volunteering, committed to supporting anyone in need.

2020 in detail

The impact of COVID-19

Through 2020, Serve the City Brussels - like many other organisations - was confronted with unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic had a catastrophic impact on vulnerable people, leading to a growing demand for humanitarian assistance. The numbers speak for themselves: in Brussels, homelessness increased by 29%, while lack of access to food and basic hygiene needs increased by 73%². Increased loneliness (+76%), extreme social isolation (+32%) and mental health issues (+44%) were also direct consequences of this pandemic. It became clear that the support efforts of organisations like ours would be more crucial than ever.

From the beginning of the pandemic, we strived to continue providing support to the vulnerable, despite being faced with

challenges as a result of the lockdown and restrictions on physical contact.

From one day to the next, and due to the strict lockdown put in place in March, we lost a lot of the social contact that is so integral to volunteering work. Social interaction is crucial to the experience of both volunteers and those we serve - and this posed a real challenge that forced us to rethink our model and be creative and flexible in our actions.

Thanks to the commitment and drive of our network of volunteers and partners, we found new ways of supporting people in need by launching "volunteer from home" projects. These projects included collecting and delivering lunch bags and COVID-19 sanitary kits, initiating postcard exchanges, and delivering flowers. We also moved all our interactions with volunteers online, including training and

information sessions. Thanks to the relentless support of our volunteers, we were able to continue serving vulnerable people and positively impact their lives.

As COVID-19 lockdown measures were gradually relaxed, we were able to resume some of our face-to-face activities through small-scale initiatives such as making and distributing sandwiches on the streets, relaunching our Big Volunteer Days and resuming some of our partnerships and volunteering activities. We also helped the Plateforme Citoyenne with the move of two of their shelters for migrants and asylum seekers (Porte d'Ulysse and Sisters House), built new partnerships, and we also launched new projects, including homework classes and activities for children at the Parc Léopold Centre for Asylum Seekers alongside G4S Care, and support for the Red Cross 'PSA' food

2 Source: King Baudouin Foundation, October 2020: "Poverty during the COVID-19 crisis".

distribution and day centre. We also proudly launched our “ServeNow” app, providing us

with new channels to connect our volunteers with projects.

2020 Activities for the People we Serve

While our total number of volunteering activities was greatly reduced in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Serve the City Brussels managed to maintain and develop crucial projects throughout the year. Here is a glimpse of our projects in 2020.

Lunch 4 Refugees

We bring a moment of warmth and community to those most in need by serving 900 warm meals a week to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Initially called ‘Breakfast 4 Refugees’, this Serve the City initiative started out as a breakfast distribution project at the Parc Maximilien in central Brussels, where thousands fleeing war had sought shelter back in 2015. In March 2020, our distribution work was relocated by the city of Brussels to the Quai des Péniches, under the supervision of the Red Cross. This

was a temporary solution before Serve the City could find suitable infrastructure of our own. In October 2020, our distribution project was officially relocated to a new PSA centre (‘Personnes Sans Abris’, meaning centre for homelessness) located at Avenue du Port, and managed by the Red Cross. Serve the City, alongside several other non-profit organizations, distributed lunch and dinner packages to 900 migrants, refugees, and homeless persons every day of the week.

Throughout the year, ‘Lunch 4 Refugees’ took place three times a week: every Monday, Tuesday and Saturday. Our volunteers distributed hot drinks (coffee and tea) and desserts (including waffles or muffins) as a complement to the meals distributed by the other associations. We also distributed COVID-19 kits including face masks and hand gels during the first wave of the pandemic. Our lunch service has helped bring the people we serve closer to one another, creating a sense of community.

”

I come every week to the homework classes and the activities. I love coming here because it is very fun and I love playing with the volunteers. My favourite subject is math, but also love dancing. Especially Tik Tok Dances!

When I grow up, I want to be a singer, or a doctor!

