They Don't Have Anyone:
An Exploratory Study of Volunteer Legal Guardians in the Community

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Abstract

Volunteer legal guardians accept responsibility for decision-making on behalf of people who are cognitively incapacitated. Recruiting volunteers to act as legal guardians for incapacitated older and disabled adults may be critical in meeting the increased demand in light of the growth of these populations in the community and reduced agency funding. This volunteer task may be unique requiring a high degree of responsibility for critical decisions made on behalf of another. Moreover, volunteer guardian programs are relatively uncommon. The research reported here sought to understand why people accept this task, and how they may be similar to and different from a sample of volunteers engaged in more generalist volunteer tasks (hospitals, schools, etc.) This exploratory research builds upon an existing research base on reasons for volunteering using a sample of guardians from a mid-Atlantic guardianship agency. Qualitative data indicates volunteers who are motivated to help the 'unbefriended,' those who have no one to help them, and the opportunity to give back to their community. In addition, the respondents valued learning skills to navigate the aging and disability service systems. Quantitative data using a validated measure of volunteer motivation indicate guardians scored higher on altruistic factors (values) and lower on more egoist factors (career and enhancement) than indicated in studies of generalist volunteer endeavors. Implications include increased understanding of the task to inform providers that may choose to include a volunteer guardian component, and the potential need for targeted recruitment in volunteer guardian programs and in public programs serving older and disabled adults.

Key Words: volunteer, volunteer guardians, legal guardianship, incapacity

Introduction

Recruitment and retention of volunteers are always issues in practice (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, & Washburn, 2008; Hager & Brudney, 2004a; 2004b). The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) estimated that Americans contributed 7.7 billion hours of volunteer service in 2013 (CNCS, 2015). Independent Sector (2015) reported that the average dollar value of an hour of volunteer service was $23.07 in 2014, and that the total estimated value of volunteer service in 2013 was $173 billion. Volunteers are important, and may become increasingly important, in providing service in the community during times of economic stress. Yet, between 2009 and 2010 when this research was conducted, fewer volunteers contributed more volunteer hours (CNCS, 2011a). CNCS noted that 36.5% of Americans who volunteered in 2009 did not return to contribute volunteer hours in 2010 (CNCS, 2011b). Unfortunately, this decline continues (1.1% decline in 2013 as per U.S. BLS, 2014). Some volunteer positions are known to require the deft hand of volunteer resource managers and program administrators with regard to recruitment and retention, because of the nature of the task itself (Hager & Brudney, 2011). In the absence of qualified family or professionals, many older and disabled adults who are no longer able to make important decisions on their own behalf require the assignment of a legal guardian. Few municipalities have the resources or financial capacity to assign trained professionals. An uncommon solution, training community members to act as volunteer legal guardians, may be a critical resource to the aging/disabled services continuum of care. The purpose of this study is to explore reasons why people volunteer to become legal guardians, and to compare these reasons to a sample of traditional volunteers using a validated measure of motivation to volunteer.

In the United States, the age group comprised of people who are 65 years old is growing at an unprecedented rate. The Census Bureau reported that as of 2010, 13% of the population (40.3 million Americans) were 65 and older (Werner, 2011). The Alzheimer's Association estimates that as of 2014, 5.2 million of Americans are living with Alzheimer's Disease or a related dementia (Alzheimer's Association, 2014)). Dementias and a configuration of other issues, such as poverty, lower education, and living alone may be predictive of a decrease in ability to care for oneself and the potential need for guardianship services (Dyer et al., 2008; Pavlou & Lachs, 2008; Reynolds, 2001). Situations involving older adults who are no longer able to make decisions on their own behalf are common in aging services. Older adults who are unable to be safely discharged from a hospital admission, or may have been referred to an adult protective services unit of an area agency on aging due to complaints of abuse or neglect, may become adjudicated as incapacitated by a local court system. In some circumstances, a friend or loved one is able to accept the assignment of legal guardian. Often, no one is available. Community level resources to provide this type of assistance are uncommon. Volunteer legal guardians step in to accept the assignment to make legal decisions on behalf of their 'wards.' These decisions may include discharge from or admission to a hospital or nursing facility, support regarding remaining at home, supervised responsibility for finances and end-of-life decisions. Understanding why volunteer guardians chose to be and remain at this task may inform our ability to provide a vital and needed service in the community.

