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“Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities”**

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Key Words: benefits, community, family, inclusive, volunteering

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Volunteer service has the power to contribute to the vitality of communities, countries, and people around the world. It also has the power to transform volunteers in the process, leading to increased confidence, a strong sense of personal accomplishment, new professional aspirations, and more. International volunteerism can be a particularly empowering experience for people with disabilities who traditionally have been recipients – not providers – of volunteer service. Like all volunteers, those with disabilities bring a unique knowledge and skill set to any program or project. Volunteers with disabilities also help dispel stereotypes and change perceptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do in countries and communities with fewer

opportunities than the United States. In return, volunteers with disabilities, as well as their fellow volunteers without disabilities, can gain insight into their own culturally based perceptions of disability through the lens provided by interactions and experiences in a different culture. In this article, the authors introduce volunteer resource managers to information and resources on how to create inclusive volunteer abroad programs, as well as success stories from international volunteers with disabilities, compiled by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE). Sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, the NCDE is a comprehensive resource on advising and tools for people with disabilities, professionals, educational institutions and organizations on increasing disability inclusion in international study, volunteer, teach and other exchange programs.

Key Words: volunteers, international, disability, accessibility

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Key Words: seniors, cross-generational, individuals with disabilities, pets

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Key Words: individuals with disabilities, youth, inclusion

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(Editor-generated) Key Words: mental retardation, case study, volunteer, Hebrew Home

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(Editor-generated) Key Words: disability, diversity, rehabilitation

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(Editor-generated) Key Words: volunteer, disabilities, inclusion

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(Editor-generated) Key Words: volunteer, disabilities, inclusion

In This Issue:
Each Individual Has Something to Offer, and a Right to that Opportunity

Harriett Naylor is largely recognized as one of the (if not, *the*) founders of the volunteer resource management profession. And as early as 1967, in the introduction to her pioneer work *Volunteers Today: Finding, Training and Working With Them*, she stated:

This book expresses the need of each volunteer to be treated as unique and valuable, to become involved in the lives of others, to be awed by the difference and enjoy building unity out of diversity.

This has always been one of my favorite quotes; I use it extensively as I teach and train others in the area of volunteer resource management, and especially as I work with learners and peers to guide and challenge them in developing their personal philosophy of volunteerism and volunteer resource management. As a foundation tenet of my personal philosophy of volunteerism, I believe that each individual, regardless of race or age or creed or gender or ability, has something, some gift or talent, to share with his/her community through volunteerism. I further believe that one of our most critical professional responsibilities as volunteer resource managers is to develop opportunities that allow each willing individual who so chooses to exercise his/her right to share that talent or gift with others as a volunteer.

Therefore, on behalf of the Editorial Board and Reviewers of *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*, I am very proud to introduce this issue focused upon engaging volunteers with disabilities. In my opinion, too often this aspect of human diversity (and pluralism) is overlooked and/or under-valued in our professional development initiatives, our volunteer-based programs, and our personal sensitivities as professional managers of volunteer resources.

The issue opens with an excellent *Feature Article* by Kimberly Miller, Pam Scoglio, and Stuart J. Schleien who emphasize that “when individuals of diverse abilities are supported appropriately . . . barriers [to engagement] can be successfully overcome and a win-win scenario realized” (p. 3). In their article, “Inclusive Volunteering: People, Family, and Community Perspectives”, the authors describe initiatives of Partnership F.I.V.E. (Fostering Inclusive Volunteer Efforts) in Greensboro, NC, a collaborative initiative of the local volunteer center, volunteer resource managers and nonprofit agencies, self-advocates, and inclusion specialists. A major premise of the collaboration is that “every citizen has a basic right to full community participation through volunteerism, to be recognized as a community asset, and to have the opportunity to give of oneself to others for the betterment of the community” (p. 5). The personal testimony of one mother’s perspective regarding the positive impacts of inclusive volunteerism in her family’s life, and six pragmatic strategies presented by the authors, provide an insightful window into how volunteer resource managers may successfully engage volunteers with disabilities. (NOTE: Miller and Schleien are also co-authors on two additional articles in this issue in *From the Annals* that were published previously in the former *Journal of Volunteer Administration*.)

In *Ideas That Work*, Michele Scheib and Stephanie Gray provide practical suggestions for engaging volunteer with disabilities, not just in the United States, but worldwide. According to the authors, “Like all volunteers, those with disabilities bring a unique knowledge and skill set to any program or project” (p. 13). In “Not Just recipients of Service: Including People with Disabilities in Volunteer Abroad Programs”, the authors introduce volunteer resource managers to excellent information and resources regarding creating inclusive volunteer abroad programs compiled by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE).

Two excellent *Tools of the Trade* share valuable resources available to volunteer resource managers who seek to better engage volunteers with disabilities in their programs. (Coincidentally, both resources were also developed under the auspices of the 4-H Program, although in two different states.) Lucinda Miller and Ryan Schmiesing describe the 4-H PetPALS (People and Animals Linking Successfully) program that enables youth volunteers to interact and work with senior adults and individuals with disabilities. Mitzi Downing describes the 4-H Shine Up and Step Out curriculum that guides youth and adults in interacting and working with individuals with disabilities, and especially youth with disabilities.

From the Annals includes six articles published previously in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, all relating directly to the current issue’s focus. “The Self-image of a Mentally Retarded Volunteer” by Elaine K. Hollander and Hedy Peyser was first published in 1980, while “The Handicap May Be Yours” by Claudia Apfelbaum was published in 1983. “Disability as a Part of Diversity” by Lisa Taylor was first published in 1995; “It Shouldn’t be this Difficult’: The Views of Agencies and Persons with Disabilities on Supported Volunteerism” by Linda L. Graff and John Vedell was published in 2003. The July issues closes with two articles by Kimberly Miller, Stuart Schleien, and Mary Merrill, both first published in 2005: “What’s In It For Me and My Agency? A Survey on the Benefits of Engaging Volunteer with Disabilities (co-authored with Paula Brooke) and “Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities: A Qualitative Study” (co-authored with Suzanne Stroud).

I join the entire Editorial Board and Reviewers of *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration* in sharing this first-of-its-kind resource so that managers of volunteer resources may better mobilize and engage all individuals, regardless of ability or disability, in exercising their right to offer their unique time, energies, and talents in improving our society through volunteerism.



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Inclusive Volunteering: Community and Family Perspectives

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Abstract

Communities are strengthened when the assets of every citizen are recognized, utilized, and valued. Inclusive volunteering (i.e., the engagement of volunteers with and without disabilities) capitalizes on the assets of community members who traditionally have not been sought out. There are benefits to both volunteers with disabilities and the agencies that engage them when they are included. Obstacles and barriers, both real and perceived, to fostering the engagement of these volunteers are evident. However, when individuals of diverse abilities are supported appropriately, these barriers can be successfully overcome and a win-win scenario realized. This article provides a brief review of what is known about the engagement of volunteers with disabilities, outlines how inclusive volunteering contributed to the building of capacity for one community, and illustrates how one family has been impacted through volunteering. The authors provide several suggestions for how volunteer resource managers may facilitate inclusive volunteering.

Key Words:

disabilities, benefits, community, family, inclusive, volunteering

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Introduction

During these difficult economic times, nonprofit organizations are being squeezed from two directions; charitable giving is down while the need for services is rising (National Council of Nonprofits, 2010). The nonprofit agencies that survive and thrive will be those who identify assets where others see deficits, and contribute to the building of community capacity. Successful agencies know that they are only as strong as the community in which they serve. A central message about building community capacity speaks to this:

Every single person has capacities, abilities, and gifts. Living the good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making. (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993)

Inclusive volunteering seeks to capture and capitalize on the assets that come from those in our community who are rarely viewed as assets; those individuals with disabilities. In this way, inclusive volunteering represents a potent strategy for building the capacity of individuals, nonprofit agencies, and the broader community within which they are located. This article briefly reviews what is known about the engagement of volunteers with diverse abilities, including benefits and obstacles, how a community strengthened its capacity through inclusive volunteering, and the story of how one family built a supportive community through volunteering.

Volunteers with Disabilities

Approximately 19% of the population has some form of disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), yet only 4.5% of

volunteers have an identified disability (Miller, Schleien, Brooke, & Merrill, 2005). While the number of volunteers with disabilities is low, the majority (83%) of volunteer resource managers (VRMs) reported engaging these volunteers. There is much to be gained by volunteers with disabilities and the agencies that engage them. Volunteering has provided individuals with disabilities myriad benefits such as raised levels of maturity and responsibility, improved socialization, relationship skills and development of social networks, increased sensitivity to the needs of others, increased self-confidence and a sense of empowerment, and vocational skills development (Brill, 1994; Choma & Ochocka, 2005; Miller, Schleien, Kraft, Bodo-Lehman, Frisoli, & Strack, 2003/2004; Miller, Schleien, Rider, Hall, Roche, Worsley, 2002; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998).

Likewise, VRMs speak to a number of benefits, such as more accurately representing their consumers and community (i.e., increased diversity), providing insights and perspectives on the broader community. A more robust volunteer base has also helped diversify services that agencies provide (e.g., a volunteer with a hearing impairment allows the agency to serve members of the deaf community for the very first time), increase awareness and tolerance of differences, and improve the agency's public image, publicity, and community relations. Furthermore, they have depicted volunteers with disabilities as dedicated and hard working, conscientious, reliable, and motivated to acquire new skills (Miller, Schleien, & Bedini, 2003; Miller, Schleien, Brooke, & Merrill, 2005; Stroud, Miller, Schleien, & Merrill, 2005).

Volunteer resource managers and individuals with disabilities have identified similar barriers to inclusive volunteering,

including staff not being prepared to engage volunteers with disabilities, negative attitudes among staff and consumers, inaccessible settings, and perceived skill deficits of individuals with disabilities (Balandin, Llewellyn, Dew, & Ballin, 2006; Balandin, Llewellyn, Dew, Ballin, & Schneider, 2006; Bruce, 2006; Choma & Ochocka, 2005; Graff & Vedell, 2003; Reilly, 2005). Volunteers with disabilities identified a lack of understanding and awareness of their potential assets and an underestimate of their abilities as additional barriers. VRMs also alluded to the perceived need for increases in staff supervision of individuals of diverse abilities being a barrier. Moreover, barriers of omission, a type of attitudinal barrier that is evident when society fails to provide for the needs of individuals of diverse abilities (e.g., individuals with disabilities never ask or wish to volunteer) are highly prevalent throughout our communities (Miller, Schleien, & Bedini, 2003; Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997).

Despite these initial doubts, Miller, Schleien, and Bedini (2003) found that more than two-thirds of volunteer resource managers (VRMs) who engaged volunteers with disabilities believed the resulting benefits far outweighed the barriers. Also, they noted that VRMs who were currently engaging volunteers with disabilities perceived far fewer barriers to their engagement when compared to barriers perceived by those who have not engaged them. Furthermore, there has been clear evidence that when structured and supported appropriately, barriers are overcome successfully and volunteers with disabilities become true assets to their communities (Balandin, Llewellyn, Dew, & Ballin, 2006; Choma & Ochocka, 2005; Miller et al., 2003/2004; Miller, et al., 2002; Stroud, Miller, Schleien, & Adams, 2006). What follows is an example of how one

community overcame negative perceptions and implemented key strategies that resulted in a diverse and successful volunteer corp.

One Community's Approach

In recognizing the "win-win" potential of inclusive volunteering, the Greensboro (NC) community came together to establish Partnership F.I.V.E. (Fostering Inclusive Volunteer Efforts), a collaborative initiative of the local volunteer center, volunteer resource managers and nonprofit agencies, disability advocacy groups, self-advocates, and inclusion specialists. The partnership was founded on two principles: 1) every citizen has a basic right to full community participation through volunteerism, to be recognized as a community asset, and to have the opportunity to give of oneself to others for the betterment of the community; and 2) every citizen has strengths and abilities to offer his or her community that will enhance the capacity of that community (Miller, Frisoli, Smythe, & Schleien, 2003). Partnership F.I.V.E. prepared VRMs to recruit, engage, and support volunteers of diverse abilities; prepared and supported individuals with disabilities to be successful volunteers; and worked with family members and care providers to sustain inclusive volunteer efforts. This broad approach to supporting volunteers of diverse abilities had a dramatic impact on the face of volunteering in the community. Follow-up evaluation indicated that the percentage of volunteers with disabilities in the community's volunteer pool grew substantially, increasing from 4.9% to 12.1%, within a three-year time frame.

It was determined that three key factors were responsible for the success of the partnership: 1) the careful matching of the assets of volunteers with the needs of agencies; 2) support was provided to volunteer coordinators in the form of

training, assistance with planning to be more accommodating, and technical support when a volunteer of diverse ability was engaged; and 3) a purposeful inclusive approach was utilized which paired volunteers without disabilities with volunteers who would be more successful with supports.

A Family Builds Community Through Inclusive Volunteering: A Mother's Perspective

The Partnership F.I.V.E. initiative began as a grassroots effort, and one of its earliest proponents was the Scoglio family. To understand why, you need to know their personal story. What follows is the mother's perspective, in her own words, concerning the important roles that inclusive volunteering played in surrounding her entire family with a strong and supportive community.

In Her Own Words . . .

Thirty years ago, following the birth of our first child, Erin, we learned almost immediately that she had some serious developmental delays. At 18 months, it was confirmed that she was also deaf. Devastated, my natural tendency was to withdraw. And that's exactly what I did – withdraw from other new parents and their babies and toddlers. It was just too painful to be around them and their typically-developing little ones. Their 'issues' seemed so trivial to me. Play dates and outgrown clothes . . . My issues were learning sign language and understanding the importance of 'language' and development, not to mention paying for hearing aids. I chose to focus on the differences between our family and others with new children instead of the similarities. The coming months brought improvement in her development, but her deafness remained. Life settled into a new 'normal' for our little family.

Four years later, after the birth of our son, Mike, we immediately learned he had Down syndrome. That desire to withdraw came flooding back, even stronger than the first time. The longing to 'hole up' at home was overcome with the need to see cardiologists and specialists. Lots of bad news and tons of medical tests and negative diagnoses followed. Thankfully, folks from church reached out to our family, and friends stood close-by during these difficult times. With their help and prayers, we got through it. But even with all of the support, it still just hurt too much. The coming months brought heart surgery in a faraway city and gradual improvements in Mike's development. As the 'danger' decreased, along came the desire to reach out to others who also had children with Down syndrome. Little had we planned on dealing with all of this at such a young age, but also little had either of us planned on getting involved with volunteering our very limited time. We didn't come from families where 'volunteerism' was instilled. Actually, to me, it was a foreign concept. I was busy caring for our son who had recovered from heart surgery and was catching up on his development. I was also busy continuing to learn sign language and interpreting for our young daughter at each of her soccer practices and games.