Soha - Resident of the G4S Care centre

Logistics at Red Cross

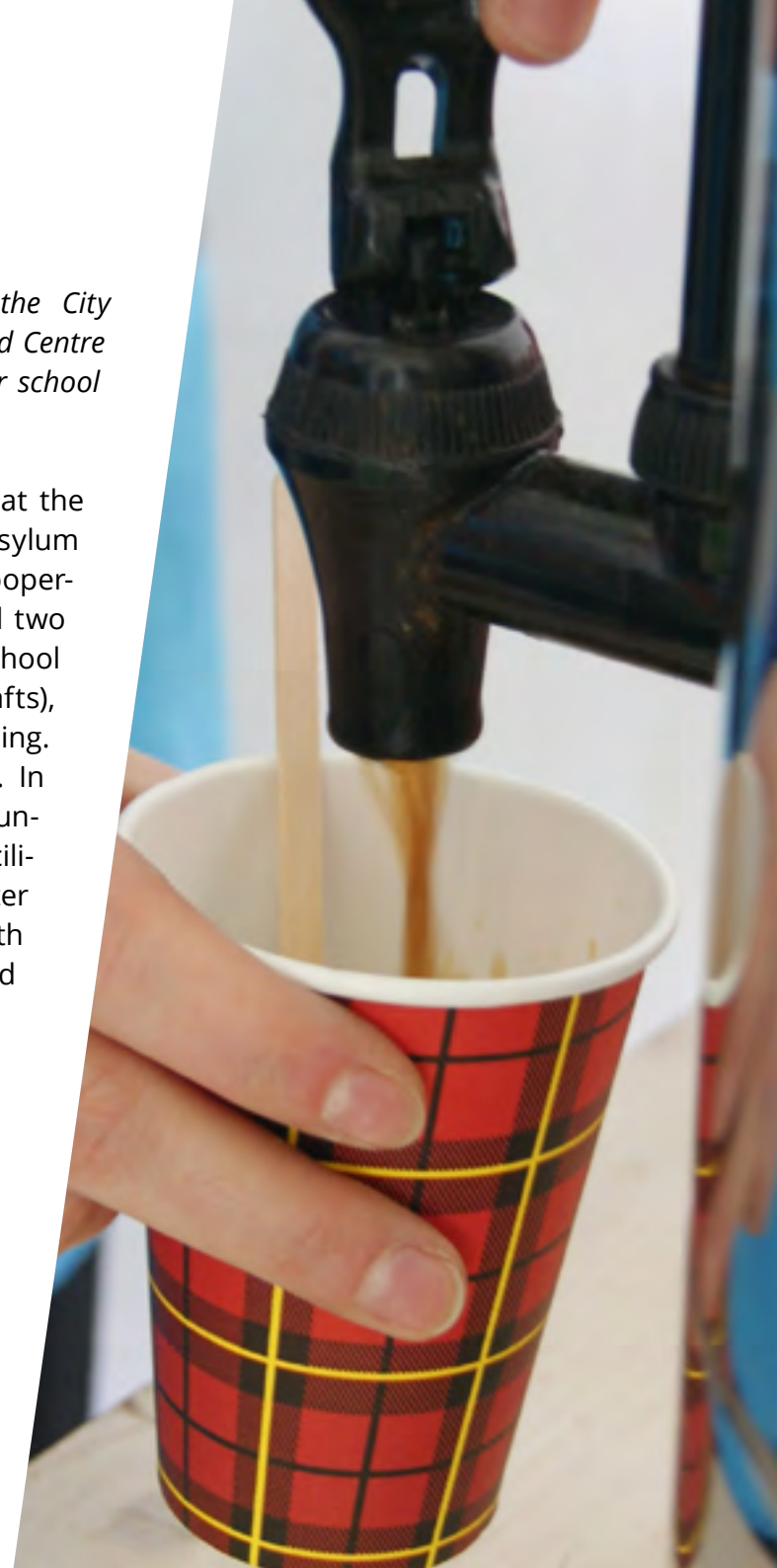
In what was such a difficult year for migrants, refugees and homeless people, Serve the City Brussels' volunteers acted as force multipliers by helping the Red Cross manage their added workload and supporting them with food distribution and supervision.

Following the start of our partnership with the Red Cross during the summer, Serve the City launched a logistical support project to help Red Cross staff perform their supervising duties at the Quai des Péniches and later at the PSA centre. The project welcomed Serve the City volunteers every day of the week to help Red Cross staff manage food distribution and canteen supervision.

G4S Care

Thanks to the dedication shown by Serve the City Brussels' volunteers, children at the Parc Léopold Centre for Asylum Seekers can participate in fun after school activities and receive educational support.

This partnership started in November 2020 at the newly opened Parc Léopold Centre for Asylum Seekers run by the G4S Care company. In cooperation with G4S Care, Serve the City launched two weekly activities every Wednesday: after-school activities for children (sports, dance, arts & crafts), and a homework support class in the evening. Around 30 children participated each week. In addition to the two weekly activities, our volunteers also helped to improve the centre's facilities by creating a library, setting up a computer space, decorating common spaces with paintings and stickers, and donating toys and games to the children of the centre.





For us at the Red Cross Belgium, our partnership with Serve the City Brussels at the Centre for Homelessness (PSA Centre) is both essential and natural. Essential because it is thanks to Serve the City that we can manage to serve hundreds of people in need every day, with humanity and kindness. STC is a crucial partner. Nothing would be possible without their volunteers, their energy and their 'Can Do' attitude, always looking for solutions. STC is a fundamental strength of the PSA Centre. Fighting against misery and poverty is often frustrating, as we cannot always have all the answers. We sometimes stand powerless and witness dramatic situations where people fall further and further into misery. It is the energy from the volunteers - from STC and others - and the strength of their motivation that helps us find back the power to continue our fight against poverty and misery.