Theory and Research on Motivation to Volunteer

Volunteerism has been the subject of considerable research over the past 30 years (Wilson, 2012). Much of the research since the 1990s has sought to understand individuals' reasons or motivations for volunteering. Early research on volunteerism generated an

overarching functionalist theory regarding motivation to volunteer (MTV): people will seek out and engage in volunteer tasks that fulfill a personal motive or need. Therefore, different individuals may pursue the same opportunity for different reasons, and these reasons may be subject to change over time. While the first introduction of this theory produced a unidimensional model of MTV (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991), Clary and colleagues developed a more nuanced, multi-dimensional model of MTV that identified six important reasons or 'factors': (a) 'values,' to express humanitarian and altruistic concerns toward others, (b) 'understanding,' to learn more about something new and/or practice skills that might otherwise not be used, (c) 'enhancement,' to support one's ego or self-esteem, (d) 'protective,' to mitigate guilt about the circumstances of those less fortunate, and/or to address personal negative affect, (c) 'career,' to learn new career skills and/or support current career responsibilities, and (f) 'social,' to spend time with friends and to engage in an activity viewed favorably by society (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary, Snyder, & Stukus, 1996; Clary et al., 1998; Mannino, Snyder, & Omoto, 2011). This six-factor model of MTV was developed from a validated instrument of MTV, the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI; Clary et al., 1998). Research has been conducted to test this model at different times in the volunteer process including research by the original authors and others (Finkelstein, 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2011, Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005; Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998).

Much of the aforementioned research on volunteerism describes and defines an individual's motivation to volunteer. The intense nature of volunteer guardianship and the requirements for a volunteer's level and length of commitment may make this kind of volunteer task different from other volunteer opportunities. Therefore, through extensive interviewing this exploratory research sought to understand more fully why members of a community would volunteer to become the legal guardians for incapacitated older adults and disabled members of their community.

Methodology

This exploratory study employed a mixed method approach to studying the motivations of volunteer legal guardians, using semi-structured interviews and the administration of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Clary et al., 1998).

Sample

The study sample for this article drew from the agency master email list of 33 volunteer guardians. The final sample includes 12 volunteers, including 9 active, 2 inactive, and 1 past volunteer not currently interested in helping. This sample consisted of 3 men and 9 women with a mean age of 53.8 years ($SD = 11.02$; range = 34-70 years). Nine volunteer guardians (75%) were employed full or part-time. Five of the 12 (42%) respondents were human service professionals (social workers, social service agency administrators, and clergy). All 12 volunteers reported both formal and informal volunteering histories. Table 1 contains information describing this sample.

Table 1
Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample (*N* = 12)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	3	25
Female	9	75
Age		
30-39	1	8
40-49	3	25
50-59	3	25
60-69	4	33
70-79	1	8
Volunteer Status		
Active	9	75
Inactive	3	25
Employment Status		
Employed full-time	6	50
Employed part-time	3	25
Self-employed	1	8
Retired	2	16
Employment Category		
Human Services Professional[a]	5	42
Non-Human Service Professional	7	58
Prior Volunteer Experience	12	100

[a]Human service professional is defined as engagement in a job with a not-for-profit organization including social service administration, disabilities administration, clergy, and social work direct practice.

Procedure

Following approval from the University Institutional Review Board, letters of invitation were sent to the agency master mailing list of 33 volunteer guardians from a not-for-profit volunteer guardianship agency in a mid-Atlantic state. Nineteen were active volunteers, 8 were inactive, 4 were past volunteers not currently interested in helping, and two were willing to volunteer for the agency but not in a guardian capacity. Each person received a letter of invitation to participate by mail, which included contact information for the interviewer, and an opt-out postcard. Six volunteers (five active, one inactive) returned opt-out postcards. Interviews were conducted and analyzed in groups of two to three interviews to allow for purposive sampling relative to developing themes and the deliberate inclusion of negative cases to improve trustworthiness (Padgett, 2008). Of the 27 respondents who did not opt-out, sets of 2-3 potential participants were contacted by phone in the following manner: (a) an attempt was

made to enlist a representative number of men and women across each of the four status categories (active, inactive, past, and other volunteer capacity), (b) new calls were made following the interview, transcription, and analysis of each set of two to three interviews.