Still, this is exactly what we did. Over the years, I believe that volunteering (and through volunteering, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones) helped bring us back to reality. I learned that the rewards and confidence that resulted through the sharing of my life with others were in fact healing and beneficial to me. Helping other young families with their questions and concerns, and meeting other families who were dealing with even more difficult issues, made me realize that my life was my own God-given gift. Tremendous

confidence and a personal peace came with this realization.

Initially, my husband, John, and I became trained support parents with Family Support Network. I also served on their Board of Directors for several years. Later, John served on the Board of our local Arc (formerly, The Association for Retarded Citizens, a nonprofit agency that advocates for opportunities that enrich the lives of individuals with intellectual and related developmental disabilities) for many years. He also served on the NC Board of Schools for the Deaf and the NC State Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Later I served on the Board of Communication Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Finally, I've been very involved with our local Challenger Baseball League since its inception. This is a baseball league designed for any person with a disability to successfully play on a team. In every scenario, the agency's volunteer administrator not only respected our desire to give back to the community, but our ongoing interest in networking with professionals and other parents. They also offered us opportunities to provide input concerning agency services and policies, as they were keenly aware that parent volunteers had more to offer than simply their time.

Since we became familiar with the many personal benefits of volunteering in organizations we believe in, we encouraged Erin and Mike to volunteer as well. The benefits to their volunteering were two-fold. Firstly, the obvious benefit that anyone gets from volunteering is that it feels good to help others, knowing that your life experiences can help another person on their journey. Secondly, for individuals with disabilities, the act of volunteering often exposes them to a world they may not have the opportunity to fully experience in any other way. And when they are matched with

a buddy who does not have a disability, they are provided with a way to learn just what behaviors are appropriate and those that are not. Our daughter became involved as a volunteer with our local urban ministry, and she served many years as a member of a sign language troupe that performed at (among other places) nursing homes. These were "win/win" scenarios for everyone involved. Erin was also a volunteer counselor at several camps throughout the state. We were all thrilled and so proud when she was selected to carry the Olympic Torch when it traveled through Greensboro during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. She was chosen because of her many volunteer activities in our community.

Our son, Mike, has been volunteering for most of his life. As early as the fifth grade, we would visit the kindergarten class at his elementary school and read stories to the children. Most were 'typical' kids and a few had disabilities. This was a great experience for all who were involved. Mike became the role model for the children in that class. Prior to this, beginning in the second grade, Mike became involved as an actor with our local community theater. Because of his involvement, our entire family became involved with the Community Theatre of Greensboro. Mike and John have acted in 8 different plays between them, and they have been on stage together and individually. Other family members have worked backstage during most of these productions. It was a blast and a huge confidence builder for Mike. When not on stage, he enjoys ushering for the shows and has also ushered at another downtown theatre.

As a Challenger Baseball League player, Mike initially was supported by a volunteer buddy. Soon he was not only playing independently, but also served as buddy for another player. Mike volunteered at a second game and pushed a young friend

using a wheelchair around the bases. When he was in middle school, he became involved with Partnership F.I.V.E. and was matched with a nondisabled buddy. This was a terrific experience for him because it was the first opportunity he had to volunteer without a family member coaching him. Through this inclusive volunteer program, Mike worked at an Adult Daycare Center and at the Greensboro Public Library; both experiences being major confidence boosters.

As a young adult, Mike currently holds two part-time jobs in our community, at a restaurant and at the local YMCA. One Halloween he volunteered to help out in the YMCA's "Haunted Chamber" and came up with the idea to approach Community Theatre of Greensboro for a ticket donation as a grand prize for the costume contest. He facilitated this and tickets were donated. As an athlete, he's been a power lifter for Special Olympics for several years, and has reaped the benefits of that program's volunteers. At the same time, he still plays baseball and serves as an assistant coach for his team. He's really gone 'full circle' with Challenger. He loves watching out for his team and helping them play. It's his way of giving back to a league that has given him so much for so many years.

There are a few common threads that were essential to the success of our children as volunteers. In each case, volunteer administrators and agency staff focused on their strengths. Rather than being blinded by potential limitations associated with their disabilities and labels, staff became familiar with their individual assets and then identified agency needs that would capitalize on those strengths. Erin and Mike were never forced into 'cookie-cutter' volunteer roles. To the contrary, roles were constructed around Erin and Mike, and subsequently, the agencies benefited in ways that they never could have anticipated.

Also, agency staff established open communication with us and our children. This enabled us to help staff identify simple accommodations when an occasional barrier arose and before challenges became insurmountable. Furthermore, agency staff recognized how Erin and Mike were blossoming in their experiences and adjusted their volunteer roles accordingly. Mike's progression from being a player supported by a volunteer buddy, to serving as a buddy assisting a player in a wheelchair, to becoming an assistant coach in the Challenger Baseball league is one example of how this worked. Simply put, the agencies where Erin and Mike volunteered demonstrated an ongoing willingness to capitalize on their many assets and problem-solve until a "win-win" situation was established and maintained.

Our children grew up in a mid-sized southern city. The sense of community that we have experienced has provided well for them. In school and in the community, they were not 'lost' in a sea of services and programs. Instead, due to the creativity of a community that cared, they flourished and had many unique opportunities that helped them develop into concerned and caring members of their communities. The saying goes "It takes a village..." Our experience expands that to "It takes the creativity and caring of a few..."

Suggestions for Volunteer Resource Managers

From our understanding gleaned through Partnership F.I.V.E. and volunteers such as the Scoglios, we offer six suggestions on how VRMs could increase the likelihood of success with inclusive volunteering:

1) Extend an invitation: Reach out to individuals with disabilities and the agencies that serve them. Inform them that you are interested in recruiting

volunteers of diverse abilities. Many of these individuals have never been asked to volunteer, and subsequently, may have never considered themselves as contributors to community capacity.

2) Take an asset-based approach:

Concentration should be placed on identifying individual strengths that the volunteers have to offer.

3. Make a careful match: Ensure that a “win-win” situation is created by making an accurate match between individuals’ strengths and your agency’s needs. The cold reality: if your agency is not benefiting from the contributions of any volunteer, you are perpetuating the stereotypical, charitable position of the individual in society at the expense of your agency’s resources.

4) Don’t hesitate to ask the experts:

Establish open lines of communication with your volunteers, and family members when appropriate. When barriers arise, ask these individuals how they can be overcome.

Accommodations are often simple and inexpensive when we ask the experts.

5) Consider the power of peers:

Inclusive volunteering becomes substantially more powerful when we purposefully partner individuals with and without disabilities. In some cases, serving as a peer partner has revitalized veteran volunteers in need of a new ways of contributing to the agencies in which they serve. Others have elected to volunteer solely because they had a desire to work with an individual who had a disability.

6) Empower staff and volunteers with knowledge: Provide disability awareness and etiquette training to staff and volunteers. A little bit of knowledge will go a long way in helping everyone to feel more comfortable working with volunteers of diverse abilities and

improving the quality of services provided to the constituents of your agency.

Conclusion

As the economy continues to stagnate and the budgets of nonprofit agencies continue to shrink, “volunteers become even more vital to the health of our nation’s communities” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2009, p. 1). Concurrent with this growing dependency on volunteers, a staggering number of volunteers are being lost (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, & Washburn, 2009). The Corporation for National and Community Service (2007) reported that of the 65.4 million individuals who volunteered in 2005, 20.9 million did not continue to volunteer during the following year. Subsequently, nonprofit agencies will need to become significantly more creative in broadening their volunteer pools. The time is now for everyone, regardless of diagnosis or level of ability, to have the opportunity to “live the good life” by volunteering and giving of themselves to their communities. Individuals of diverse abilities must be encouraged to tap into their intact strengths to make our communities more powerful, and in turn, better places to live. The Partnership F.I.V.E. inclusive volunteering initiative serves as an excellent example depicting the necessary collaboration between parties to facilitate engagement of members of our society who have not traditionally volunteered their time. A local volunteer center, nonprofit agencies, and advocates collaborated to overcome the real and perceived barriers that have traditionally prevented people of diverse abilities from giving back to their communities. One of the most effective of all strategies to broaden the volunteer pool was by asking people who had never been asked before, to become involved. The

Scoglio family is a prime example of how we could build community capacity by recognizing all community members as assets, and as potential givers to their community, rather than always being the recipients of others' volunteer efforts. From being "holed up" at home and riding the medical roller coaster, as many families who have children with disabilities experience, this extraordinary family broke all stereotypes and made substantial impacts in their community. However, we are not certain that "win-win" says it all. Inclusive volunteering benefits more than individuals with disabilities and the communities in which they serve; inclusive volunteering enriches all of society.

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**Not Just Recipients of Service:
Including People with Disabilities in Volunteer Abroad Programs**

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Abstract

Volunteer service has the power to contribute to the vitality of communities, countries, and people around the world. It also has the power to transform volunteers in the process, leading to increased confidence, a strong sense of personal accomplishment, new professional aspirations, and more. International volunteerism can be a particularly empowering experience for people with disabilities who traditionally have been recipients – not providers – of volunteer service. Like all volunteers, those with disabilities bring a unique knowledge and skill set to any program or project. Volunteers with disabilities also help dispel stereotypes and change perceptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do in countries and communities with fewer opportunities than the United States. In return, volunteers with disabilities, as well as their fellow volunteers without disabilities, can gain insight into their own culturally based perceptions of disability through the lens provided by interactions and experiences in a different culture. In this article, the authors introduce volunteer resource managers to information and resources on how to create inclusive volunteer abroad programs, as well as success stories from international volunteers with disabilities, compiled by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE). Sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, the NCDE is a comprehensive resource on advising and tools for people with disabilities, professionals, educational institutions and organizations on increasing disability inclusion in international study, volunteer, teach and other exchange programs.

Key Words:

volunteers, international, disability, accessibility, inclusive

Introduction

Volunteer service has the power to contribute to the vitality of communities, countries and people around the world. It also has the power to transform volunteers in the process, leading to increased confidence, a strong sense of personal accomplishment, new professional aspirations, and more. Motivated by these gains, volunteers with disabilities also help dispel stereotypes and change perceptions about what people with disabilities can and

cannot do in countries and communities with fewer volunteer opportunities than the United States.

In Paraguay, where Shannon Coe served as a Peace Corps volunteer, local people with physical disabilities are not often seen in society because the inaccessible infrastructure makes it difficult for them to leave their homes without a companion. “When I pushed myself around my community, people stared at me curiously. Many had probably never seen an

independent woman in a wheelchair before. Every time I heard, 'Qué quapa (you are hard-working)!' when going to work on my own, I knew that I had changed another person's perspective." Like Coe, people with disabilities have valuable contributions to make as international volunteers, yet historically have been underrepresented or underutilized in volunteer abroad programs. Those programs often focus on serving the disability community rather than engaging volunteers with disabilities as leaders and contributors to accomplish volunteer program goals. People with disabilities have the same desire to contribute, give back and gain skills as their non-disabled peers. With simple accommodations, creativity and a can-do attitude, any international volunteer program can be made accessible to volunteers with all types of disabilities.

Designing and Implementing Inclusive Volunteer Abroad Programs

Volunteer resource managers (VRMs) should be proactive within their organization and with overseas partners to ensure they are operationalizing values of diversity and non-discriminatory practices. VRMs can use the following tools to assess their ability to include participants with disabilities in their overseas programs:

- *Self Assessment and Action Plan on Inclusion of Participants with Disabilities* (available at <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/inclusionassessment>) are informal assessment tools designed to guide organizations in determining strengths and weaknesses at the programmatic and staff preparedness level, and helps organizations articulate strategies and action steps for including people with disabilities in their programs.
- *A Practice of Yes! Working with Overseas Partners to Include*

Students with Disabilities (available at <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/poy>) focuses on overseas program sites, partner agreements, knowing your participants, assessing risk versus empowerment, and more.

People with all types of disabilities have volunteered in cities, towns, and villages around the world. Martha Harris, who is blind, volunteered with at-risk young adults in Guatemala. Elyse Rolino, a deaf student at Gallaudet University, volunteered with children in Costa Rica. As a wheelchair user, Megan Smith's volunteer experiences in Nepal, Costa Rica, and Peru led her to a career in international affairs. Making programs accessible means different things for different individuals depending on disability type, individual needs and personal preferences. "Accessibility" may entail removing physical barriers, providing sign language interpretation, or simply finding tasks appropriate to each person's individual skills. In many cases, the same adjustments that make volunteer sites accessible to older individuals, including those well into their 80's, make volunteer sites accessible to people with disabilities of all ages. Thinking ahead and being open and welcoming to all participants is easier if these issues are addressed in the initial design stages of a volunteer abroad program. The following are a few questions to consider when creating an inclusive volunteer program:

- Is the physical environment hilly? Is the ground firm? Are there alternative routes? Can someone locally orient volunteers to the site?
- Is there an accessible toilet, or can a portable toilet be installed, at the site? For people who are blind, can a guide rope from housing to the outdoor toilet be installed? Is there

accessible housing? Can a portable ramp or a shower chair be used?

- Is accessible transportation available? What do local people with disabilities use? What does the individual use in less-than-perfect accessibility situations?
- What materials (e.g., computer disks, large print, MP3 audio, etc.) can be produced in alternative formats if needed? Could someone assist as a reader?
- Are there sign language interpreters available? Can a pen and paper be used informally and an interpreter found through a local organization of people who are deaf?
- What are participants' dietary needs? Is refrigeration available at the site?
- Are rules and project instructions stated concretely and clearly? Can these be written down, repeated or stated one at a time, orally and/or visually? Can peers act as a team to work together?

Practical Next Steps

When a motivated individual with a disability applies to participate in a volunteer abroad program, a VRM should:

- Have the volunteer communicate directly with overseas partners to establish a personal relationship and to discuss his or her access needs. Some volunteers may find it useful to provide a video illustrating how s/he accomplishes tasks in everyday life to dispel some of the assumptions overseas partners may make about his or her independence level.
- Enlist the volunteer to research access in the host country by contacting local disability organizations. The NCDE website features a searchable database

(available at

<http://www.miusa.org/orgsearch>) of disability organizations worldwide.

Local partners can also do this proactively.