This is where the natural dimension of our partnership with STC finds its meaning. Naturally, often without talking, STC and the Red Cross find themselves on the same page. We have the same reflexes, always in favour of the most precarious. Always.

On a day-to-day basis, volunteers from STC are now an integral part of our team. This happened naturally, without any effort. Sometimes, volunteers at the centre do not even know if they are with STC or with the Red Cross. Other volunteers come one day with us and the other with STC; and it makes no difference, neither for them nor for us. Thank you, Serve the City, for this partnership that grows stronger every day, and for being by our side, no matter what the day brings.

Robert Ghosn, Red Cross Belgium

Mobile Library

Our book distribution network brings resources to those in need, helping them to better integrate into society and improve their language skills.

The Mobile Library project has been running for five years. Serve the City volunteers distribute books to the homeless in different shelters across the city. The books distributed are usually received through donations. They vary in language (French, English, Arabic, German, Dutch, etc.) and in style (dictionaries, fiction, language books, novels, essays, etc.).

In 2020, our weekly Mobile Library project ran every Thursday evening. In October, our volunteers also set up a library at the Parc Léopold Centre for Asylum Seekers to provide books to the 400 residents of the centre, including many children. This project has been helping us make a difference for people to better integrate into society, with language skills that can help find new friends or interact with public authorities, for example.

Le Phare

Since 2012, Serve the City Brussels has been partnering with non-profit organisations to provide crucial support in the distribution of food and basic supplies, always adapting to society's evolving needs.

Le Phare is a landmark project at Serve the City. Relaunched in 2012 in collaboration with the Salvation Army and Community Kitchen, volunteers distribute home-cooked healthy meals to homeless people every Tuesday morning in the Sainte-Catherine area. Due to the growing number of people in need of food during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, our volunteers decided to double their efforts and launched a second round of distribution taking place every Friday. In addition, volunteers also started to hand out clothes, blankets, shoes and sleeping bags when the temperatures dropped in October-November 2020.

This project showcases how Serve the City has effectively collaborated with partner non-profits and dynamically adjusted to offer emergency support to those in need during the most difficult periods, exacerbated by the pandemic this year.



2020 Activities for our Volunteers

Information sessions

Throughout the year, Serve the City Brussels organises information sessions for prospective volunteers. The aim of these sessions is to inform our new volunteers about our mission, values, and volunteering opportunities. These sessions are based on exchange and conversations, to get to know our volunteers, their skills and ideas, to help us create a true volunteering community. In 2020, our weekly information sessions were held online every Tuesday evening and Thursday at noon.