Upon establishing interview time and location, informed consent was obtained. Interviews were audio taped and lasted approximately 45 to 85 minutes. Respondents completed a brief demographic questionnaire and the VFI (Clary et al., 1998) at the conclusion of the interview. Following the analysis of the qualitative data, 3 respondents from the original set of 12 respondents were contacted for a second interview. This provided an opportunity to further address important issues and to member-check, a strategy of qualitative methodology that seeks to verify data analysis results with respondents (Padgett, 2008). All interviews were conducted between June 2011 and March 2012.

Qualitative Interview Guide

Consistent with our interest in exploring why volunteer guardians choose and continue in this specific volunteer task, the interview guide was designed to elicit the volunteers' perceptions beginning with the broadest possible question, 'please tell me about your experience as a volunteer guardian.' Probes included questions about how they found this specific opportunity, their perception of their day-to-day experiences as a guardian, their first assignment, and their sense of the changes in the task over time. Other questions included asking about their perceptions with regard to a difficult situation and a satisfying situation. In terms of retention, volunteers were asked what they felt helped them continue as guardians and included probes related to training and family support. In addition, perceptions of how this experience had affected and/or changed them were elicited. The second interviews asked more specific follow-up questions based on the first interviews with these specific respondents, and solicited their feedback regarding the salience of qualitative findings at that point in the research process.

Quantitative Data Collection

As noted earlier, the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Clary et al., 1998) examines six motivational factors (MTV). A 30-item inventory of motivation to volunteer, the VFI uses a seven point Likert scale with anchors ranging from 1 = *not at all important/accurate for you* to 7 = *extremely important/accurate for you*. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the factor subscales range from .89 ('career') to .80 ('values') with an average interscale correlation of .34 (Clary et al., 1998). Clary and colleagues (1998) also reported sample means for each of the six factors ranging from high to low are: 'values' (M =5.82, SD = 1.00), 'understanding' (M = 4.91, SD =1.32), 'enhancement' (M = 4.27, SD = 1.43), 'career' (M = 2.74, SD = 1.54), 'protective' (M = 2.61, SD = 1.37), and 'social' (M = 2.59, SD = 1.30). 'Values' and 'understanding' are considered to be more other-focused as opposed to self-focused factors (Mannino, Snyder, & Omoto, 2011). The VFI has been validated by other researchers on diverse populations of volunteers with similar results (Allison, Okun, & Dutridge, 2002; Okun, Barr, & Hertzog, 1998).

Demographic data

Respondents also were asked their sex, year of birth, marital status, employment status (full-time, part-time, self-employed, retired), current volunteer status, and formal and informal volunteering history.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using the generic inductive qualitative method (GIQM), a technique that employs elements of grounded theory, but is prescribed when small samples prohibit theory development (Hood, 2007). Interviews were conducted and analyzed in groups of two to three interviews. Open coding using constant comparison and an iterative process permitted early thematic development, which then informed sampling choices for the next set of interviews. The purpose of GIQM is to develop sustentative themes. Categorical saturation may be achieved, but is not required. GIQM also allows for the comparison to existing models or theories, such as the functionalist model underlying the VFI. GIQM may be best employed with unexplored topics in exploratory situations.

