

# Time bank



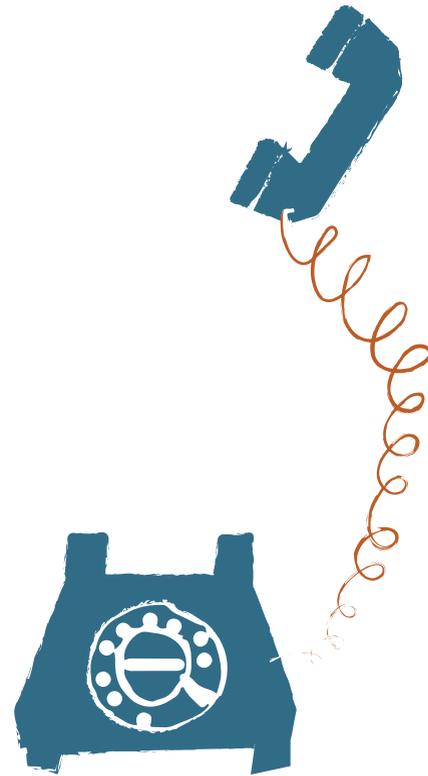
## Brief description of the activity

Time bank is a bank where people mutually exchange activities, services and knowledge. People exchange their free time to help each other especially in small daily necessities. The Time bank is organized as credit institutions where transactions are based on the circulation of time rather than money. The biggest difference is that interest is never accrued, neither in passive nor in negative! The only obligation that one has is the balancing of the account. In a Time Bank, the value of the traded assets corresponds only to the hours used to carry them out and the rule is to combine utility with pleasure. Anyone can join a time bank, as everyone has the potential to offer something useful to others and everyone needs something.

A time bank provides for the intermediation between people, so as to allow indirect exchanges, based on mutuality, beyond the bilaterality characteristic of barter-

ing. These exchanges may also be postponed, because one can give when he/she can, and receive when he/she wants.

Being an account holder in a time bank has the further advantage that one does not become debtor/creditor of someone else, but the relationship is established with the bank, that can cross supply and demand as effectively as possible.



## Time bank

### Topics, objectives and methodology:

- Trust, reciprocity and civic engagement
- Increased self-esteem/confidence
- Greater participation in community events
- Diminished loneliness
- Accept help with dignity - knowing you will help others in return

A Time bank firstly aims at easing the active encounter of people and at increasing solidarity within the community. What is exchanged are activities and the unit of measure is time, rather than money, independently of the market value of the "service" exchanged; a Time Bank is based on the principle of equal dignity of the activities exchanged and on reciprocity, so that each subject is a bearer of needs and resources.

The encounter of people is defined "active" because it is based on mutual aid, and helps to discover other people

through their abilities or willness to help, in a win-win situation. For instance: Shahab from Pakistan was a math teacher in his country and now he has some issues to renovate his health card. He offers two hours a week to give maths lessons and asks in return legal aid. Maria, who is preparing her entrance exam at the med school, needs some math lessons and uses her credit with the time bank (gained by going grocery shopping for an old lady the previous week) to get 5 math lessons by Shahab. Shahab so accumulates 10 hours of credit with the bank and he will "use" them as soon as another "account holder" of the time bank will make available his/her time (and expertise) in legal matters.

The usual help that is exchanged between members of the same family, groups of friends or - in small communities - neighbourhood, is now extended to people previously unknown, through the intermediation of a third party, the Time Bank, in which both sides of transaction trust, makes the encounter happen and its participants take advantage of it.

Through this activity is possible to vividly convey the advantages of cooperation: those who have little time will notice that it is sometimes possible to multiply it, for example by making the activities made for themselves and their family members available for others (for example, shopping, taking children to school) and receiving help to "earn time" in other areas.

**Duration:**

The duration of a Time Bank is directly linked to the success of the initiative. Namely, it is not a one-time activity, but it is a process. There are, nevertheless, some steps to take.

**Location:**

The minimum required is room to have a front-office where people can get information, open an account and check the time and activities made available by the other "account holders". If the premises allows, some activities can also take

place at the Time bank; in fact, among other activities, one can offer his time for company, for a conversation, or activities that do not require to be done at home or in specific places. So it is advisable to have a space big enough to have an common area for informal meetings (tables, chairs, sofas) and a more private area with tables and chairs for activities that require concentration (language classes, legal advice...).