Big Volunteer Days

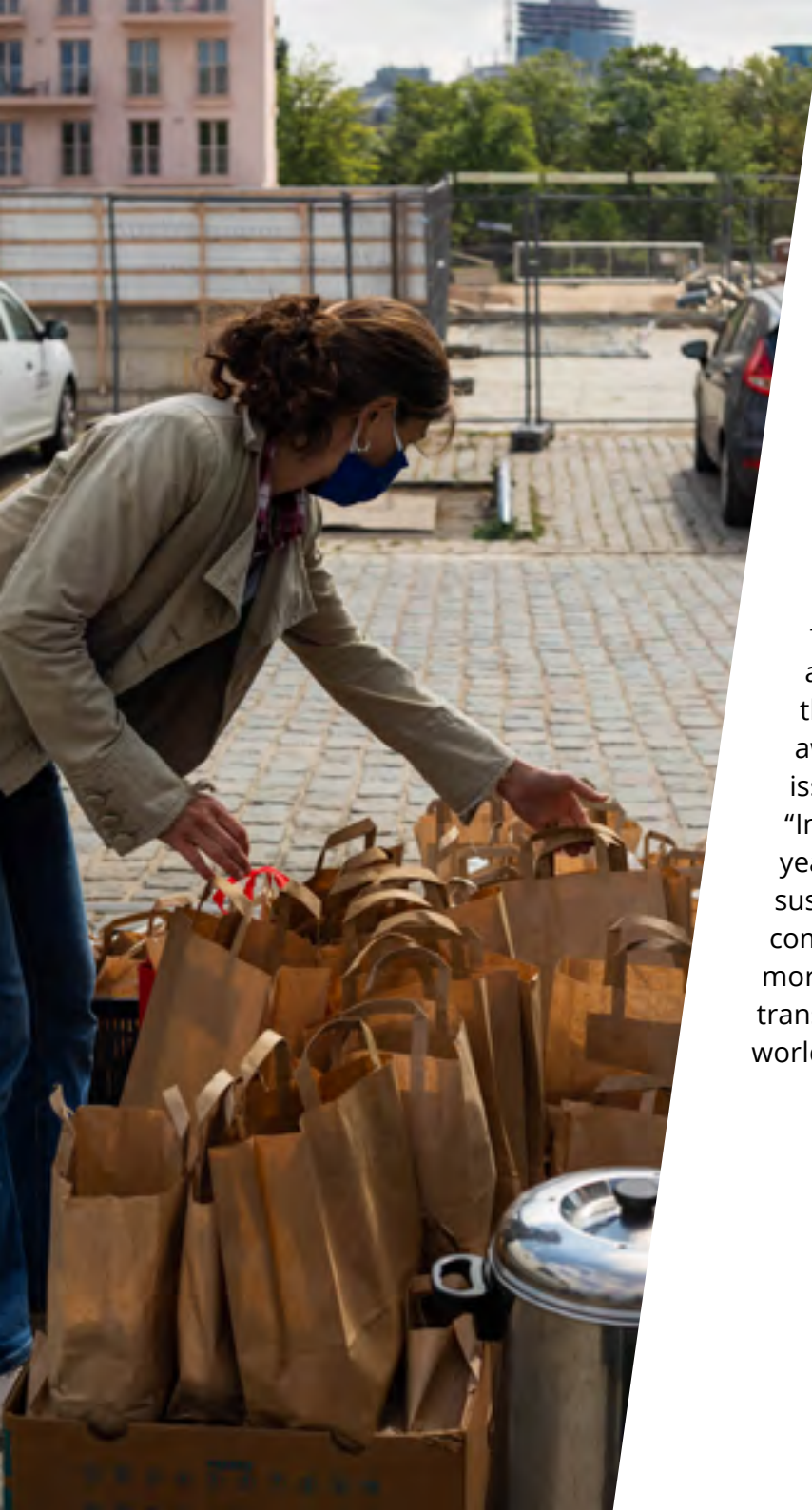
Every first Saturday of the month, Serve the City organises a Big Volunteer Day. These events are an opportunity for many to try out volunteering for the first time, to highlight the benefits of volunteering, and to foster our ties with our volunteering community. Many different volunteering opportunities are on offer for volunteers to serve the homeless, refugees, migrants, children in need and the elderly.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, we organised 7 Big Volunteer Days, and two Big Volunteer Week-ends. Since the start of lockdown in March, our events focused on 'at-home volunteering', the collection of lunch bags (around 500 lunch bags per event), the distribution of COVID-19 Kits and writing postcards for the residents of the HAMA4 centre, which is a centre for elderly people with intellectual disabilities. As lockdown measures were relaxed, we relaunched our volunteering activities with our partners, who were often lacking in support and in urgent need of help due to the pandemic. On average, we had over 50 participants for each Big Volunteer Day, spread across different projects, both at home and in the city.

7
big volunteer days

2
big volunteer week-ends

55
volunteers on average



International Forum

Our yearly International Forum brings together volunteers and staff from Serve the City International and from local Serve the City branches. The 2020 edition was held online on the 23rd and 24th October. The forum aims to connect different STC organisations, to enhance exchange, unity and coherence. This year, the forum consisted of online workshops and training, aimed at improving Serve the City's management and increasing awareness on global and contemporary issues. STC International also presented "Imagine 2025", our vision for the next 5 years. This includes developing thriving, sustainable and self-replicating volunteer communities in 1,000 cities by 2025, serving more people and neighbourhoods in need, transforming lives and cities around the world.