In order to ensure trustworthiness and reduce researcher subjectivity and bias, a number of methods were employed (Padgett, 2008). In regard to sampling, with each set of interviews transcription and coding informed choices regarding subsequent interviews, and all efforts were made to seek negative cases and choose as representative a sample as possible. As qualitative data were collected, an open coding process, which included interview data, field notes, and memos began with initial transcription by the researcher. This permitted consideration regarding the thickest descriptions possible, essential to transferability of results (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). A reflexive research journal was maintained to serve as an audit trail and to decrease subjectivity and researcher bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A code book was developed and revised. Transcripts were reviewed by two independent coders, one of whom had significant experience in social work and in qualitative research, and another who was a naive reader. Codes were discussed, transcript documents were reviewed and findings were incorporated into the next round of interviews. Moreover, selected transcripts and thematic development at the project level were reviewed periodically by two researchers with many years' experience in qualitative and quantitative research. On several occasions, the researcher had an opportunity to discuss the research with a research interest group who offered peer debriefing. With regard to member checking, three respondents were asked to participate in a second interview process, specifically to develop emergent themes and check on perception of the validity of the findings. In addition, rigor was established using methodological and data triangulation by analyzing qualitative and quantitative data relative to the same research questions (Padgett, 2008).

Quantitative data were analyzed using one sample t tests. A t test allowed us to compare average scores of the respondents in this study on the VFI to the average scores from hundreds of respondents in the study by Clary and colleagues (1998). Therefore, this t test provided an opportunity to examine how volunteer guardians may be similar to and different from other volunteers. Although the sample size for the quantitative data analysis is small ($n=12$), it provides comparison points for the qualitative results and helps develop existing theory or new themes and theories vis-à-vis qualitative data analysis. The study has very good power (.93) to detect a difference of one standard deviation from the mean, and .79 to detect a .8 standard deviation from the mean on the VFI. Although this is a large effect, it was hypothesized that this sample of volunteer guardians would be demonstrably different from the larger population of volunteers used to validate the VFI, as volunteer guardians may be motivated by factors other than those found among generalist volunteers.

The quantitative findings are also used to frame the qualitative results illuminating similarities and differences between volunteer guardians and the volunteer population used to validate the VFI. The quantitative data served as methodological triangulation, specifically to reduce researcher and methodological bias and contextualize the guardians' motivations (Creswell, 2003).

Results

Several motivational themes were identified in this exploratory research including 'helping the unbefriended,' which described why many of the volunteers chose this task, and 'learning skills,' an interest expressed by many of the respondents relative to the information they learned as they worked with clients. In addition, 'giving back/paying forward' seemed related to 'helping the unbefriended' in that it described in a larger sense how many of the volunteers felt they were supporting their community. These themes are explored below, with illustrative quotes from participants, who are identified using a number system (e.g., respondent one is '1'). Reflections on relationships between these themes and the quantitative factor model are discussed in the final section of this article.

Helping the Unbefriended

All of the respondents spoke often about their strong desire to help those they perceive to be unable to adequately help themselves. Several of the respondents saw their mission as volunteer guardians as an individual task. As one guardian noted, "I just make sure that he, you know, is happy; that he's content…I try to make sure that he's got the best quality of life that he can" (5). Many had known older adult neighbors who were isolated in the community, or had volunteered for agencies, such as Meals on Wheels, and had personally experienced individuals in the community who had no one to help them. At times, the guardians would express a sense of frustration that their clients had been forgotten by families or neighbors, and saw their mission as champions of the 'unbefriended.'

> …but how about all the other little grannies who don't have anybody to get their groceries. (1)

> …you think about these other people who just don't have any support – *don't have anyone*. And I think that's kind of, you know, the hardest part of the story – that *they just don't have anyone*. There's no family. There's no friends who are around or can look in on them. (5)

> …a lot of people are always willing to help out with all the animals, pets… People are always willing to help out pets and children. I just kind of felt like, you know, that's [helping older adults who need guardians] not like an area where people generally put their time to be to. That's not cute and cuddly…. The hardest part of the story - is that they don't have *anyone*. There's no family. There's no friends who are around or can look in on them. (6)

In one specific situation, a guardian (2) noted that one of her clients, who was an unpaid family caregiver most of her life, had not been adequately financially prepared for old age. Initially, the family had responded to inquiries to participate in this woman's care, but their interest seemed to wane when it was made clear that there would be no financial windfall for the family.

This theme was noted by several guardians.