- Identify specific barriers overseas partners are concerned about and determine which are attitudinal versus infrastructural. Contact the NCDE for specific ideas about ways to remove or mitigate barriers.
- Find allies in the host community (e.g., someone who has a family member with a disability or an advocate within a disability organization) to step forward and say, "I will host this volunteer," or a fellow volunteer who says, "I will support him/her in the first week." By demonstrating broad community support to your overseas partners, you are conveying a positive message that will likely translate to a successful experience for the volunteer.

Cultures are neither static nor stagnant in their views of disability. The historic United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed by 144 countries. Engaging volunteers with disabilities at overseas sites and partnering with local disability organizations to arrange accommodations and identify local needs is a powerful way to educate partners on changing perspectives and laws (even within their own communities).

Budgeting for Inclusion

The investment of financial resources represents a critical benchmark of an organization's commitment toward diversity. Most disability-related accommodations are simple and low-cost (e.g., the purchase or rental of a portable ramp, making program materials available electronically or in large print, etc.).

However, forward-thinking volunteer abroad programs incorporate a “disability accommodation” line item into every program and administrative budget to ensure that financial resources are available to make programs accessible to people with disabilities who require more expensive accommodations to participate fully in an overseas program. Examples include providing a sign language interpreter for a deaf volunteer or arranging for wheelchair accessible transportation at a program site. See *Budgeting for Inclusion* (available at <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/budgeting>) for more information and strategies on planning ahead to support the full inclusion of volunteers with disabilities in volunteer abroad programs.

Providing Accommodations at Overseas Sites

The following are a few of the many creative adaptations and approaches that have been used in the past by volunteers with disabilities at overseas project sites. Most are inexpensive and involve readily available materials.

- A broomstick with a sponge on the end can be used to clean wide tabletops from a wheelchair.
- A paintbrush on an extension can be used to paint ceilings or high walls.
- With proper orientation, a participant who is blind or visually impaired can help with lifting, building or painting.
- A participant who uses a wheelchair may be able to carry heavy loads on his/her lap.
- A participant with limited strength in his or her arms may be able to do fine woodcarvings or sign painting.
- A participant who has difficulty walking or standing can use a chair to work sitting down.

- A participant who cannot do heavy physical labor can help organize logistics, such as selecting groups, assigning projects, or organizing kitchen duties.

The NCDE website includes a wealth of step-by-step information and resources on accommodating individuals with all types of disabilities on overseas programs. See *Tools for Exchange Professionals* (available at <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools>) for links to helpful tips sheets, forms, and articles on recruitment, participant advising, overseas placement and other suggestions on designing and implementing inclusive programs. Note that many volunteers with disabilities will participate fully without requesting any special arrangements.

Success Stories of Volunteers with Disabilities

People with disabilities have volunteered in nearly every country in the world, and many have shared their stories online through the NCDE website. For a complete list of stories by and about volunteers with disabilities, see *Volunteer and Teach Abroad* at <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/exchnngtype/voltchabd>.

- The Volunteer Abroad issue of NCDE's *A World Awaits You* online journal (available at <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/volunteeraway>) includes information and stories written by people with disabilities who embarked on life-changing journeys to countries and communities around the world, volunteered their time, skills and passion, and had the cultural experience of a lifetime. Volunteers share tips on everything from choosing a program to fundraising to foreign languages and reflect on the challenges and rewards of volunteering far from home.

Volunteer program administrators at organizations such as Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS) and the Cultural Restoration Tourism Project (CRTP) discuss their commitment to including volunteers with disabilities in their programs and strategies for making accommodations at overseas sites. Special sections highlight international volunteer opportunities in the United States, international work camps, and more.

- *DeafBlind Traveler and Volunteer Touches the Developing World* (www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/roschaert) was written by Christine Roschaert, a young woman who volunteered in Nigeria for a year as part of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) organization, and has since traveled throughout Oceania and Asia.
- *Diversity in the Peace Corps* (www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/houston) was written by Pamela Houston, a returned Peace Corps volunteer who served in the Republic of Kiribati, where she was the only volunteer with a disability at the time.
- *Faith, Service, and Community in Israel and India* (www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/rogozen) was written by Nehama Rogozen, an American who is deaf who studied in Jerusalem and lived on a kibbutz while abroad in Israel, then traveled to India to help build a school.

Conclusion

Part of any volunteer abroad experience is learning to adapt to new situations. All volunteers, including those with disabilities, may have to adjust to living and working conditions that are new to him or her. Sometimes it is not possible to make overseas program sites fully or ideally accessible. People with disabilities have the right to choose adventure and risk, and to find their own ways to contend with difficult conditions. The role of the volunteer program administrator is to provide potential volunteers with complete and accurate information about program sites, and to encourage those with disabilities to discuss possible accommodations and make informed choices about their participation. A person with a disability who is willing to be flexible in less ideal situations should be able to join any program that fits his or her interests and skills. This is often referred to as a philosophy of "Challenge by Choice" which can guide the individual, the organization and its overseas partners in adopting a positive attitude toward inclusion and the rights of the individual to participate.

NCDE provides personalized, free technical assistance services to international exchange professionals, including volunteer program administrators, on designing and implementing inclusive overseas programs and projects. For more information or assistance, contact the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange at Mobility International USA, 132 E. Broadway, Suite 343, Eugene, Oregon 97401, USA, Tel/TTY: 541-343-1284, FAX: 541-343-6812, E-mail: clearinghouse@miusa.org, or via an online form that may be found at <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/aboutncde/infoquestionnaire>

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Stephanie Gray is a consultant for Mobility International USA. In this role, she has provided support and training to international exchange organizations regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities on academic and cultural exchange programs in the United States. She also has written and edited articles and publications for the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange including the book *Building Bridges: A Manual on Including People with Disabilities in International Exchange Programs*. Previously, Ms. Gray served as International Exchange Program Coordinator for Mobility International USA and Program Officer for the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research in Moscow, Russia. She has managed all aspects of program administration, including participant recruitment, program planning, budgeting, evaluation and workshop facilitation. Ms. Gray holds a Master of Arts degree in International Affairs from The George Washington University.

**4-H PetPALS: A Volunteer-Facilitated Program Engaging Youth, Seniors,
and Individuals with Disabilities**

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Abstract

4-H PetPALS (People and Animals Linking Successfully) is a volunteer-facilitated program that links young people, pets, adult volunteers, and seniors in a cross-generational educational experience. Guided by a comprehensive curriculum, young people gain valuable experience and skills that will enable them to successfully interact and work with senior adults and individuals with disabilities. The curriculum model is easily adaptable to any youth-serving organization and agency that works with local senior and/or assisted living facilities.

Key Words:

seniors, cross-generational, individuals with disabilities, pets

Introduction

More than 37 million people over the age of 65 live in the United States, with more than 14 million of those individuals having a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With increased family mobility, geographic distances, and multiple marriages affecting today's American family, it is often difficult for strong grandparent-grandchild relationships to develop. Few of today's youth have much contact with older adults in their communities. It is easy for young people and senior adults to have stereotyped views of each other instead of seeing each other as individuals with real feelings, needs, and desires. When youth and senior adults do interact, new friendships develop and existing relationships are enhanced. Senior adults can teach youth how to make decisions and overcome some of life's

obstacles. Youth can share with older adults what it is like growing up in today's society with its endless opportunities and difficulties. Both young people's and older adult's lives are enriched as linkages across generations are developed within families and communities.

Curriculum/Program Overview

Implemented in local communities, 4-H PetPALS (People and Animals Linking Successfully) is a volunteer-facilitated program, delivered through youth organizations and agencies, developed by Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development. Designed as a comprehensive curriculum, youth, senior adults and companion animals are joined together to enhance cross-generational communications and understanding. The overall goal of the program is to provide a vehicle by which

cross-generational communication is enhanced, strengthened, and promoted for the benefit of youth and adults. Participants gain practical and useful knowledge and skills that will prepare them to work with and support senior adults and individuals with disabilities.

A key component of the 4-H PetPALS program is the engagement of Master 4-H PetPALS volunteers who teach youth skills needed to participate in animal-assisted activities with residents in senior assisted-living and skilled nursing facilities. Adult volunteers are required to participate in a comprehensive and rigorous training and workshop prior to working with youth who will visit senior healthcare facilities.

During the required training program, adult volunteers learn how to implement and adapt the curriculum to fit their specific club or group needs, including how best to work with and support individuals with varying levels of ability. The volunteers bring pets they plan to use during program instruction to the workshop. This allows the adult participants to learn more about their own pets' behaviors, and better understand what is required of them to be successful when visiting and interacting with individuals with varying levels of ability. It also serves as a foundation from which to transfer their experiences to the youth (and pets) they plan to teach.

Using the experiential learning model, volunteers learn to identify how dogs, cats, and rabbits communicate; how to approach, temperament test, socialize, and train these animals for animal-assisted activities; and how to conduct the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen tests and Socialized 4-H PetPALS tests, which animals must pass prior to participating in 4-H PetPALS animal-assisted activities. Volunteers also learn how to recognize stress and its implications in visiting animals, and how the pets use calming

signals to displace their stress. Master 4-H PetPALS volunteers learn how to familiarize pets with medical equipment (including wheel chairs, walkers, canes, etc), noises, odors, and the unique physical environment of assisted living facilities. Additional strategies that volunteers learn include how to implement pet wellness programs, the animal health requirements of different facilities, the importance of well-balanced, high quality nutrition, and daily exercise for the pets.

After learning about activities of daily living and other qualifications of independent living for senior adults, health conditions related to aging, as well as non-age-related medical conditions, are discussed. This discussion is followed by volunteers engaging in sensitivity training, stroke simulations, eye condition simulations, and hearing and speech impairment recognition activities. Volunteers also learn communication techniques for people with many different conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease, hearing impairment, and stroke conditions.

Selecting facilities and preparing for the visit are critical components of successful programs. Throughout the training, volunteers learn how to select a facility, contact that facility, meet with the appropriate administrator and staff, and learn the facility's protocol, including the best times to visit, how to bring closure to visits, and how to prepare youth if a resident they visit dies. Meeting with staff and visiting the facility prior to the program provides an opportunity for adult volunteers to learn about the residents and better understand their ability and comfort level when interacting and communicating with youth and their pets. Discussion is always held with volunteers on how to determine when it is not appropriate to visit with a particular pet due to stress, age, or health

issues, or when young people should not visit.

Finally, volunteers engage youth in role playing activities where youth and their pet's role play with other youth who are acting as senior adults or people with disabilities. Following these activities, youth and their pets actually visit the facility under the volunteer's guidance, and then debrief after the visits.

Requirements and Implementation

A 4-H PetPALS club or group must be lead by a Master 4-H PetPALS Volunteer Leader or facilitator who has successfully completed a comprehensive and rigorous training program. When recruiting and engaging volunteers, program staff should identify individuals who: (1) understand the key elements of a positive youth development experience; (2) are committed to youth people and their growth; (3) are dedicated to young people and sensitive to their abilities and needs; (4) commit to following organizational policies and procedures; (5) actively participate in a 6-hour workshop; and (6) commit to recruiting young people to be a part of the program.

At the completion of the required workshop, 4-H PetPALS volunteer leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement the program. Working in partnership with paid staff of the organization, volunteer leaders should follow the steps below to begin their programs: (1) identify a minimum of five youth, ages 9-18 and their pets; (2) provide training to youth and their pets, including socialization skills; (3) identify local facilities for youth and pets to visit; and (4) engage parents/guardians in programs.

Benefits

There are significant benefits for youth, pets, volunteers, and service recipients as a result of participating in the

4-H PetPALS program. By engaging in the 4-H PetPALS project, youth learn to select, socialize, and train appropriate pets to participate as youth-pet teams in animal-assisted activities. Participants learn how animals behave and communicate, and how to interpret their own pet's temperament and personality. Further, young people practice safe and humane animal handling techniques, involve their pets in wellness programs, and practice responsible pet ownership and care.

As part of the curriculum, youth wear components of an instant aging kit and participate in aging sensitivity simulation activities to learn about the physical changes associated with aging. Sensitivity activities also focus on learning about medical conditions that young people and adult volunteers may encounter, as well as communication strategies when meeting senior adults and/or individuals with disabilities. While focused on aging, the same activities are relevant for working with individuals with disabilities who may be the same age as the young person.

Conclusion

The 4-H PetPALS curriculum may be used with any youth organization that seeks to expand their programming to include a cross-generational relationship with pets as one vehicle. Regardless of the organization, the steps that must be implemented to be successful include (1) introduction to human-animal interactions; (2) understanding animal behavior; (3) identifying appropriate animals; (4) learning about senior adults; (5) identifying a residential living facility to visit; (6) preparing youth for the visit; (7) conducting the visit without the pets; (8) preparing pets to visit; (9) practicing with pets; and (10) visiting the facility with the pets. Implementing each of these steps according to the curriculum will result in a positive

experience for young people as they learn about the human-animal bond, and strengthen their understanding of senior adults and physical limitations that individuals may have.

The 4-H PetPALS curriculum can be ordered through Ohio State University Extension Media Distribution (tel. 614-292-1607) via the online catalog at <http://estore.osu.-extension.org> The Product Code for this curriculum is 230GPM and the cost is \$32.25.

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4-H Shine Up and Step Out: Engaging Youth with Disabilities in service

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Abstract

4-H Shine Up and Step Out is a volunteer-facilitated program that engages both youth and adult volunteers in a series of activities that bring to light disability-related issues and barriers often faced when individuals with disabilities want to participate in community service and volunteer programs. Guided by a comprehensive inclusion curriculum, young people and adults gain valuable experience and skills that enable them to successfully interact and work with individuals with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities. The curriculum model is easily adaptable to any youth-serving organization and agency that wishes to become more inclusive and engage youth or adult volunteers with disabilities.

Key Words:

disabilities, youth, adults, inclusion, volunteers

Introduction

Our world faces profound challenges that require the engagement of youth and adults, including those with disabilities, as active citizens and volunteers if we are to effectively overcome them. Now more than ever, all young people desire the opportunity to participate in the civic life of their communities. If performed within structured programs and organizations, youth volunteerism and service is a proven intervention strategy that helps all young people navigate childhood and transition to adulthood by building connections to their communities, making academics interesting and relevant, providing resiliency when circumstances inevitably change, promoting positive social behaviors, preparing youth for the workplace, and providing them with lifelong habits of leadership, problem-solving, empathy, and self-reliance.

