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Voluntary work - das Ehrenamt - in Germany.

In Germany there has been voluntary work for a very long time. During the last 20 - 30 years it became organized, that means today there are organisations for voluntary work in nearly each city. Here people who need help can apply and those who want to help can apply as well.

Once a year there is an "Ehrenamtstag" where there are reports about everything which has been done during the past year and some people are honoured for their work or for their ideas.

Meantimes many organisations doing voluntary work are integrated into daily life.

In the following some examples:

In hospitals there are the "Grünen Damen", these ladies see the patients, find out what they need: shopping, getting in connection with insurances, making difficult telephone calls or just talk to them.

There are organisations where schoolchildren find help with their homework; this is very necessary when both parents work or for children from other countries having difficulties with the language.

There is the firebrigade; especially in the rural areas they are volunteers.

Many cultural events could not take place without the help of private helpers. E.g. every year in Weilburg - only minutes from Braunfels - there are the great summer concerts with famous musicians. Everything is organised by private helpers, without them these concerts could not take place.

Rather new is the "Tafel". Supermarkets give food which they could not sell to organisations where meals are cooked for those who cannot afford good food.

A great problem are old people; what is being done is by far not enough.

Unemployed people, especially those having been unemployed for a long time must get help, also to get out of isolation.

I also would like to mention funds. Very new is the so called Bürgerstiftung. In Wetzlar three years ago the "Bürgerstiftung Wetzlar" was founded. Every citizen can give money; this money is kept in a permanent stock. It is only the interest which can be given to organisations. There is e.g. the Albert-Schweizer-Kinderdorf which could not exist without donations.

Today with the financial crisis where nobody knows whether the worst is yet to come voluntary help is more necessary than ever, we can no more do without.

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