> Most of my wards have been - and I've had four - have been kind of wards of the state because they had no money, and nobody really wants to take care of them basically. That's the bottom line, right? It's sad to say that, because if there was money involved probably somebody would step forward…. (2)

The guardians repeatedly talked about "advocating," and viewed themselves at times as the champions of their clients. They became accomplished problem solvers and relationship experts on behalf of helping their clients get what they needed. One guardian described designing an incontinence undergarment for her client to preserve her client's level of placement. Another told of advocating on behalf of her client to undergo cataract surgery and hired a companion against the advice of the facility staff.

When families are involved, the guardians receive support and advice from the Agency with regard to advocating for clients in potentially complicated and difficult collaborations. Often, families have been accused of malfeasance and may be resentful of the presence of a legal guardian. One guardian, who had strongly advocated to create a discharge plan that would support his client in the client's own home, chaired a family mediation session complete with a professional mediator and documentation (5). Each of these examples was preceded by strong suggestions of advocating for the rights and liberties of those who cannot speak on their own behalf.

Several of the guardians expressed an interest in advocating in service of just one person and seemed quite comfortable to be working at an individualist task as opposed to group task with other volunteers.

> I'm looking for maybe just one person that I can make a difference in their lives…I found it to be one of the more meaningful things that I've ever done. Really. Just to journey with another person, and to be responsible for that person. (3)

However, despite this focus on one individual – a micro perspective – many of the volunteers returned repeatedly to the idea that advocacy for the unbefriended is actually a task of civic responsibility.

> And it struck me that there's two things in this world that make me very, very angry - and that's people that take advantage of kids, and people who take advantage of the elderly and those that are needing help. (5)

> I firmly believe that there's those of us who are put on earth who can't take care of themselves for whatever reason. It could be mental health, it could be, you know, maybe we're not the brightest person God ever put on the face of this earth or whatever. And I do believe those of us who do have a brain-we can walk, we can hear, we can talk, we can think-have some responsibility for taking care of the people. (12)

Many of these volunteers reported being active in several civic tasks. Again, this sense of civic or societal responsibility was voiced, "Do *something*. Leave it better than you found it" (9). Another volunteer who was involved in several community volunteer projects noted, "And that's part of the reason why I decided to do the guardianship – to kind of extend the humanitarian part of my life, to give back to the community" (10). Some of the volunteers noted their interest in involving their family members, friends, and other community members in their volunteer tasks

in order to model positive civic behavior and spread the word to others.

> One of the most beautiful things that happened at the last nursing home was I was the Girl Scout leader, and we chose that nursing home as being our place where we were going to make friends. And each girl was given a particular person to like be their grandparents. And we did many service projects. We'd come and sing for them. We work with them, and so forth. And, to me, just seeing that, and also for the parents to see that as well, how their girls could really directly improve the life by doing something small was very powerful. (2)

Learning Skills

> Many of the guardians professed an interest in learning skills to assist their own families.
> So, you know, the best thing about this whole thing is that I really got an
> education – Social Security, going to the doctors, doing all the tests,
> selling the mobile home, which I never thought in all my life I'd ever do.
> (3)

Other guardians noted that volunteering as a guardian offered an opportunity in self-growth.

> Part of what they now think is Alzheimer's, and since I had a mother and a father that died of it, I have to watch out for it, is the more new stuff you learn how to do, you build new paths in your brain. (12)

Although several of the guardians are human service professionals, none of the guardians indicated that they brought skills to the task as a result of having cared for others. More often, they expressed a desire to acquire skills for the future. "And also at the same time I was learning a great deal of how to care for my own elderly parents and so forth" (2).

Giving Back/Paying Forward

Several of the guardians felt motivated to volunteer at this task in order to return a kindness shown to a family member. One guardian noted that he was unable to provide assistance to his father who lived at a distance, but felt secure that care was provided by a family member. He saw volunteer guardianship as an opportunity to 'pay back' this kindness. On another occasion, a volunteer offered a similar scenario, but one that included a community effort.