Unfortunately, youth with disabilities are frequently overlooked as volunteers or

providers of service, and have not been encouraged or given the opportunity to serve. While many obstacles can deter youth with disabilities from volunteering and participating in community service opportunities, a volunteer program's outreach efforts are more likely to succeed if paid and volunteer staff are aware of disability-related issues that might arise in recruiting and working with youth, and the program's present strengths and weaknesses are assessed with respect to engaging youth with disabilities.

Program Overview

Implemented in local communities, the *4-H Shine Up and Step Out* is a volunteer-facilitated program, delivered through youth organizations and agencies, developed by the Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program at North Carolina State University. Through this comprehensive curriculum, youth and adults

partner together to gain knowledge and to participate in hands-on activities that simulate barriers and obstacles that youth with disabilities face daily. The 12-lesson curriculum features activities such as navigating an obstacle course while simulating mobility and visual impairments and doing an onsite evaluation for accessibility. Several lessons emphasize etiquette for working with youth (and adults) with disabilities, the use of “person-first language,” assistive technology, and communication. The overall goal of the program is to provide youth and adults with effective strategies for engaging youth with disabilities in their programs.

Requirements and Implementation

Volunteer involving organizations have used the *Shine Up and Step Out* curriculum in a number of different (and often, multiple) ways. The curriculum is designed to be lead by an older-youth (i.e., cross-peer delivery involving teens teaching younger youth) or adult volunteer leader or facilitator who has successfully completed the curriculum training. Involving youth with disabilities in volunteer and community service efforts often means providing for accommodations that remove barriers to involvement. When recruiting and engaging volunteers with disabilities, program staff should be aware of potential challenges:

- (1) it is not always obvious what accommodations are most appropriate for a given person or situation;
- (2) many individuals have not been in situations where they meet, much less know, individuals who have a disability;
- (3) organizations that place youth with disabilities must be aware of tokenism (i.e., young people with disabilities engage in volunteerism to gain real experience and to serve and

to contribute to their communities, not to be “token” members of a committee or advisory panel).

At the completion of the curriculum training, *Shine Up and Step Out* youth and adult volunteers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in implementing the program. Working in partnership with paid staff of the organization, volunteers should understand that youth coping with both adolescence and a disability face difficult life adjustments and challenges, such as dealing with the limitations of their disability; recognizing, expressing, and accepting their feelings; understanding how others feel about and react to their disability; and just being a teenager . . . one who is also a person with a disability.

Benefits

As social capital declines in the economic and social reality today (Putnam, 2000), youth volunteering can offer important opportunities to other young people, and to volunteer/service organizations to help overcome social exclusion and social discord. In addition to personal gain, youth volunteers were found to have more positive attitudes toward society: volunteers acquired social responsibility, had more knowledge about others in their community, improved their skills, and were more capable of decision making than non-volunteers (Sundeen & Raskoff, 2000). As youth volunteer with other youth, they promote social inclusion and the trustworthiness of the organization in the eyes of the clients. Youth volunteers who worked with people with disabilities showed greater willingness to interact with disabled people than non-volunteers (Carter, Hughes, Copeland, & Breen, 2001).

The 4-H *Shine Up and Step Out* curriculum may be used with any youth organization that seeks to expand their programming to include youth with

disabilities. The curriculum aims to support volunteer and community service organizations looking to engage youth with disabilities as program volunteers, yet may have concerns about proper etiquette, accommodation strategies, and overcoming misconceptions.

For too long, individuals with disabilities have been viewed as recipients and not providers of service. In an effort to encourage everyone to serve, the *Shine Up and Step Out* curriculum challenges volunteer resource managers to consider ways to involve youth volunteers with disabilities in volunteer programs. It is critical that we all begin to view youth with disabilities as valuable and skilled resources, rather than individuals who are only able to participate on the receiving end of volunteer service.

The *Shine Up and Step Out* curriculum can be ordered directly from Dr. Mitzi Downing at North Carolina State University (mitzi_downing@ncsu.edu). The cost is

\$5.00.

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About the Author

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The Self-image of a Mentally Retarded Volunteer ¹

Elaine K. Hollander, & Hedy Peyser

University of the District of Columbia & Hebrew Home of Greater Washington
(no current contact information available)

(Editor-generated) Abstract

The authors present an expansive case-study outlining the life and volunteer career path of Miriam, a mentally retarded volunteer, at the Hebrew Home in Washington, D.C. They describe her struggles as a volunteer, the challenges of Hebrew Home employees, and the personal successes Miriam gained through the experience of working at the Hebrew Home.

¹ Editor's Note: the term "mentally retarded" as used throughout this article is that of the original authors as first published in 1980, and in no way reflects the philosophies or sensitivities of the current Editor, Editorial Board, or Editorial Reviewers of *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

mental retardation, case-study, volunteer, Hebrew Home

Work can be a way for the mentally retarded to feel useful- to be contributing members of society. Individuals work to fulfill economic, social and/or psychological needs. The mentally retarded have long been deprived of their human rights, including the right to work. Mentally retarded individuals are able to benefit from a systematic and structured environment designed to improve and develop their abilities and work skills. All too often the normal channels of the rehabilitative process, e.g., vocational rehabilitation, fail to provide adequate services for the mentally retarded. This paper examines and presents another avenue designed to serve the rehabilitation and normalization of a mentally retarded adult.

We will explore the development of a full-time, structured work plan for a mentally retarded volunteer, who performed meaningful work and established mutually beneficial relationships with elderly residents and staff in a long-term care

facility. In the rehabilitative process, Miriam's self-esteem was enhanced and she gained greater independence in activities of daily living. To examine Miriam's normalization process, a case study approach will be used. Further, her responses to a questionnaire regarding a volunteer's role perception and self-image will be compared to responses obtained in a research study of 144 non-retarded volunteers.

The Hebrew Home of Greater Washington, D.C., a structured community living environment for the elderly, served as the setting for the training model. This training model is unique in that it serves individuals with a variety of handicaps as well as normal individuals. It also provides a variety of work opportunities so that volunteers can experience choice and a degree of responsibility.

In October, 1975, a telephone call was received by the Director of Volunteers

of the Hebrew Home from Miriam's sister-in-law inquiring about the possibility of Miriam, then age 43, doing volunteer work at the Hebrew Home. A meeting was arranged with the brother, sister-in-law and Miriam for the purpose of evaluating her potential for volunteer work.

During the interview it was learned from the family that Miriam's first three years of development were "normal." At age three, she had mastoiditis with very high fever, and after surgery, a marked slowdown was noted in her ability to learn. Endocrine tests showed nothing abnormal. She attended special classes in the New York Public schools until age 18. She learned to read, write and do simple arithmetic, but her reading comprehension lagged.

At age 25, her family placed her in a job program for the retarded, but the training was minimal. During a five year period she worked intermittently and part-time, first in a candy factory placing chocolates in boxes, and later in a jewelry factory placing rhinestones into pins. Both factories closed, and Miriam never earned a salary again.

We were informed that Miriam's parents believes her ability was even more limited than the school psychological testing indicated. She was sheltered and never allowed any significant independence. She occupied herself by watching T.V., occasionally knitting, but was not encouraged to do household chores. Her parents made every effort to protect her against disappointments, and she developed many irrational fears. At age 43, after her parents' deaths, Miriam's older brother and his wife brought her to Washington, D.C., and assumed total responsibility for her.

Initially, we had doubts about Miriam's ability to perform meaningful volunteer work. She seemed nervous, excited, distracted, and it was difficult to keep her focused on any one subject. She appeared insecure, had a limited attention

span, and her affect was mechanical and flat. She told us how much she liked old people, but seemed aloof when introduced to some of the residents.

However, moved by the family's sincere desire to help her become more independent, the situation was viewed as offering a meaningful challenge as well as being potentially beneficial to the residents of the home. We began with a three-hour orientation involving the family, including a tour, introductions to staff and a review of rules and regulations. The family agreed to reinforce the learning that has taken place during the orientation and to work together with us. The family's goal was to help Miriam attain as much independence as possible... to use public transportation, maintain her own apartment and do her own shopping.

Supervision

A fundamental principle in training the retarded individual to function is that the training must be accomplished in short, methodical steps, to include the following:

1. Orientation, observation and assessment.
2. Settling in, or adapting to the surroundings.
3. General training.
4. Detailed, practical training.
5. Actual work itself (Lennig, 1978).

In essence, these training stages were incorporated in our plan to integrate Miriam in our volunteer training program. We began with an orientation period involving extensive on-site supervision. One of our most capable and qualified volunteers, a member of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), agreed to undertake the supervision and training of Miriam. Miriam became an honorary member of RSVP since she was too young to join. She attended the meetings and eventually was provided with

free transportation. As part of the general training, Miriam accompanied the senior volunteer on her daily rounds, visiting residents and escorting them to and from physical therapy, clinic and various activities.

It took Miriam approximately five months to feel secure enough to function on her own. Building on her phenomenal ability to memorize names and room numbers, combined with her abundant energy, the detailed practical training began. We decided she could escort residents to and from their appointments in the physical therapy department, a job involving long periods of waiting. In one week, Miriam demonstrated that she was capable of handling the work and was asked to extend her volunteer activities to three days a week. A few weeks later Miriam was taught to collate printed material and deliver bank statements and weekly schedules to the residents.

During the final phase of actual work training, we were able to provide Miriam with a highly structured and supportive environment. She had daily conferences with the Director of Volunteers. Staff (department heads and nursing aides) were consulted in order to analyze and evaluate the appropriateness of her assignments. Miriam's strengths and weaknesses were evaluated on an on-going basis, and she was encouraged to express her interests and job preferences.

Dealing with Problems

When Miriam first started her work in physical therapy, she was relatively quiet and reserved. As she became more secure, she began to talk incessantly, often in loud tones, constantly saying "I know," and frequently interrupting staff. She served as a "one-woman grapevine," conveying all the news to us, and once had to be reprimanded for discussing privileged patient

information. Miriam's verbal excesses became very annoying to the staff and many conferences were held to find a way to deal with this problem. It was decided that each of us would speak to Miriam privately, firmly, but kindly, aware that she was anxious to please and fearful of rejection.

We were assisted by the other volunteers who also reminded Miriam that she was talking too much. She would usually quiet down for a few days, but then we would hear "See, I have stopped talking so much," of course interrupting staff in order to say this. However, with constant reinforcement, we had moderate success.

After Miriam was with us about four months, her family provided her with an apartment a few blocks from their home and taught her to do her own shopping. Miriam was on her own for the first time in her life and, of course, problems developed. For example, her personal grooming had been supervised by her family; now her hair was oily and she had an offensive body odor. Constant reminders and demonstrations of proper body care proved futile; Miriam insisted that she showered twice daily. The help launched a major educational campaign. An endocrinologist was consulted and ruled out hormonal problems. Constant reminders, positive feedback when her hair looked nice, and the fact that the RSVP volunteers brought her lovely clothes, all helped in our attempts, and Miriam began to take pride in her physical appearance. She was especially proud of her volunteer uniform and identification pin.

Close contact with Miriam's family was essential and provided the basis for our success. Matters discussed, and reinforced by them, included clothing, grooming and excessive talking. Miriam visited her family weekly and they provided her with an allowance. It took Miriam's brother three years of paper work, lost forms, phone calls and personal visits to the Social Security

office to secure for Miriam a \$180 Supplementary Security income. Her family still subsidizes her financially.

Relationships with Staff, Residents and Fellow Volunteers

Miriam has proven to be a most reliable volunteer. She is always punctual, and during her three years as a volunteer she has accumulated over 2000 hours of volunteer service. The staff deeply appreciates this devotion.

Her relationships with staff and residents are excellent. Miriam, always friendly, greets everybody at least three times a day. She shares many details of her personal life with us. When she received her volunteer certificate, she told everyone at the Home about the award. Although at times she is definitely a nuisance, her work is viewed as a valuable contribution. The staff realizes that a non-retarded volunteer would be bored with the routine, which is often tedious, monotonous and lacks challenge. Miriam, on the other hand, never complains and gives every indication of enjoying her work. Indeed, for her it is a challenge.

Physical therapy and other departments accept Miriam as a member of the team. She has lunch with the staff in the employees' cafeteria; they buy her gifts; she shares in their personal lives; and they named a plant after her. She developed friendships with many of her fellow volunteers and a few even visit her apartment.

The residents have accepted Miriam although they recognize she is "slow." Even our more alert residents, who often snub each other, are very fond of Miriam. The explanation may be that Miriam is no threat to them, makes no demands, acknowledges them by name, is friendly, does what they ask of her and is someone they can mother. She is affectionate and nurturing with the

residents and manifests a strong sense of responsibility in her relationship with them. Initially, she suffered a deep sense of personal loss when a resident died, but was unable to verbalize her feelings. She is not demonstrating growth in her ability to talk about, and deal with her feelings of loss.

Referral to Manpower Training and Vocational Rehabilitation

We referred Miriam to Manpower Training (a Federal, state and locally funded agency) for possible training as a nurse's aide. We thought it would be an ideal situation; however, Miriam failed the exam. A referral was also made to Vocational Rehabilitation. Miriam was sent to three jobs; two involving child care for which she was unsuited, and a government clerical job she did not get.

Summary of Psychological Evaluation

Miriam was tested in 1976 at Vocational Rehabilitation. She responded impulsively to verbal items and showed little patience with non-verbal tasks. Her responses were often expressed in apologetic terms and her self-references were self-reproachful. She was anxious to please and be accepted, but gave the impression of anticipated disapproval.

A WAIS full-scale I.Q. of 64 was attained, based on a verbal I.Q. of 73 and a performance I.Q. of 57. Miriam is functioning in the mild retardation range of measured intelligence. The psychomotor rate was relatively high. Pronounced deficits were indicated in visual perception, visual motor coordination and perceptual-motor integration. Her drawings show orientation errors and perseveration, two qualitative errors that suggest developmental lags. Miriam's word recognition skills were comparatively good. Responses on the Sorting task showed signs that Miriam was experiencing feelings of inadequacy with

respect to working out her problems. No serious psychological problems

Self-image

When Miriam first came to us as a volunteer, her self-image was poor and she was very dependent, and documented by psychological testing. After three years as a volunteer at the Home, Miriam was functioning independently and there was a great improvement in her self-image, particularly as it pertained to her volunteer work. For the first time in her life, Miriam felt she was needed and capable of performing useful and productive functions.

Miriam's enhanced self-image can be substantiated on the basis of her written responses to a questionnaire, which was part of a research study involving 145 male and female volunteers in the Hebrew Home. The motivation, self-image and commitment of the volunteer in this extended care facility for the aged was examined.