Zoom-In

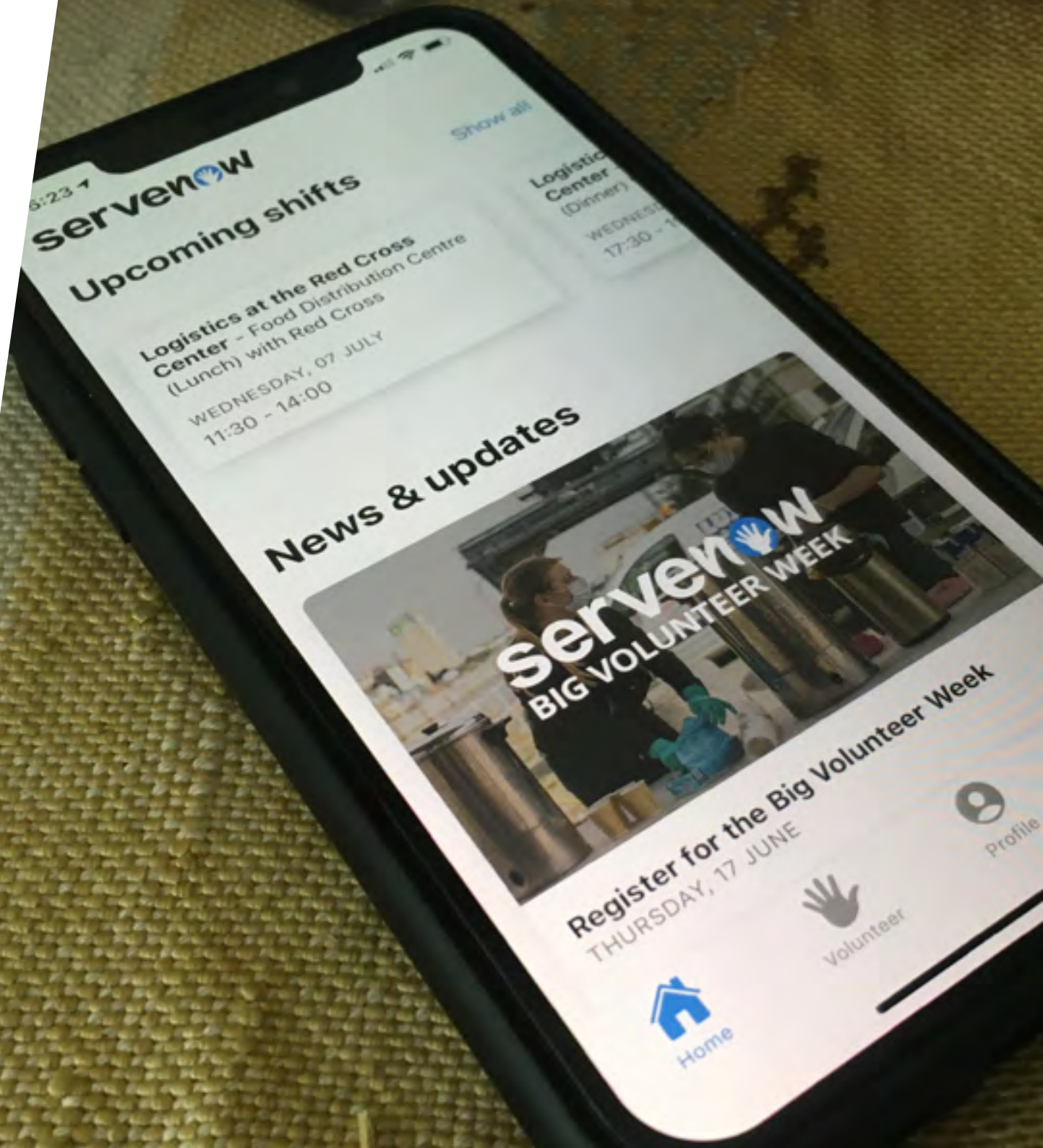
Zoom-In is a virtual training experience that we offer to our volunteering community to increase their knowledge of specific topics related to our fields of serving (i.e. homelessness, migration, social inclusion, etc.). These sessions are great opportunities to share experiences, and equip volunteers with knowledge, helping to build awareness on the various issues faced by our volunteering community. Through panel discussions, experts and individuals affected by a specific issue are invited to talk and interact with volunteers. This year, our Zoom-In event focused on the personal story of our Volunteering Coordinator, Mahmoud Qeshreh, who shared his journey as a refugee from Syria. 81 volunteers attended the virtual event which was entitled, "Being a refugee is not a choice".