> My parents are deceased 10 or 11 years now, and while they lived in Pennsylvania, about 50 miles away and there were people – friends of ours – they kind of looked after them. Not in any official capacity, but just looked in on them and everything. And, I said, that was nice. (5)

Several of the guardians tending toward the older end of the age range for the sample, seemed to identify with their clients on a very personal level. For these volunteer guardians, disability and helplessness seemed less of an abstraction. One guardian, a 68 year old woman, noted,

> And, you know, I can remember saying this to the judge - you know someday I'm going to be in that situation where somebody's going to have to help me. So, I guess it's like you pay it forward. (8)

Quantitative Results

Analysis of the quantitative data from the Volunteer Functions Inventory compared average scores for respondents in this study to the respondents in the study by Clary and colleagues (1998) on each factor (career, enhancement, protective, social, understanding, and values). Volunteer guardians in this study scored significantly lower on the 'career' subscale ($t(11) = -3.45$, $p = .005$), and the 'enhancement' subscale ($t(11) = -3.27$, p = .007) than the volunteers described in Clary and colleagues 1998 sample.

In addition, two other subscales (values and protective) approached statistical significance at $p < .10$ and may be worthy of further investigation. Of particular interest with regard to qualitative findings, the guardians scored higher on the 'values' factor ($t(11) = 2.07$, p = .062) than the general population of volunteers. Volunteers guardians also scored lower on the 'protective' factor ($t(11) = -2.04$, $p = .066$. Table 2 depicts these results by factor.

Table 2

Volunteer Functions Inventory[a] Subscale Means for1998 Sample and Study Sample

Subscale	Clary et al., 1998 Sample *M(SD)* (*n* = 467)	Study Sample *M(SD)* (*n* = 12)
Career	2.74 (1.54)	1.83* (0.90)
Enhancement	4.27 (1.43)	2.93* (1.41)
Protective	2.61 (1.37)	2.13** (0.81)
Social	2.59 (1.30)	3.18 (1.29)
Understanding	4.91 (1.32)	4.60 (1.57)
Values	5.82 (1.00)	6.28** (0.77)

Note. The mean age for the population is 40.9 years. The mean age for the sample is 54.4 years. *$p < .05$, two-tailed. **$p < .10$, two-tailed. [a] Clary, E., Snyder, M., Ridge, R., Copeland, J., Stukas, A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(6), 1516-1530. The VFI uses a one to seven point likert scale (*not at all important/accurate for you* to *extremely important/accurate for you*.)

Discussion

These findings suggest that the volunteer guardians are less motivated to learn career skills or to enhance their self-esteem than the general volunteer population. Furthermore, it should be noted that the highest mean score among the six factors on the VFI for Clary and colleagues' (1998) sample is 'values' ($M = 5.82$) indicating an interest in helping others.

Volunteer guardians may be even more motivated than others to volunteer for these reasons ($M =$ 6.28). Indeed, the guardians' interviews strongly highlighted their need to help the unbefriended and those who could be or had been victimized. Many respondents routinely voiced a certain amount of frustration with a society that ignores older adults, and used terms, such as 'advocate,' to demonstrate their strong interest in championing those who the guardians perceive cannot protect themselves.

It seems consistent with the original research on the VFI that the guardians would most likely not be motivated by an interest in gaining knowledge about a new career or forwarding their own career objectives; a factor usually attributed to a younger cohort of volunteers (Clary & Snyder, 1991; 1996; 1998; Hustinx et al., 2010). None of the qualitative findings of this study indicate that volunteer guardians are motivated to learn about new careers. Indeed, several of the guardians are already employed as human service professionals.

However, some of the guardians indicated an interest in acquiring knowledge at this task in order to assist their own older adult relatives and friends. This qualitative theme, 'learning skills,' seemed more consistent with the VFI factor 'understanding,' which is defined by Clary and colleagues (1998) as a knowledge function, specifically, "…the opportunity for volunteerism to permit new learning experiences and the chance to exercise knowledge, skills, and abilities that might otherwise go unpracticed" (p. 1518). Clary and colleagues' (1998) mean (4.91) and the mean for this sample (4.60) are comparable indicating that 'understanding' may be of some importance to both cohorts of volunteers.