To the first item on the questionnaire, "Why do you do volunteer work?," most of the respondents stated they wished to help/serve others, including Miriam who said, "because I like to help people who are sick..." For the second item, Miriam wrote, "A volunteer is someone who is helpful to take care of the sick." Similarly, the other respondents indicated the volunteer was consistently viewed as someone helpful. The volunteer responses were overwhelmingly positive to the question, "How do other people (family, friends, neighbors, etc.) describe volunteers?" While not responding directly to the question, Miriam wrote, "They are glad for me to do it." In terms of the question, "How do the residents see your role as a volunteer?," Miriam replied, "They like the work I do and they kiss me and compliment me for the work I do." Again, her reply was consistent by the majority of the volunteers of how the residents view them. The final question,

"How do you think the staff of the Hebrew Home see your role as a volunteer?," elicited a generally positive staff perception of the volunteer, echoed by Miriam who replied, "They like me."

The findings of this study indicate that a volunteer who is highly motivated and has a positive self-image is more likely to be committed to his work. Most of the volunteers in the sample were found to have a positive self-image, a high level of self-esteem, and a volunteer work tended to reinforce their positive self-image. Like Miriam, a repetitive theme was that as volunteers they feel useful, fulfilled and satisfied. Volunteer work offers them a sense of accomplishment, pride and good feelings about themselves and was overwhelmingly reported as being enjoyable and pleasurable.

Summary and Future Research

Miriam herself has best summarized her experiences with the statement, "I have grown a lot in the past three years. I appreciate life. Life means more to me now." In fact, Miriam has demonstrated much growth and maturation and her self-esteem has improved. Her attention span has increased and she is not as easily distracted. As a result of Miriam's improved level of functioning, additional vocational training is currently underway with a goal of paid employment at the Home. Miriam is presently participating in an in-service nurse's aide training program where she is learning skills such as making beds. In addition, under the direction of a senior volunteer, she is learning how to feed the more impaired elderly residents. Further, under the supervision of a social worker, she spends one-half hour daily with one of the confused elderly residents and is paid by the family for her services as a companion.

With the cooperation of the administration at the Home, arrangements

were made for Miriam to obtain low-cost housing adjacent to our facility.

The success of the rehabilitation program for Miriam in the Hebrew Home, a setting similar to a sheltered workshop, was in many ways dependent on the high degree of cooperation and coordination, as well as collaboration, between members of the staff and the family. The positive responses from the professional and non-professional staff and the elderly residents have provided the impetus for a grant application to replicate

and expand the volunteer department vocational training program for other mentally retarded adults.

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About the Authors

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The Handicap May Be Yours

Claudia Apfelbaum

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(Editor-generated) Abstract

The author details the difficulties many handicapped persons face when entering an organization as a volunteer. The article also indicates the need for directors of volunteer programs to encourage acceptance and adaptation of organizational practices to be inclusive of disabled individuals.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

handicap, volunteer, program evaluation, attitudes

Attitudinal Overview

For the past year and a half, I have been the director of volunteers in an agency where half the volunteers are disabled persons. Through my work, I have come to the realization that the primary difficulty in incorporating disabled persons into the workplace (and elsewhere) lies not with their disability, but with our response to it.

We in North America have been thoroughly socialized into accepting one standard of beauty. Contained within that image are a person's attributes. Thus, beauty also connotes intelligence, social status, and appropriate sexuality. In meeting other people, we immediately evaluate them on the basis of their similarity or dissimilarity to that image. If they approximate that image, they are suitable people with which to make social contact. If they look different, we already have a pre-set notion that they are not "good" and we shy away.

This pervasive image affects our interaction with disabled persons. Until recently, the majority of disabled persons were kept hidden from the American public in institutions and back rooms. Now, they are seeking equal participation in American

life, and we need to deal with our responses to them.

Overcoming Negative Responses

I entered my agency with a strong belief in the right of all people to lead fully productive, participative lives. I perceived myself as an advocate for disabled persons. When I found myself reacting negatively to some of the staff's physical differences, I was surprised and disappointed. I can only deduce that my difficulties were due to the socialization I had received, and were typical of first encounters between non-disabled persons and disabled persons.

I anticipate that, as you begin to incorporate disabled persons in your volunteer program, most of you will go through a similar process of acculturation. I will briefly share my experience, so that if you have some inner difficulties, you will know that you are not alone.

During my initial interview, I was introduced to a woman sitting in a wheelchair, who seemed completely surrounded by equipment. I reached out to shake hands and was met by little, inflexible fingers. Their rigidity made me gulp. I spent

many months trying not to look at the long, spidery arms of another staff member nor could I stop myself from continuously wondering if his face was truly longer than other peoples'.

It took me some months to be completely at ease. I knew I had gotten to that point when I found myself remembering my initial reaction to my colleague's face. I no longer saw his abnormality. I liked him. I enjoyed working with him. He had become a person to me.

The woman also emerged out of her equipment. As we shared an office, we met each other as co-workers. I grew quickly to appreciate her keen and empathetic response to people. I also learned her life story.

A Typical Life Story

Typical of most disabled people, my colleague participated only minimally in social and community life. As a child, she was tutored at home. The public schools were not accessible to her. Marriage was not considered, despite her beautiful blue eyes, her intelligence, and her good heart. Neither was employment an option.

From that secluded and isolated situation, her life has gone through a metamorphosis. In 1976, she sat in her first classroom, to begin work on her master's degree at the age of forty-six. In 1981, she held her first paid position, outside her home. In the fall of 1982, she drove herself to work for the first time because, for the first time, she had a driver's license and her own vehicle!

These changes in her own life were simultaneous to a general change in the attitude and self-perception disabled people had of themselves. Only in the late sixties did disabled people begin to perceive that the isolation and loneliness which shrouded their lives was not fundamental to their existence. As a result, they began to work for social and political change. To a degree,

they have succeeded in obtaining governmental support and social acceptance. My agency, Resources for Living Independently Center, is a social service agency serving disabled persons through a staff composed primarily of disabled persons.

Using My Experience with Volunteers

Both non-disabled persons and disabled people come to the agency to volunteer. Of necessity, I speak to them somewhat differently. When interviewing non-disabled persons, I have begun to use my initial experience as a way of opening discussion regarding their feelings about working with disabled persons. They need to evaluate their response to this environment. Most of these people will be supervised by a disabled person and need to be aware of that. To many, this is a new concept. To a few people, this has been an uncomfortable idea.

It has been important to discuss this issue from the start. It has enabled most people to relax and openly accept this new situation. Some have disclosed hidden disabilities. The few who have felt significantly uncomfortable have been able to say so and have generally determined not to volunteer here. They have screened themselves out.

The disabled people who come for an interview know this agency is oriented toward their needs. For instance, I am able to offer transportation (a contracted service) to wheelchair users and other disabled persons. Yet often when they first come to the agency they are surprised by its accommodations and by the staff. To see other disabled people holding positions of responsibility is a new and wonderful experience. They can relax. They can be who they are and know that they are okay.

A disabled person expects to be treated like any other person. Erving Zola, a

professor of sociology at Brandeis University and a disabled person, decided on an experimental basis, to become a resident at a village specially designed for disabled persons. This required him to reduce his present mobility and return to a wheelchair. The moment he sat down in the wheelchair, an attitudinal change occurred.

The next half hour was weird. Partly it was my getting used to being in a wheelchair after a twenty-year absence. But it was much more than that. Subtly, but all too quickly, I was being transformed. As soon as I sat in the wheelchair, I was no longer seen as a person who could fend for himself.

Although Metz had known me well for nine months, and had never before done anything physical for me without asking, now he took over without permission. Suddenly in his eyes I was no longer able to carry things, reach for objects, or even push myself around. Though I was perfectly capable of doing all these things, I was being wheeled around, and things were being brought to me—and all without my asking. Most frightening was my compliance, my alienation from myself and from the process.¹

It is this attitude we need to fight against when we interview disabled persons. During the interview, the same questions need to be asked as we ask of any potential volunteer: What are your skills? What is your previous training? What are you interested in doing? Additionally, it may be useful to inquire what this person's physical capabilities are, for example, how long s/he can work at a stretch of time or if s/he can write. As this person is well-acquainted with his/her physical needs, the best thing to do is

listen and not assume answers. Disabled people are quite capable of saying what they need and what they can and cannot do.

Volunteers at RLI

Working with a disabled person sometimes takes a bit of creative ingenuity. For instance, a man who has been blind since birth volunteers weekly as our receptionist. He answers the phone by pressing the row buttons until he finds the one with the caller on it. He takes the message in Braille. At the end of the morning, he reads the messages to me and I write them down and give them to the various staff. Taking the messages from him in this way makes it possible for him to work and is what I mean by ingenuity.

Another example of using resources and making links creatively is the work being done by our ramps building project. We are building ramps to enable our clients to leave their residences independently. (For most clients, steps are a major impediment to their free entry and departure from home.)

The ramps project coordinator is a young man who has recently become disabled. He has chronic tendonitis and walks with crutches. His background as a carpenter enables him to assess and design ramps. He cannot do the actual construction, so we have linked up with a weekend workcamp, which provides the manual labor, and he oversees the construction of the ramps.

Another volunteer, a paraplegic who drives his own van, is also involved in the project. He uses his van to drive the ramps project coordinator to sites and to transport lumber. Without these various resources, the ramps would not be built.

Some of the work done by the volunteers is more straightforward. One extensively disabled woman calls a group of clients on a monthly basis to check with them if the services they are receiving are

satisfactory. She reports her calls to one of the staff. She does all the work at home. It is more convenient for her.

Another woman, also a wheelchair user, contacts housing developers on a weekly basis. She questions them about buildings which should have accessible units for disabled persons. She asks how many units, what different types of accessible units, how to apply, etc. She reports her work to the housing coordinator. Her persistent questioning makes her able to obtain much needed information. Disabled volunteers could ask similar informational questions at other agencies in equally competent ways.

A man born with spina bifida is the legislative liaison between an attendant care² task force at the agency and state officials. As the liaison, he contacts state officials to talk about proposed legislation for attendant care, to enlist their support, and to educate them about the concerns of the disabled community. This type of assignment could be developed by any agency to utilize a disabled volunteer to contact state officials on any issue. Education about the issue and methods of approach would be important in preparing this person for the work involved.

As you can see, disabled persons hold a variety of volunteer positions at my agency. They do research, contact clients, act as intermediaries between the state and the agency, design ramps. They also write articles, proofread newsletters type, file, Xerox, and have organized social activities for themselves and clients. Their skills are many. As with all volunteers, their work

should be determined by their ability and the agencies needs.

Conclusion

It is up to us, as directors of volunteers, to evaluate our programs and consider how we may incorporate disabled persons as volunteers. Just as any other volunteer, a disabled person could teach sewing to a group of Girl Scouts, tutor someone preparing for high school equivalency exams, edit a newsletter, or organize a fund-raising project. The possibilities are endless and are only limited by our imagination.

The point is to begin to think about disabled people as people first. It may feel easier not to do so, but in not doing so we are denying ourselves and this "other" an opportunity for real human contact. As directors of volunteers we have a wonderful opportunity to integrate our programs and to use an invisible minority in effective volunteer positions.

Endnotes

1. Erving, Z. (1982). *Missing pieces*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, p. 52.
2. Attendant care is a form of assistance some disabled people need to take care of washing dressing, meal preparation, etc. The goal of the task force is to enable disabled people to be responsible for their own hiring of attendant care providers with state money, rather than through a third party.

About the Author

At the time of the article's original publication:

Claudia Apfelbaum was Director of Volunteers at Resources for Living Independently Center, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Center is a social service agency staffed primarily by disabled persons, offering social services to other disabled persons. Ms. Apfelbaum was recording secretary for the Delaware Valley Association for Directors of Volunteer Programs.

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Disability as a Part of Diversity

Lisa Taylor

Courage Center

(no current contact information available)

Abstract

One out of every seven people in this country has a disability, 19.1% of our population. Of all people with disabilities 66% are unemployed; 79% of them want to be engaged in meaningful work. It is apparent that there is a huge untapped resource for those seeking volunteers. This article explores barriers to and strategies for incorporating people with physical disabilities into a volunteer pool. It is based on the experience Courage Centers (a rehabilitation facility) has had in working with people with physical disabilities as volunteers and on a presentation made at the Association for Volunteer Administration International Conference in October, 1992.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

disability, diversity, rehabilitation

Introduction

Courage Center is a nonprofit rehabilitation facility headquartered in Golden Valley, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis. Founded in 1928 by volunteers concerned about unmet needs of "crippled children," Courage Center today serves 22,000 children and adults annually through more than 70 different programs. Woven into the fabric of these programs is the dedication of 2,400 volunteers who gave over 82,000 hours of direct client and clerical program support in 1993. Our organization's mission is to empower people who have physical disabilities and sensory impairments to achieve their full potential. We carry out this mission through rehabilitation, enrichment, vocational, independent living and educational services, with the vision that one day all persons will work, learn and play together in a community based on their abilities not their disabilities.

Approximately 20% of Courage Center's 2,400 program volunteers have a

physical disability. Many are current or former clients who have received services. These volunteers work in a wide variety of roles, including tour guides, reception volunteers, activity directors, and assistants, instructors for art classes, ski instructors, swim buddies, couriers, maintenance workers, disability awareness speakers, Board members, tutors, officials for wheelchair athletic events, and general office workers.

In order to include people with physical disabilities as part of your volunteer resource, it may be necessary to make a few adaptations or shifts in thinking, but the investment will reap a multitude of benefits to your clients, your staff and especially to those individuals with physical disabilities who became your volunteers.

How to Get Started

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities. Major life activities

include self-care, tasks done with one's hands, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning, working and recreation. A disability may be congenital (something one is born with) or it may be acquired through disease or as a result of an accident or injury. In this article we are concerned only with people with physical impairments. In order to successfully incorporate people with disabilities into your organization, it is important to lay some groundwork.

Assess the physical barriers in your facility

First, survey your building or office space to determine its accessibility. The survey should include: parking availability, the entrance, your office or interview space, volunteer work areas, bathroom facilities, break room, cafeteria, width of doorways, door handles, and drinking fountains. As you identify physical barriers, you need to look for adaptations or alternatives such as attaching blocks under a table or desk to elevate it to accommodate a person using a wheelchair, or a telephone device for the deaf (TDD) to accommodate people with hearing impairments. See the appendix for a quick checklist and suggested solutions to barriers you might identify. Resources that may be helpful to you include your State Council on Disabilities, occupational therapists at a local hospital or rehabilitation facility, or staff members of an organization that provides services to people with physical disabilities.