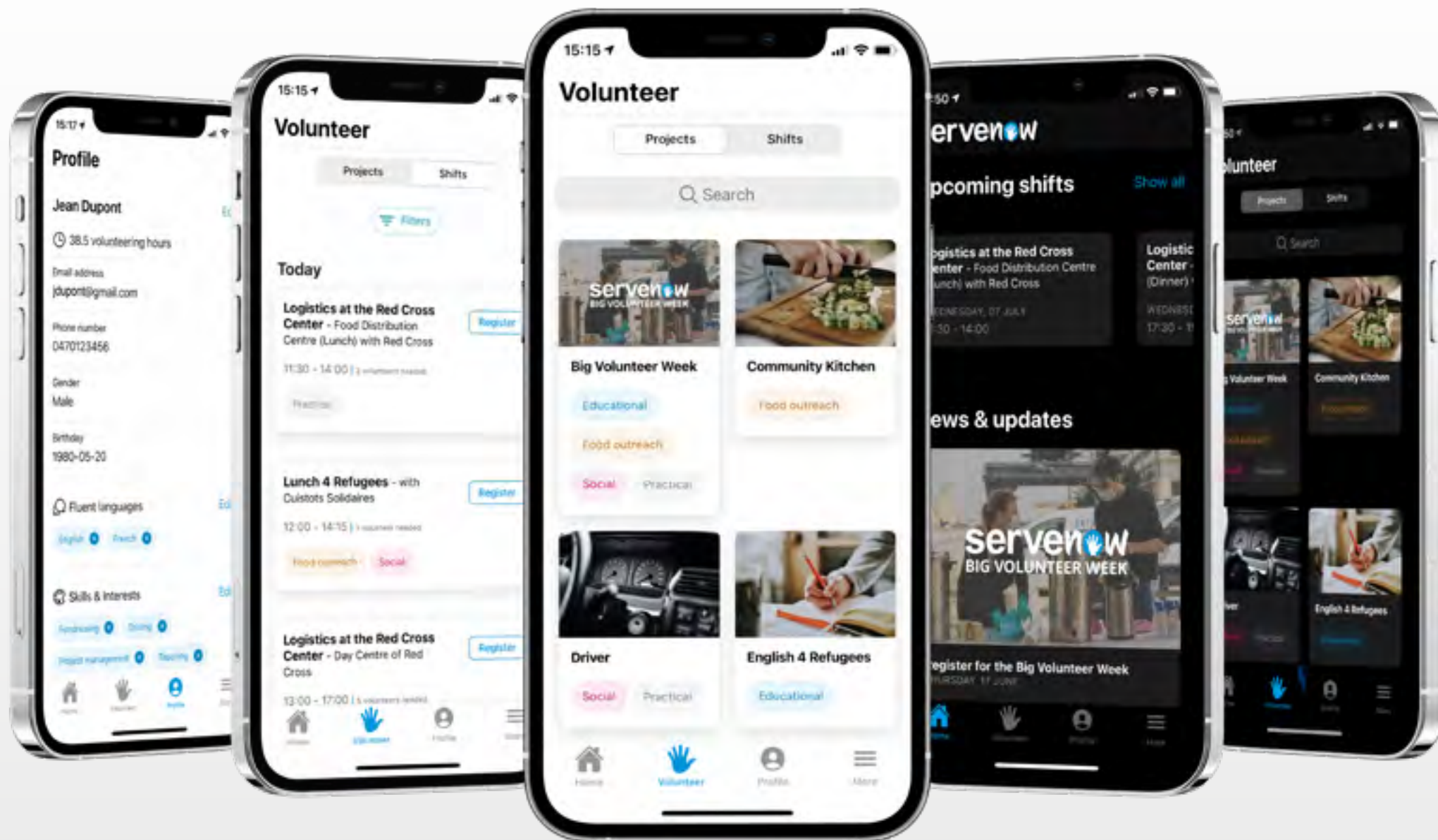
ServeNow

On the 23rd October 2020, Serve the City launched its very own app called ServeNow. This ground-breaking app displays our weekly projects, news, updates and volunteering needs. At the tip of their fingers, volunteers are able to contact project leaders, sign up for an information session and register for volunteer shifts. ServeNow enhances the overall organisation of our projects, as project leaders can now know in advance the number of volunteers attending their project.

ServeNow also provides us with a better picture of our overall impact, and we are now looking to expand it to other STC branches around the world.

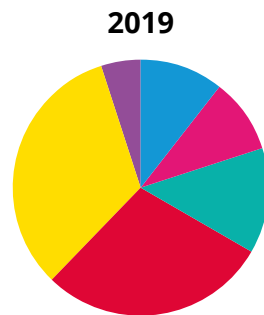
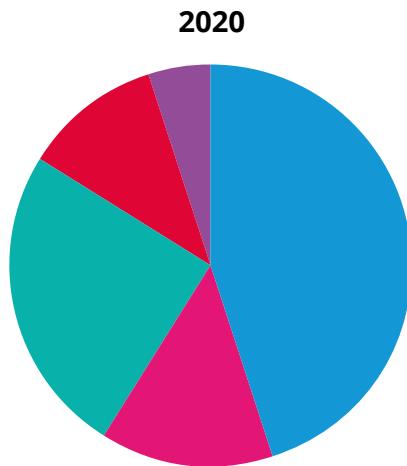
Two months after its launch, the app had recorded already over 1000 volunteer hours on the three pilot projects.