In the VFI literature, factors such as 'enhancement' and 'protective,' are known as more egoistic or self-focused than 'values' and 'understanding,' which trend toward the more altruistic end of the scale continuum (Clary & Snyder, 199; Clary et al., 1998; Mannino, Snyder, & Omoto, 2011). Indeed, the guardians scored below the comparison sample's already low mean on the 'protective' factor (i.e., volunteers are less motivated to volunteer in order to address their own depressive feelings). Moreover, the guardians scored significantly below the comparison sample's mean on 'enhancement,' a factor indicative of a need to bolster one's self-esteem or mitigate one's sense of guilt about their own good fortune. These lower scores on self-focused factors may mirror higher scores on 'values.'

An important theme among the guardians, 'giving back/paying forward,' seems absent from the VFI factor definitions. It is difficult to say whether this theme represents an emergent new factor specific to volunteer guardians. However, it does seem to be relevant in keeping with the strength of the qualitative findings associated with the 'values' factor ('helping the unbefriended'). All of the guardians spoke strongly of their interest in helping the unbefriended individuals in their community, as well as holding a more global construct of helping the unbefriended in society as important. Indeed, in research conducted by Omoto and Snyder (1995) indicating additional and different VFI factors specific to AIDS volunteers, the authors noted an emergent factor titled 'community concern.' Essentially, AIDS volunteers in their research seemed strongly motivated to help in a community, in this case a virtual community, devastated by a deadly disease. The theoretical model of motivation to volunteer may be further supported by the addition of these new and varied reasons for volunteering. Although themes arose from the qualitative data that were comparable to the quantitative factor model, several reasons for volunteering that arose from this research may be viewed as emergent factors.

Limitations and Strengths

There are several limitations to this research. It uses cross-sectional data representative of a small sample in one geographic area. Moreover, the participants volunteer for an agency that uses a specific model of training and service provision based on a legal perspective. Other agencies may have different models of volunteer guardianship delivery, and could conceivably use techniques to manage volunteers differently. These factors make generalizability of the findings of this study to other populations difficult. In addition, the VFI is not the only instrument used in volunteer research, and it, too, represents a specific model of MTV; one perhaps not sensitive enough to measure more specific motivations, such as 'giving back.' As it was tested with a small sample in this research, additional testing or a different measure may be indicated. Other research has sought to explore different theories and models, such as role identity, etc., which could be considered for further research (Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010; Penner, 2002). Volunteer guardianship programs are common. The opportunity to conduct research is this area was constrained by the ability to find a program and respondents. However, the strength of this study was its ability to gather data descriptive of this interesting and unique sample, which may inform our ability to recruit and retain volunteer guardians going forward.

Implications

The setting for this research, an agency committed only to providing volunteer guardianship services within the framework of a legal perspective, makes it qualitatively different from guardianship provided under the aegis of a social service agency with a multi-faceted mission or a faith-based not-for-profit organization. Additional research on this type of volunteerism could be conducted using larger samples in other areas of the country, and in other agency settings. A purely qualitative approach may lend itself to an exploration vis-à-vis a framework, such as life course perspective, as a history of volunteer behavior may predict future volunteerism. In addition, new quantitative measures could be employed that may offer an opportunity to measure volunteer motivations developed among the qualitative themes of this research.

Implications for practice include an improved understanding of how to recruit and retain volunteers, especially volunteers who are interested in serving as legal guardians. Qualitative findings related to 'helping the unbefriended,' 'giving back/paying forward,' and 'learning skills,' have implications with regard to what may be important to potential volunteer guardians. Seeking volunteers with human services training may be of particular interest in practice as 5 of 12 respondents had been trained as human service professionals. This may be a critical point with regard to targeted recruitment efforts. Improved knowledge should help to drive an increased understanding of volunteerism on the regional and the national levels.

Increased knowledge about specific volunteer tasks, such as volunteer guardianship, should inform policy, both local and national, with regard to provision of service to older adults in the community. Volunteer guardians provide a very special and specialized service. To the extent that our society feels compelled to provide assistance to older adults in their community, we may become more reliant upon volunteers to provide these services.

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