Assess and address attitudinal barriers within your organization

Secondly, it is important to recognize not only the physical barriers in your organization, but to have an accurate sense about how people *feel* about persons with physical disabilities. Some of the conscious, or often unconscious, attitudes that may exist as barriers in your organization include:

Fear: We often fear the unknown. We are afraid of doing or saying the "wrong thing."

When we encounter someone with a disability, such as someone who uses a wheelchair, we may not know where to look or what to say to this person. Getting to know individuals with disabilities, learning WHO they are, what their interests are, activities they are involved in, things which are important to them helps alleviate this fear. Disability awareness speakers who can educate staff about what it is like to live with a disability are often available through your state or local Council on Disabilities, or through an organization that serves people with disabilities.

Oversensitivity: When meeting a person with a disability, we may be overly sensitive, seeing only the disability and not the person. We focus our attention on the wheelchair, the scarred face, the missing arm, or the service dog. While it is not possible to deny that the disability exists, it is the individual who needs to be "seen." Again, by getting to know a person as an individual: his/her likes and dislikes, their feelings, their goals and opinions it helps you to see the *person*, not just his/her disability.

Condescension: This is a patronizing attitude. An attitude of condescension causes people to treat the person with the disability as if he/she are "less than" an able bodied individual. It is a classic example of focusing on the disability rather than on the individual's abilities.

Spread effect: This means generalizing about a person's abilities, based on your observation of his/her particular disability. This might be demonstrated by making an assumption that because someone uses a wheelchair, he or she cannot hear or understand. In speaking to that person, you may try to over simplify or talk loudly, believing that you are making yourself more easily understood, when, in fact, understanding is not the issue at all.

Assumption: Too often we assume we understand what is wrong with someone without taking the time to investigate. When we see a person with a staggering gait or slurred speech we may assume that he/she are abusing drugs or alcohol, when in fact he/she may be recovering from a stroke or head injury. We may see someone with communication and/or mobility problems due to cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, or Parkinson's Disease, and assume that he/she have some intellectual impairment. Again, learning more about physical disabilities can reduce many of these misconceptions.

Discomfort: Disabilities are an uncomfortable reminder that we are all vulnerable to accidents, illness and aging. We do not like to think about how a disability might change our lives. Additionally, we tend to be uncomfortable with physical conditions which are unfamiliar and which we do not understand.

Education and experience are the best approaches in eradicating attitudinal barriers. (See Appendix II.)

Once you have identified and addressed the barriers, you are ready to recruit.

Recruitment

Many volunteer centers include information in their data bases indicating whether placement is appropriate for a person with a disability. Let your volunteer center know that you are interested in recruiting people with disabilities as volunteers. Local organizations that provide services to or advocacy for people with disabilities would be ideal recruitment resources. As you are developing recruitment materials, look at the written and visual messages you are giving about opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer: are you actively conveying the message that they are welcome?

Applying the Basic Principles of Volunteer Management

The interview

When interviewing someone with a disability, people often become overly concerned about their language and with what they should or shouldn't do to be helpful to the person with the disability. Common sense and common courtesy are your best guides. If you think the person may want some help, it is all right to ask. People with disabilities are used to instructing others about ways to help them. If you are concerned about your language, tell the person that if you say something that makes he/she uncomfortable to please let you know, so that you can learn to be more sensitive about language. Saying "see" to a blind person, or "walk" to someone who uses a wheelchair is seldom offensive to them. This is an example of being overly sensitive about everyday language. By the same token, there are words like cripple, lame, or victim that have negative connotations and should be avoided. Many of these appear on the handout noted in the appendix.

In discussing an individual's skills and interest, Courage Center uses the same application and interview process as with any volunteer. As we begin to focus on a specific volunteer assignment, we show the potential volunteer the job description and ask whether he or she has any concerns about being able to fulfill any of the responsibilities. At that point, the person being interviewed has the opportunity to share any reservations. It would also be appropriate to ask the individual if any adaptations would be needed in order for him/her to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. Use your creativity here. It is important to be direct, clear and respectful. Two way communication during the interview process gives you the opportunity

to explore the probability of a fit. If one does not exist, you need to be honest and, if possible, help that individual find a more appropriate volunteer opportunity elsewhere.

Designing the job/making the match

When assessing the appropriateness of a specific placement, it will be helpful to determine the essential functions of the volunteer assignment, the associated tasks and the performance criteria.

Functional analysis: What *functions* need to be accomplished? For example, for a tour guide, the essential functions include speaking clearly, moving around the facility, knowing the organization, meeting a variety of people well. An activity assistant must be able to understand and convey information to the clients, and must be patient and nurturing. If executing the tasks involved is a problem, are there alternative ways to accomplish the tasks other than the way in which they have traditionally been done? Let me give an example of job-sharing as an alternative method. We had a volunteer who used a wheelchair. Although he was licensed to drive, he lacked the hand strength to operate the wheelchair tiedowns in our vans. We had an able-bodied volunteer who was performing community service but, according to Courage Center policies regarding court referred volunteers, was not allowed to transport clients. We paired them together to drive clients to an activity off site; one drove, and the other operated the tiedowns.

Task analysis: In assessing a job, it helps to separate it into the specific tasks that are involved. See the task/skill analysis section (Appendix IV pg. 23).

Performance criteria to consider: Timing: does this need to be done within a specific time frame or at a specific time? Is *mobility* a consideration? Is *strength* a factor? What about *endurance*? Must the tasks be done in

a specific *sequence*? How important is *attention to detail*? What kind of *communication skills* are required (verbal, written, telephone)? What level of *math or reading comprehension* is necessary? What kind of *social skills* are important? Is *hygiene/appearance* a consideration? What is the *stress level* of this job? How *independent* does this individual need to be?

The checklist in the appendix may be helpful in addressing these questions and assessing the appropriateness of an individual for a specific job.

Adapting the job: Once you have identified job tasks that do not match the person's abilities, you need to allow for some reasonable accommodations. These accommodations will fall into three categories:

1. Task modification: changing, simplifying or reordering the steps used to complete the task.
Examples: could something done manually be done by computer? Try using different materials to complete the task: calculator, checklist as a reminder of the task sequence, or a paper hold to enable someone to staple single-handedly.
2. Task elimination: simply eliminating a task that the person is unable to do.
3. Task reassignment: changing the amount of personal assistance to complete a task, or job-sharing as in the example given for the transportation volunteer.

A local resource to help you in solving similar challenges might be an occupational therapist at a local hospital, school, or rehabilitation facility. Again, the Job Accommodation list in the appendix may be helpful.

Don't be diverted by the existence of barriers. Enlist the potential volunteer to

help until you address them. Be up front with the volunteer that this is a new experience for your agency, and that you need his or her help in blazing the trail. This will establish the relationship you need as you begin together to address the barriers. Start small in order to set yourselves up for success. Assign the volunteer to a staff member who is willing to be a partner in your pilot efforts; enlist his or her support as you move ahead together.

Training

As with any volunteer, the training you provide for a volunteer with a disability can make or break the situation. There are a number of job aids, such as checklists, flow charts, troubleshooting guides, a mentor or experienced partner, a manual that can be employed to facilitate the process of learning the assigned job. (See "Job Aids for Volunteers: Tools to Help Them Successfully Complete Their Jobs" by Susan J. Barkman, *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Summer 1990.) Remember that the best guide for this will probably be the volunteer: Ask him or her for suggestions; how does he/she best learn?

Keep in mind that the complexity of the person's disability may require an extended learning time for the job.

Supervision

In initially placing a person with a disability as a volunteer in your organization, the creativity and flexibility of the staff supervisor is a key point. Someone who is flexible and open will be a far better person than one who appears to be under pressure or is rigid. It will be important for the supervisor to be explicit about his or her expectations of the volunteer. Communication is critical. In giving the volunteer an assignment, it is important to define the tasks in terms of what is to be accomplished, not just the activities

themselves. It is also important for all volunteers to have a sense of the big picture into which their roles fit.

Communicate parameters for decision-making and the availability of resources, both material and supervisory. Who is available for clarification and problem solving? What is the desired result of the volunteer's work? Frequent and ongoing feedback to the volunteer will be essential: when will it happen, from whom? All of this is part of good supervision, but as you begin to include people with disabilities as volunteers, you want both their experiences and yours to be successful. Extra attention to good supervision is key because many individuals providing supervision to volunteers have had no supervisory experience or training.

Recognition

What kind of ongoing recognition are you providing for volunteers? Socialization may be a primary motivation for someone with a physical disability to volunteer. Is that need being met by interaction with other volunteers and/or with staff? Another motivator may be skill development: are you providing opportunities for growth?

If you typically hold a recognition event, remember to determine whether the site for the event is accessible. Will you need an interpreter for volunteers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing?

This article has addressed person with disabilities as an untapped resource and discussed an approach for ensuring their inclusion. However, each person is an individual, and as such, is your best source of information about how to develop a successful volunteer experience. Persons with disabilities now represent over 19% of our population. They are rich in skills and knowledge, a gold mine of abilities waiting to be asked to make their contribution to your programs!

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Appendix I: Quick Look Barriers Checklist

This checklist is designed to give businesses a quick appraisal of potential problem areas for accessibility.

ITEMS TO BE PERFORMED	YES	NO
Building access		
1. Are 96" wide parking spaces designated with a 60" aisle?		
2. Are parking spaces near main building entrance?		
3. Is there a "drop off" zone at the building entrance?		
4. Is the gradient from parking to building entrance 1:12 or less?		
5. Is entrance doorway at least 32 inches wide?		
6. Is door handle easy to grasp?		
7. Is door easy to open (less than 8 lbs. pressure)?		
8. Are other than revolving doors available?		
Building corridors		
1. Is path of travel free of obstruction and wide enough for a wheelchair?		
2. Is floor surface hard and not slippery?		
3. Do obstacles (phones, fountains) protrude no more than four inches?		
4. Are elevator controls low enough (48") to be reached from a wheelchair?		
5. Are elevator makings in Braille for the blind?		
6. Does elevator provide audible signals for the blind?		
7. Does elevator interior provide a turning area of at least 51" for wheelchairs?		
Restrooms		
1. Are restrooms near building entrance/personnel office?		
2. Do doors have lever handles?		
3. Are doors at least 32" wide?		
4. Is restroom large enough for wheelchair turnaround (52" minimum)?		
5. Are stall doors at least 32" wide?		
6. Are grab bars provided in toilet stalls?		
7. Are sinks at least 30" high with room for a wheelchair to roll under?		
8. Are sink handles easily reached and used?		
9. Are soap dispensers, towels, no more than 48" from floor?		
Personnel office		
1. Are doors at least 32" wide?		
2. Is the door easy to open?		
3. Is the threshold no more than 1/2" high?		
4. Is the path of travel between desks/tables wide enough for wheelchairs?		

Appendix II: Job Accommodation Ideas

Job accommodation problems with proposed low-cost solutions from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

We present these "problems" and "solutions" to start the creative process. They can be used to give a person who is inexperienced in hiring people with disabilities and idea of some accommodations that have actually been achieved. They make it easier to begin the process of working together for change.

Problem:	A person has an eye disorder. Glare on the computer screen caused fatigue.
Solution:	An antiglare screen was purchased. (\$39.00)
Problem:	A person with a learning disability worked in the mail room and had difficulty remembering which streets belonged to which zip codes.
Solution:	A rolodex card system was filed by street name alphabetically with zip code. This helped him to increase his output. (\$150.00)
Problem:	An individual with dyslexia who worked as a policed officer spent hours filling out forms at the end of each day.
Solution:	He was provided with a tape recorder. A secretary typed out his reports from dictation while she typed the others from a handwritten copy. This accommodation allowed him to keep his job. (\$69.00)
Problem:	A person who used a wheelchair could not use a desk because it was too low and his knees would not go under it.
Solution:	The desk was raised with wood blocks, allowing a proper amount of space for the wheelchair to fit under it. (\$0)
Problem:	An employee who used a wheelchair could not use the restroom.
Solution:	The toilet facilities were enlarged and a handrail was installed. (\$70.00)
Problem:	A person who worked outdoors had a medical condition which caused his hands to be unable to tolerate the cold.
Solution:	The individual used gloves with pocket hand warmers such as those used by hunters (\$50.00)
Problem:	A person with an unusually soft voice was required to do extensive public speaking.
Solution:	A hand-held voice amplifier did the trick. (\$150.00)
Problem:	An employer wanted to make the elevator accessible to a new employee who was blind and read Braille.
Solution:	Raised dot elevator symbols that were self-adhesive made the elevator accessible. (\$6.00 each)
Problem:	A person with a condition that required two-hour rest periods during the day.
Solution:	The company changed her schedule and allowed her longer breaks, although she worked the same number of hours. (\$0)

For specific assistance, call the Job Accommodation Network 1-800-ADA-WORK

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“It Shouldn’t Be This Difficult”: The Views of Agencies and Persons with Disabilities on Supported Volunteering

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(Editor-generated) Abstract

The authors discuss supported volunteering and ways to help disabled volunteers to become meaningfully involved in organizations. Focus groups were conducted and qualitative input from both agencies and volunteers, disabled and non-disabled, are discussed.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

disabilities, volunteers, supported volunteering

Introduction

“Opportunities for All,” a project focused on current and future supported volunteering in Waterloo Region, was launched by an inter-agency consortium called The Resource Group for Supported Volunteering (R.G.S.V.), formed in 1997. The Trillium Foundation of Ontario funded the project. The R.G.S.V. comprised eleven agencies whose mission it is to a) serve persons with physical disabilities, or b) promote voluntary action in the community.

Philosophy

The philosophical basis for R.G.S.V.’s activities is:

- commitment to “assisting *all persons* to participate in satisfying, productive volunteer experiences...”
- Removal of “barriers to full participation by educating, and supporting community members, identifying and developing resources that promote accessibility, and supporting individuals to cultivate their potential.”

- belief “that *all persons* have the right to informed choice and equal access to fully participate in the opportunities they choose for themselves...” Belief “in encouraging independence, individual growth, mutual respect, cooperative relationships, and partnerships within an understanding and welcoming community.”

In context of the above philosophy, the overall purpose of Opportunities for All is: “To increase the community’s capacity to open up new opportunities for all persons to exercise more control over their own lives and make a contribution to this community through volunteer work.”