Financial Report

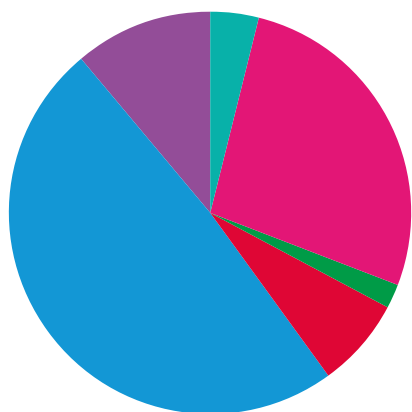
Revenues



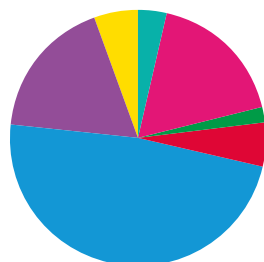
	2020			2019	
Donations	88 562 €	45%	(+228%)	26 973 €	11%
Private grants	27 707 €	14%	(+14%)	24 308 €	9%
Corporate don.	48 308 €	25%	(+45%)	33 235 €	13%
Corporate vol.	-825 €	-0%	(-101%)	73 146 €	29%
International vol.	21 916 €	11%	(-74%)	83 484 €	33%
Other	9 869 €	5%	(-19%)	12 184 €	5%
Total	195 537 €			253 330 €	

Expenditure

2020



2019



	2020			2019		
Admin/Logistic	5 302 €	4%	(-53%)	11 340 €	4%	
Project support	37 864 €	27%	(-18%)	45 875 €	18%	
Communication	2 706 €	2%	(-46%)	5 058 €	2%	
Rent	9 750 €	7%	(-31%)	14 223 €	5%	
Salaries/consult.	69 649 €	49%	(-45%)	125 531 €	48%	
International vol.	14 787 €	11%	(-68%)	46 247 €	18%	
Other	460 €	0%	(-97%)	14 340 €	5%	
Total	140 518 €			260 771 €		

Overcoming loss of traditional revenue streams in 2020

In 2020, Serve the City Brussels focused on developing new revenue sources to minimise the negative impact of the pandemic on our traditional sources of income.

As reported by the King Baudouin Foundation, 49% of non-profits in Belgium were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Serve the City was not an exception. The lockdown and the strict sanitary measures in place throughout the year resulted in the loss of key revenue streams - those driven by in-person volunteering and cross-border travel. In particular, we were unable to organise our fundraising events, corporate volunteering, and our international volunteering programme, which were the pillars of our revenues.

To preserve our programme, we focused on driving the revenue we receive from donations. The exacerbated inequalities caused by the crisis meant that private donors were increasingly concerned and they were willing to get involved. We therefore worked hard to channel our community's goodwill.

This great display of generosity and kindness was helped significantly by Serve the City securing a **recognised charity status**, which allows our donors to **claim a 60% fiscal deduction on all donations exceeding EUR 40**.

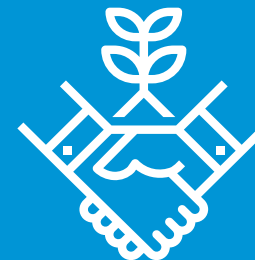
Traditional revenue sources for Serve the City



Donations and
private grants



Fundraising
events



Corporate
volunteering



International
volunteering

Exercising prudence over 2020 expenditure

The loss of our other revenue streams provoked a shift in our budget allocation. Our corporate and international volunteering programmes typically cover salaries, consultancies, and rent costs, but due to our inability to organise such events, budget reductions were put in place to reduce our costs to a maximum in order to survive. Importantly, we succeeded in retaining all our staff, as costs related to salaries, consultancies and rents were partly covered by donations and grants from public and private actors.

As a result of driving donations and exercising expenditure prudence, we actually raised funds in excess of our 2020 predictions, building an excess of EUR 55,000, which in 2021 we determined to retain as a reserve and a helping measure to manage the sustained uncertainty and restrictions of the pandemic. We anticipate that our traditional revenue streams from corporate events and international volunteering will remain negligible in the first half of 2021.

Our partners

In addition to private donors, we were also supported by many public and private actors and partners. Among others, we would like to thank the **King Baudouin Foundation** and **Toyota Motor Europe** and their employees for helping to keep our projects up and running, the **UPS Foundation** for financing the development of ServeNow, as well as the following organisations for their financial support (this list is non-exhaustive): **Austin Bright**, **Red Rock**, **F5**, **CDC United Network** and the **Gumley House Convent**.

Throughout the year, we have also been supported with material donations and food supplies from our partners. The **Community Kitchen** has been instrumental in the success of our food outreach projects, by supplying us with warm meals and thousands of muffins per week.

Jennie's story

Volunteers at Project Le Phare prepare and distribute sustainable and vegetarian meals through personal interactions with their beneficiaries in the neighbourhood of Sainte Catherine. The project restarted in 2012 as a collaboration between Serve the City and the Salvation Army. Today, the project serves up to 300 people weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Jennie started volunteering at Project Le Phare in 2013, around 3 months after she and her husband moved to Belgium. She wanted to get involved in her new neighbourhood and had heard about the project from a friend. In 2015, she started to co-lead the project with Marie, another volunteer. 5 years later, in January 2020, Marie handed over the lead of the project to Jennie. "It was a very easy transition," Jennie recalls. As usual, volunteers would come every Tuesday to prepare hot meals at the Salvation Army offices, and serve them in the dining hall, where they would welcome around 120 people. "Everything was running smoothly. The only problem was... COVID-19".