**Materials:**

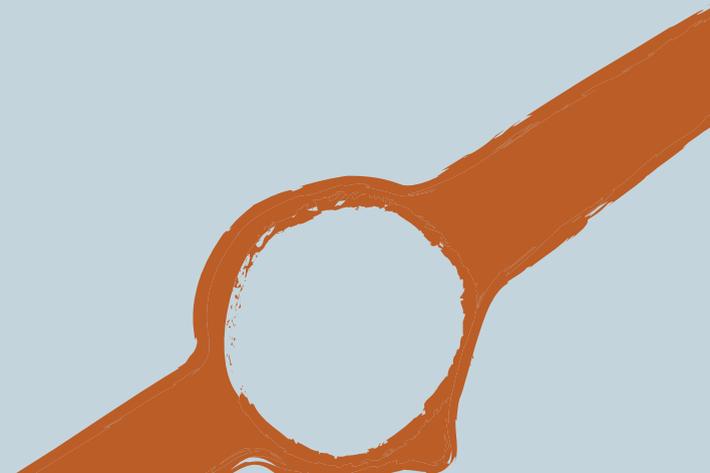
For the front-office: table, chairs, computer with a spreadsheet program, telephone, internet connection, pinboard.

For the common and private areas: tables, chairs, sofa.

**Staff needed and eventual specific skills required:**

The Time Bank works on a fixed schedule, namely it is open on days and hours that have to be known by the account holders and the people who want to join it. During a shift, at least two staff people are needed.

One will be in charge of backoffice, namely to keep the register of credits/debits and another will be in charge of frontoffice, welcoming new possible “account holders” and giving information.



**Management of the accounts:** all the accounts have to be organized in a spreadsheet reporting credits/debits: every activity done is registered in order to have clear how many hours each member gave or received (assets liabilities balance).

**Matching demand and supply:** an important feature of Timebanks is to optimize the various activities demand and supply. Likely, at the moment that somebody asks for a specific activity, there is not an equivalent activity offered by someone else. At the same time, when an activity or capability is offered, there is not an immediate request of it. The staff will register all the activities requested or offered by the members and will put them in contact. If no match is possible, the offer or request will be however noted and published on a pinboard in the common room, so that anyone can see what is offered/asked, so that matchings can arise spontaneously by the people that check the pinboard.

A second person will be in charge of the front-office, taking care of:

**Promotion of the time bank:** in order to achieve a wide number of associates and constantly increase it, it is crucial to pro-

mote the time bank. Before its opening, issue a press release, communicate on social media and organize a public event to solemnly inaugurate it. The latter will be a chance to explain the principles and spirit of the time bank, its importance to enhance the cohesion and solidarity within the community, based on the principle that anyone can contribute to its growth with his/her involvement, effort and competence. The Time bank should also have updated social media in order to ease a fast circulation of information also among those who are not often “physically” present (Facebook group, Whatsapp broadcast...)

**Welcoming new members:** when new members are willing to apply, the front office should explain the principles and rules of the Time Bank, helping them filling the association form, giving instructions on how to offer or request a service. Another important task of the front office is to give assistance to “translate” the help offered or needed in hours; namely to help people to estimate, in the unit of measure of the bank, the service offered or asked.

## Innovative aspects for the promotion of interculture

Anyone in a time bank is a bearer of values: its optimal functioning is guaranteed by the wide scope of people it manages to reach; it needs to be inherently intercultural, intergenerational, and interclass. A well-functioning time bank helps to reduce the barriers between young and old, rich and poor, locals and foreigners, disabled and able-bodied, because everyone can bring something, and all the services have the same value, that is 1 hour.

499

The approach of a time bank is intercultural because it considers diversity as a value and allows the person to promote him/herself in the discovery and enhancement of his/her own culture and that of others, according to what Gisele Legault defines relativistic sensitivity, in which social relations between individuals belonging to different cultures must represent a mo-



ment of communication and mutual knowledge rather than highlighting barriers and discrimination. This encounter of different cultures happens in a strategic moment, in which one helps the other in a logic that goes further than a mere volunteering, because both sides of the relationship take advantage by the situation, an advantage that can be immediate (the person who is helped) or postponed (the person who gains credit for his help, credit that can be “used” later on). In this perspective the relationships created by being members of a time bank are symmetrical, thanks to the existence of a third party, the bank itself, that ensures that the help offered or received will be “balanced” later. This breaks the binomial needy/charitable, that often characterize “intercultural” initiatives, as well as certain forms of volunteering itself. Furthermore, the members of a time bank find something in common, the cooperation as principle of collective well-being, without having to compromise their specificities - in a broad sense their cultures – because these specificities, expertise,

abilities, cultural knowledges, are valued as currency (through the transformation in time made available to others) in a time bank.