“Supported Volunteering” Defined

Supported volunteering is about helping marginalized persons become fully engaged in volunteering. The definition of supported volunteering typically encompasses a wide variety of marginalized populations, including, for example, persons with physical or sensory disabilities, persons

with learning disabilities, persons with emotional or psychiatric disabilities, new immigrants, and persons of diverse cultural backgrounds. In short, any indented group of persons who may need additional consideration or assistance in becoming involved in volunteering can be encompassed by the definition. It is for this latter reason that in some supported volunteering projects youth and seniors have been included in the definition.

For the purposes of the Opportunities for All project, the definition of supported volunteering was confined to “persons with disabilities.” This was because the sponsoring R.G.S.V. largely comprised organizations that provided services to that client group, and that was where the R.G.S.V. chose to concentrate its efforts in this project. The term “disabilities” was left deliberately undefined. The R.G.S.V. decided early on that any person with a disability of any nature would be eligible for consideration in this research project.

Supported volunteering can entail a range of activities. These include:

- helping prospective volunteer placement agencies increase their knowledge about involving persons with disabilities
- providing a coach for the volunteer, and/or
- a centralized placement agency that a) helps not-for-profit organizations identify, modify or develop suitable volunteer placements for persons with disabilities, b) aids volunteers who have disabilities to identify their interests and abilities, and, c) refers those volunteers to potential placements in not-for-profit organizations in the community

Supported volunteering can include interventions on three levels:

- **Individual** – support for the prospective volunteer, including placement or workplace modifications, additional training or supervision, provision of a coach for a period of time and/or provision of a partner, either initially or on a continuing basis
- **Group** – training for agencies to enable them to be more inclusive
- **Systematic** – assistance for agencies in the development of an appropriate infrastructure for management of a supported volunteering program

The R.G.S.V. hired a consulting firm, Graff and Associates, to conduct research on supported volunteering. The research design had three key components: a literature review, a survey of the current state of supported volunteering among local not-for-profit organizations in the Waterloo Region, and focus groups with volunteers, prospective volunteers and agency representatives.

This article includes emphasis on the frequently discouraging experience faced by persons with disabilities who try to become volunteers despite the apparent interest of agencies in involving volunteers with disabilities. The data indicate that if supported volunteering is to flourish, agencies must receive considerable assistance in learning how to involve and support people with disabilities. (Even some agencies that have a mandate to work with people with disabilities do not always know how to effectively support persons who have disabilities different from those whom the agency is mandated to serve.)

Focus Group Research Methodology

Based on information from the community agency survey³, and questions arising therein, it was determined that this project component needed to gather detailed information from the following populations:

- agencies that currently (or have recently) involve(d) persons with disabilities as volunteers
- agencies that have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers
- individuals with disabilities who are currently volunteering (or have recently volunteered)
- individuals with disabilities who have never volunteered

It was decided that interaction by representatives of the first two populations and by representatives of the second two populations in the focus group setting would be instructive. Accordingly, two additional focus groups were designed:

- a combination of agencies that currently (or have recently) involve(d) persons with disabilities as volunteers *and* agencies that have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers
- a combination of individuals with disabilities who are currently volunteering (or have recently volunteered) *and* individuals with disabilities who have never volunteered

Research Questions

A separate set of questions, created for each of the focus groups, are found in Appendix 'A.'

Sample Selection

To recruit agency representative participants to the focus groups, invitations were sent to the same mailing list that was used to conduct the community agency survey.⁴ To recruit individual participants to the focus groups, agencies were asked to pass along an invitation to any persons with disabilities that they worked with whom

they thought might be interested in assisting us with the research.

Schedule

All six focus groups were conducted in mid-September, 1998.

Reminder Notices

Reminder notices and/or phone calls were sent/made to all focus group participants to ensure their attendance.

The Sessions

The sessions were planned to run 1.5 hours, and this was the commitment made to participants.

A member of the R.G.S.V., acting as host, attended each session. The Consultant attended and introduced the focus group format and its purpose, and helped participants to understand that their contributions were welcomed at any time during the session. She indicated this was a research project and received participants' permission to tape the session.

The Consultant facilitated each session, asking the scheduled questions, and moderated conversations among participants. From time to time, the consultant or the R.G.S.V. member asked supplementary and clarifying questions.

The Sample

The sample included a total of 26 agencies, 24 (92%) were currently (or had recently) involved persons with disabilities as volunteers, and two (8%) were not currently involving persons with disabilities as volunteers. Of the latter two, one agency had never involved a person with a disability as a volunteer, and the other had what they considered only limited success in doing so in the past.

A wide range of agencies was represented among focus group participants, including representation from the following

sectors: arts/culture, disability service, fundraising, multiculturalism, seniors, recreation, local government, nutrition and food services, health, and social services.

The sample also included 16 individual representatives: 13 (81%) had recently or were currently volunteering; two (13%) had tried to locate volunteer work, but had met with only limited success; and one person (6%), not yet volunteered and had not thought seriously of doing so.

There were a variety of disability types and severities represented among the focus group participants, including the following disabilities: mobility, vision, speech, developmental, cognitive, and mental health.

The ideal focus group size was set at eight to ten participants. Respondents were scheduled into sessions as much as possible to create groups of that size.

Upon completion of the focus groups, the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. A thematic analysis was performed on the data collected from all six focus group sessions.

The Results

The Agencies

The experience of supported volunteering from the perspective of agencies ranged from “successful” experience to “not good” experience. Some reported “mixed” experience.

The following quotation describes a success story:

We did have a volunteer who... was pathologically shy. She asked to be at that front desk and we asked her “are you sure? You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to” and she did and we helped her, we supported her...She went from being unemployable... she now works at [a

local store]. But it took two years of us saying “It’s okay...If you don’t want to do that, say... We’re not going to make you do anything you don’t want to do.”

An unsuccessful experience is reflected in these comments by an agency representative discussing interactions with volunteers with hearing loss:

...they get frustrated. We get frustrated and we lose the volunteer, which is not the ideal situation because obviously they can contribute. It’s just we don’t know how to adapt [to] their needs, they don’t know how to adapt to our needs and we get caught in the ‘we don’t want to offend you and you don’t want to offend us’ and things fall apart.

Mixed experience of both positive and negative aspects is reflected in the following commentary:

I find that it takes extra time... You have to really be concise in what you tell them. You know, give them lots of steps. But it’s worth it, because once it’s done... these volunteers do some of the jobs that the [staff] would have to do if the volunteers weren’t there. Washing the dishes, cleaning the bathrooms, doing some laundry, things like that, and that takes the [staff] away from the children. So, yeah, in the long run it’s really worth it.

Factors Leading to Success

Agency representatives identified five characteristics required for a successful supported volunteer program.

The right 'fit' between a volunteer's gifts and limitations on the one hand, and the requirements and benefits of the volunteer position on the other. A concomitant of this is the importance of being honest with a volunteer candidate if an appropriate fit cannot be found for the time being. A negative illustration of this was the statement of one agency representative, who admitted,

when we don't have a proper match between what we need and what they can give, we just don't call back, and that's not professional, I know.

The importance of providing flexibility in job design and willingness to modify positions in order to accommodate volunteers who require such support. An example of this willingness was one agency representative, who said,

...I can build a job to fit anybody, and I'm more than happy to do it.

Another emphasized the need for persistence:

In my opinion, we need to at least make the effort. Our adopted philosophy is that every volunteer is given at least three times to try it out. We together decide if its working out.

One more participant stressed the importance of flexibility when problems arise in the placement:

...we found a way to [change a volunteer's placement in a way] that she doesn't frighten people anymore. [The volunteer] thought it was a promotion.

That this is not always a simple thing to do was highlighted by a participant who spoke of the reluctance to involve persons with disabilities for the very reason that flexibility and adaptation is difficult in a frequently changing environment.

Adequate Resources

The truism that adequate resources are necessary for a successful volunteer program, especially one that includes persons with disabilities, was emphatically stated by one agency representative as follows:

That's what we're hoping this project may end up, that we can say to somebody- 'God, if you want [the volunteer Action Centre] to be finding the right niche for different volunteers, we gotta have more money here.'

Another voiced a concern familiar to administrators of volunteers,

One of the frustrations for [our organization is that] our funders have vigorously promoted volunteerism, but promote it only in terms of being a cost savings to the organization. I certainly have not seen volunteerism or experienced in the last eleven years as a cost saver... We've benefitted in many ways from the skills [volunteers] bring to the organization, but you need resources to keep good volunteers.

In support of the previous statement, another participant said,

Sometimes when we are told to support volunteerism, and when our funders tells us that, we are told to

do so only as a cost saving method, not because we have a moral obligation to do so. There's a dollar figure that must be attached to any obligation that any organization has around this table.

That same participant contemplated that policy makers, funders, and government bodies, rather than agencies, should be the target of lobbying on behalf of supported volunteerism.

Not surprisingly, participants emphasized that the lack of resources makes it difficult for agencies to enlist special needs volunteers, because special needs volunteers can require more time and resources.

An agency mission and service consistent with the involvement of supported volunteers. Some participants felt it is difficult to accept as volunteers any persons who have a disability or limitation that resembles the disabilities or limitations for the agency's client group. For example, one participant said,

Staff would say, okay, I'm giving this volunteer just as much support as what I would a member, so where do we stop, where do we say they're no longer a volunteer...?

Sometimes the nature of the client population and their specific vulnerabilities pose limits on the type or extent to which volunteers with special needs can be involved:

[A] major barrier has been [volunteers] need to have the perceptual level to understand when residents are saying things like, 'I'm going to go home,' or 'can you take me home?' that you can't take

someone out the doors, that they're confused. Judgment is important.

Fortunately, the converse can also be true, i.e., when the work of the organization lends itself to the involvement of people of all sorts, capacities, and limitations as volunteers. This was illustrated by the following offering of a participant,

...we have volunteers of every description, every disability. There isn't one that I can think of that [we don't have]... We do... a whole range of activities so we're able to be inclusive.

Clients as Volunteers

An increasing number of organizations are seeking to involve their clients ("consumers") as volunteers, in some cases on the board or in an advisory capacity. In other cases, organizations allow, even encourage, clients and ex-clients to participate in service delivery. The latter often is part of the recovery process of the client *qua* volunteer.

One organization spoke of two conditions for the involvement of their own clients as volunteers in a program: 1) approval from program clients, and failing that, 2) absence as a client from a program for six months before becoming a volunteer in the program. Another participant noted the importance of volunteering for clients, but added that it is better if they volunteer in some other agency. A third participant stressed the principle of inclusivity as it relates to special needs volunteers as well as to clients. Applying the principle, however, can lead to a "dicey" situation when the clients are reluctant to accept the ex-client as a volunteer.

Value Added vs. Volunteering as Therapy

Very few organizations exist solely to give volunteers a place to volunteer, but rather, they invite volunteers to assist with accomplishment of the organization's mission. Accordingly, the "output" of a volunteer must exceed the "input" of time, energy and resources required to achieve and sustain placement.

When input to the supported volunteer exceeds adequate return to the agency, supported volunteering moves from being "therapeutic," i.e., a useful tool in interrogation, recovery and healing, to "therapy," i.e., it becomes volunteering for its own sake. One agency representative described a situation in which this occurs. Students with special needs work along with paid staff, who later redo the students' less than adequate work. In that case, the involvement of students is chiefly of value to the student, not the organization.

In reaction to this description, another participant expressed discomfort tinged with anger:

What's the point then? To me that's tokenism. [Such a practice makes me] furious, because they're obviously not being trained and counted as a person who's doing a job.

Clearly, achieving a proper balance between the resources input required to find or create the right position for the right volunteer and the productivity output from the volunteer in the position can be difficult to achieve⁵.

The Right to Volunteer and the Obligation to be Inclusive

Even though organizations rightly can expect a "return on investment," is there a responsibility on voluntary sector organizations to expend greater effort for

special needs volunteers, regardless of an input-output imbalance? Is failure to do this discriminatory, a form of "ableism"?

A few focus group participants spoke to this question. One felt strongly that volunteers have the same rights as patrons of a facility:

As far as I'm concerned, no one gets turned away because it is a public institution, and it's my job to find a way for them to fit in... Sometimes I'm finding that it's really complex, but that's the way I feel about it.

Most who spoke, but not all, were sympathetic to this view, even to the point of saying inclusion is part of an agency's mission. The countervailing opinion was

I take pride in the face that we are able to find and research things to match people. But that's certainly not our mission. Our mission is [providing services to our clients].

All agreed, however, with the participant who said,

I think to exclude people with special needs in the community for any organization to do that, is not creating the kind of community we are all hoping to be part of.

The Special Value of Supported Volunteering to Volunteers Themselves

The feelings of productiveness, belonging, self-esteem, and so on, that volunteers can reap from their volunteer work can have special meaning to people with special needs. Agency representatives in the focus groups supported this claim on the basis of their experiences working with special needs volunteers. They spoke of the special sense of ownership special needs

volunteers exhibit, their loyalty, and their sense of responsibility, all of which are, in effect, their contribution in return for the psychosocial rewards that being a volunteer affords.

Resistances

Administration and Board of Directors. Responses of participants with regard to the question of administrative support for inclusivity tended to be pessimistic in nature. For one participant the “biggest barrier” was the executive director and board of directors. Two agency representatives acknowledged an inherent irony: sometimes organizations that resist deploying persons with disabilities as volunteers are the very organizations that try to find volunteer (and paid work) placements in other agencies for their own clients who are persons with disabilities. An even more damning irony was underscored by two other participants, one of whom offered,

I work in an agency that specializes in serving people with disabilities, so it's rather embarrassing for me to come and say none of our volunteers have disabilities.

The second stated,
...I find it personally embarrassing... I felt... I didn't even know if I could come [to this focus group] because I use the Voluntary Action Centre to get volunteers, and I use them to place our clients [as volunteers in the community], and yet we're giving nothing back.

Clients

Sometimes agency clients are discriminatory, unaccepting, or racist. Participants noted that some clients are critical of their volunteers who are

unemployed; they do not understand that the supported volunteers' disabilities are barriers to being employed. Others spoke of the discomfort some of their clients demonstrate in the presence of multi-ethnic volunteers. There were mixed opinions whether agencies should protect their volunteers from discrimination. Some organizations believe it is not part of their mission to attempt to change the attitudes of their clients, even if those attitudes are racist. Others refuse to collude with oppression, even when it is found within their own clients or constituencies. In any event, as one participant said,

We can't always be super protective, but we need to be open and honest and communicate that to [volunteers] in all fairness to them.