Only 3 months after becoming project leader, Jennie was faced with an enormous challenge: how to continue the project safely? Thankfully, Le Phare was among the only three projects in the commune of Brussels to be given permission from the local government to continue their action. "We were each given a special document that allowed us to gather and distribute food. I was also given a special permit to get food and other goods, as they were restricted during the first lockdown (...) It was never a challenge to purchase food... The real challenge was to buy paper products, since our usual stores were closed. Volunteers had to ask their neighbours and friends for plastic bags so we could wrap the meals and hand them in to our patrons." Getting her hands on masks, gloves and hand sanitizers was also a big challenge. "There was a sense of desperation... but the collective efforts from our team was a very powerful element, which created a sense of absolute hope, very much conveyed by our patrons".

Thankfully, donations to the Salvation Army and Serve the City allowed them to stay afloat. Many people also directly donated to Project Le Phare, which received hundreds of baked goods, tents, clothes, shoes, blankets, etc. "It really made a difference. Over a hundred people contributed! Even with the sanitary measures in place, people found a way to play a part and make a difference. We also started to get tons of requests to volunteer and get involved. We couldn't accept everyone at the same time as we needed to strictly respect the sanitary measures."

Very quickly, they decided to add a service every Friday as well. "We added Fridays because we had the manpower, the paper products, and the patrons." Indeed, the numbers of beneficiaries drastically increased throughout the crisis. "Before Covid, the maximum number we would get would be 120. During Covid, we reached up to 180 people on Tuesdays, and around 120 on Fridays."

”

I have done a lot in my life, I have checked a lot of boxes. From performing in Broadway shows to enrolling in the US Army, from all the things I have accomplished, this project is what I am the proudest of.

I feel like I became the best version of myself. I can really see the difference that I've made, on both our patrons and the volunteers. It really was a collective effort, and I am honoured to have led such an incredible team. Now, our next challenge is to open up again!

Jennie, project leader at Le Phare



Jennie's story

When asked about how she managed to keep the morale of her team up during the crisis, Jennie says: "It was really easy! While most of the world was experiencing a very strict lockdown, we could get away with socialising. We had our little social club. We were able to build friendships, serve people and make a difference. It was very positive and empowering. We also got to know our patrons even better, we would remind them that they were not forgotten and that we were all in this together."

"What would I tell someone who wants to get involved but is afraid to start volunteering? Just do it! Volunteering is like going to the gym for the first time. If you do too much too soon, you won't go back. But you can start slow, like once a week and do whatever you can to contribute. There is a misconception that volunteers have to think or be a certain way. Just be yourself!", she concludes.





Looking forward

Short-term goals

- Further develop our current partnerships to increase our impact, especially food distribution projects. We are planning on installing a semi-professional kitchen in our new facilities to better respond to the current and urgent humanitarian needs in the city.
- Increase the number of projects on ServeNow, including projects in other Belgian cities (e.g. Leuven, Sint-Truiden) to offer more volunteering opportunities across the country. Further develop the app to make it easier to use and more complete.
- Continue to develop and coordinate our volunteering opportunities in accordance with the sanitary measures.
- Relaunch and grow our corporate volunteering programme while strictly following the sanitary measures.
- Strengthen cohesion between our volunteers, project leaders and core team.

Mid-Term Goals

- Develop and grow the Belgian Serve the City network, including STC Brussels, STC Leuven and STC Saint-Truiden to increase our range of action across the country.
- Increase and further raise awareness about volunteering, through our key events (Big Volunteer Days and Big Volunteer Week) in order to create a strong, diversified, and unified volunteering community.
- Train and expand our network of project leaders.
- Increase our search for subsidies and stable funding opportunities.
- Resume and further develop our environmental and sustainable projects, including developing a community garden around our facilities.



Long-Term Goals

- Generate recognition of the societal value of volunteering and acknowledgement that it is a crucial part of the well-being of our society in Belgium.
- Serve the City Brussels as a well-established and resilient structure, with stable funding sources, capable of responding quickly and efficiently the needs of vulnerable people both in the city of Brussels and in the whole of Belgium.
- Facilitate a well trained community of volunteers and project leaders, who understand the needs of those we serve and who are capable of responding to these needs in an efficient and kind manner.
- Redesign all our projects to be 100% sustainable and environmentally friendly.
- Continue to live our values while serving people in need, to inspire individuals to make a difference and spread kindness, transform entire neighbourhoods through volunteering, and break down barriers between groups of people.



serve now