Staff Members

Clients are not the only source of resistance or discrimination that special needs volunteers might expect to encounter in some settings. According to the agency representatives, agency personnel can sometimes be discriminatory, but resistance mostly falls into other categories. There may be union concerns about losing positions. Staff members may perceive volunteers, especially volunteers with special needs, to be a burden that requires extra work training and supervising volunteers. Also, some volunteers seek to socialize with staff members, many of whom do not have the time. “Volunteers drive me nuts; I can't get my job done,” is a common expression by one agency representative's employees.

It would be incorrect, however, to think that all personnel, or personnel in all organizations, are resistant to the involvement of volunteers or to volunteers who have disabilities. For example, one agency representative reported

[They] come to our team meetings, meet with our [staff]. We consider them part of the agency...like they're the professional coming in and providing a service to us, like a consultant would.

What Would be Helpful?

Participants offered much information about what they would find helpful in their development and operation of supported volunteering programs. Their thoughts are clustered into a number of specific areas.

Information on How to Work with People with Disabilities

One participant stressed the importance of open communication about limitations and accommodation needs. Persons in organizations that do not directly serve people with disabilities can find the thought of working with them scary, intimidating, or uncomfortable. The greatest fear is of being offensive to prospective volunteers. For example, one representative would be interested to know if a volunteer would be offended if asked about his/her ability to read and write.

Others stressed the need for basic information about various disabilities and how to work with people with disabilities said provision of information could become the purpose of a cooperative community project.

Staff education was also cited as important. Internal and external "educators" could be important resources.

The most striking comment about the need for information came from persons that serve persons with disabilities, viz., that they feel discomfort in working with people with disabilities different from those found among their own client group. One participant, who works for an organization serving clients with a specific disability,

noted how that organization works cooperatively with two other organizations, each of which serves clients with a different, specific disability. The goal is for each of the three to become knowledgeable about the types of disabilities clients of the other two organizations have. This approach could work equally well for those seeking information about work with volunteers having disabilities.

Ongoing Support

Initial information is critical, but an ongoing source of information and support is also of great help to agencies integrating persons with disabilities as volunteers. A support worker, who places people with disabilities, finds that her availability contributes to the confidence and success of the volunteers to whom she is available.

Support is important also for those who supervise volunteers with disabilities. A participant spoke of receiving help from another agency to solve the meaning of a verbalization of a volunteer whose communication impairment made it difficult for her to make herself understood.

One agency representative said it well,

We'd need a lot of support; someone to come in and say these are the issues, and this is how you deal with the issues.

Help to Convince the Board

One representative felt that assistance from outside is needed to help convince administrators and board members of the value of involving special needs volunteers:

...having some sort of background materials [so] we could go to the Boards and say, this won't take all my time or, this will not end up being an embarrassment to you, this will

*be a good thing for you, you will
look good, let me do this.*

Volunteers' Honesty and Disclosure

Several agency participants noted the importance of prospective volunteers being forthcoming about their own needs and limitations, for example,

*The key for us has been the more
honest the volunteer is with us in the
beginning, the less we're putting out
fires down the road.*

And,

*...the [placements] that were
positive resulted from up front and
open communication from the
beginning.*

Assistance with Job Design and Accommodations

Noted occasionally was the need for help to be creative with job design and accommodation possibilities, especially for prospective volunteers who have multiple disabilities.

The Role of Referral Agents

According to one participant, in referring a person with a disability to an agency for volunteer work, the referring worker needs to

*know the services of the organization
that you're going to be referring
someone to, and know what their
restrictions are in terms of resources
[and] opportunities...*

Another participant warns against giving the agency to which a person with special needs is referred too much information about the prospective volunteer lest

*biases and preconceived
notions...get in the way of getting to
know the person.*

The Role of Volunteer Centres

As one agency representative put it,

*...the connection with the Voluntary
Action Centre is so crucial, because
I get most of the referrals from there.
The recruitment coordinator needs to
know what our barriers and limits
are, who we can accept and work
with.*

Special Difficulties

Mental Health Issues

Several participants said they find mental health issues to be the most difficult or scary to deal with among volunteers with special needs. Unpredictability, excessive need for support, and brevity of commitment are some of the difficulties participants identified as associated with involvement of volunteers with mental health problems.

Multiple Disabilities

Some participants spoke of the increased difficulties involved in placing special needs volunteers if they have multiple disabilities. One spoke of a volunteer who can't use his hands and whose speech is difficult. The problem for the agency in such a case is the demand on time that such a volunteer makes.

Another participant agreed that persons with multiple disabilities require lots of time, but that they have much to contribute:

*It's just finding the right niche...Just
trying to help them, that's what you
want.*

Prospective Volunteer Fears

Among a variety of other difficulties mentioned, is, as one participant put it, a prospective volunteer's

...lack of confidence, depression, fear, anxiety, and they can't afford the bus fare...

Some such persons need support workers to accompany them at least in the initial phases of the volunteer placement. This in itself can become a deterrent to volunteering, especially when the position involves one-to-one visiting or companionship.

Accommodations

While it is important to remember that not all people with disabilities will need accommodations in their volunteer placements, it became clear in the focus groups that a great variety of accommodations is required in support of volunteer involvement.

Some volunteers need assistance with writing. Other volunteers need attendant care. One volunteer, a board member with vision impairment, was helped by using taped board minutes.

Many agency representatives made note of the extra time they spend with special needs volunteers, putting together the appropriate set of tasks into customized jobs that correspond to volunteers' abilities. A participant who works with a volunteer who has excellent phone manner and can write down messages gave an example of that. The job being considered for the volunteer also happened to include some tasks that were beyond her ability. The job was redesigned to accommodate the volunteer's capacity.

Deliberate vs. Accidental Inclusivity

One theme that arose consistently throughout the sessions with agency representatives is that supported volunteering rarely results from deliberate recruitment efforts on the part of the agency. Organizations are not systematically seeking special needs volunteers. Not one agency representative in this research indicated they the agency had launched any special recruitment drives or included any affirmative action messages in their regular marketing and recruitment activities.

Managers of volunteers will consider accepting people with special needs if the latter make the effort to apply, or if a third party referral agency makes the approach on behalf of the volunteer. The only exception is at the board level. Ironically, some boards deliberately seek consumer representation on the board, and in some cases, these consumers are people with disabilities. Some of these boards are the same boards that resist the involvement of people with disabilities through supported volunteering at the direct service level!

The Volunteers

Three focus group sessions were held with people with disabilities who were volunteers at the time the sessions were held. Their responses to questions were categorized, and are listed below.

Motivation

Participants related a wide range of motives for their pursuit of volunteer work. Here are some sample comments.

I think that my volunteer experiences had to do with finding out about something that really mattered to me, or knowing something was already there that really mattered to me. I wanted to support a cause that I was interested in.

I had been having some difficulty getting some full time paid employment, and I am qualified to work in that area. I thought that volunteering might help me in getting some contacts, and in showing people I can still do the job in spite of the fact that I have some visual impairments. So for me, it was...showing people that I do have the skills, and I do have the abilities, and that they were able to trust me, and I was able to develop trust as well. It [also] helped me to further develop career goals. I then went back to school and...decided to look at more of a social work profession, and doing the volunteer work allowed me to see if I had the people skills.

I've seen a lot of organizations, when they're fundraising, use the slogan, "Because you'll never know when you'll need it." To me, I think that's absolutely terrible. I think you should just be able to help people.

The Rewards of Volunteering

Participants stated clearly and enthusiastically what they get back from their volunteer work.

If they were to call me next year, I would go back again, because I felt good, happy that I helped kids. They looked up to me, and that felt really good.

They found me a real neat place to volunteer. They care a lot about people, and they care a lot about me. It's wonderful. Some days I don't feel that good, and it still feels good that we can share our feelings for

each other...we can find the support that we need.

I like the fact that I can help people. When they ask a question, I can find the information. It makes me feel good about myself, because I can help them.

It's rewarding. I'm thinking of my teaching types of volunteer things, and I find it very rewarding when you see that light bulb go off in somebody's head that tells you they understand what it is you're trying to teach them.

Volunteering is fun. You meet different people that you wouldn't normally meet. People don't generally know how to talk to a person in a wheelchair, or go out of their way to talk to a person in a wheelchair.

People like me. They say, "Good morning! Welcome back!" I always am happy.

Deliberate vs. Suggested Involvement

Almost all volunteers in the focus groups were referred to volunteering through an agency from which they were receiving services. This was not surprising, because contact had been made with prospective focus group participants through disability-serving agencies; they would naturally refer their clients and ex-clients. Because of the skewed sample in the focus groups, therefore, it is not possible to comment on mechanisms used by other persons with disabilities to find their way into volunteering if they are not receiving services from an organization that encourages voluntary action among its clients.

Six of the sixteen participants identified that they had also used the placement assistance services of the Volunteer Action Centre, often in cooperation with the original referral agency.

Barriers to Involvement in Volunteering

Focus group participants experienced a number of barriers in their pursuit of volunteer work.

Physical Limitations, Accessibility, and Accommodation Requirements

Here are two quotations that illustrate some of the frustrations that volunteers with disabilities can encounter.

The bathroom was a bit of a problem, because the door that I could get through was a fire door, and we had to find a way to leave that door open so I could get in, but it was a fire door.

I have a motorized wheelchair...this is good and bad. When I travel, I need a vehicle that can accommodate this big chair. I always find that...[it] is a real problem when it comes to reaching things. This means that file drawers and high cupboards are out of my reach. Even a photocopy machine is difficult. At work I'm responsible for ordering supplies and putting them away, and the supply cupboard is not accessible.

Transportation

The greatest number of participants noted transportation the most often as a barrier to volunteer involvement. Although public transportation was available for people with disabilities in the study community, pick up was often inconvenient. Some focus group participants had to leave

their volunteer positions early because the transportation service arrived early. Others were observed waiting for transportation up to 20 minutes after a focus group session.

Expertise of the Placement Agency

Several of the participants who had experienced the most success in their volunteer work had placements in disability-serving agencies, and in particular, in agencies that serve clients with the same issues or disabilities as the volunteers themselves. In these cases, physical accessibility, attitudes, supportiveness and job design solutions all contributed to successful placements. Unfortunately, however, this openness cannot be taken for granted, as was suggested by one respondent:

It's ironic that most agencies that want to involve volunteers in volunteer work are helping the handicapped and yet they won't have them in their own organizations.

Negative Attitudes and Ill Treatment

Some of the focus group participants encountered appalling attitudes and hurtful reception in their efforts to find volunteer work. The responses in this regard were so strong that they have been summarized below in a separate, major section of this article.

Family Overprotection

Several participants need to struggle to overcome the overprotection of their families in the process of getting out, getting about, and finding volunteer work.

...my mother said I wouldn't make it, and I did make it, and I proved to her that I could do it. My mother said, "You can't do it," and I said, "Oh yes I can!" I said, "I want to try and I want to express to you that I can do

more things as a volunteer and be more independent and go to meetings and do things on my own and decide.”

In response to the above, another participant said,

I’m relating to the mother issue. I think that growing up, I was always given the message, even though it was never said in a mean kind of way, “You can’t do that.” and “Oh, we can’t ask you to do that,” so I grew up thinking I couldn’t do anything. It was big time protection.

A third volunteer added,

My sisters too. Sometimes they protect me. Sometimes you don’t need that protection. You need to grow up on your own and say how you feel.

Accommodations Required

Depending on the nature and severity of the disability, accommodations required by volunteers ranges from significant to virtually non-existent. There was, therefore, a variety of needs expressed by focus group participants, most of which are summarized here.

Physical accessibility was an issue for those in wheel chairs. Patience with, and assistance for, those with severe speech impairments is important. The visually impaired and legally blind volunteers require help ranging from bigger labels for key items, to advanced software and taped minutes of meetings. A participant who uses a walker requires help getting through heavy front doors that do not open automatically.

Participation in Problem Solving

Participants were asked what they found helpful with respect to the location or creation of satisfying volunteer placements. They spoke a lot about creative problem solving, and their role in finding or making accommodations that will work.

So I said to the...supervisor, can we make the nametags big and bold in big letters and that worked out just fine.

I was on the board [of directors] in a location that was very dimly lit, and that was difficult for me, because I need good lighting...they started to give me a copy of the board minutes in a larger font....when I started [receiving board minutes in advance], ...I could use my own equipment at home, and that allowed me to read it in advance.

Being able to articulate one’s needs was noted as an important asset.

When I go somewhere...I will tell them what my needs are...I don’t think it’s fair of me to go to a meeting and ask you to [meet my needs]. You don’t know what my needs are...I always figure it’s my job to put you at ease. That gets us through the first couple of meetings, and afterwards, people start saying, “Would it be easier if we do this or that?”...But it’s important for me to start the ball rolling by making people feel comfortable.

Two participants discussed the importance of fighting for what is needed, and never allowing a situation to go unchallenged, because it will only make it

harder for the next person to break down that barrier.

When you come up against a problem, you have to solve it, because that gives that agency, and whoever they talk to, the ability to use that experience... Sometimes it doesn't matter what you are talking about; if people have preconceived notions, they're going to keep them, but you need to address them and say "can we resolve this?" If not, then you move on. You don't just leave... Unfortunately, if there's a disability or a minority, or whatever, the next person coming behind you will have a harder time because you've already made it an okay practice if you don't object.

Several participants agreed that if the will to solve problems is not present in the placement organization, the struggle to find solutions is much harder.

Education for Staff

Several participants believed that persons who work with volunteers could benefit from education about disabilities and accommodations.

I think that non-disabled people need to become more educated about a variety of severe and non-severe disabilities, and when people really understand a little bit more about what it's like to have a certain type of disability, and what it takes for that person to really function in the community, then I think they will truly have some understanding.

I've been in an employment situation with an agency that specifically worked with disabled persons and they, themselves, were not able to

accommodate my visual needs, and my employment was terminated. I was just let go. I really firmly believe that it takes a lot of education and a real understanding before you get a workable thing happening.

Negative Attitudes and Ill-treatment

Perhaps the most dramatic, and discouraging, revelations that came from these focus groups were the appalling attitudes and hurtful reception that participants had encountered in their efforts to find volunteer work. In the first example, the volunteer needed accessibility for her wheelchair. In her first tries to volunteer she was confronted by physical barriers, and the treatment she received from various agencies along the way was shameful.

I called [a local agency] and they had me in for an interview, but then they didn't call me back. I called them back and said, "Where are we here?" And they said, "You'll get called back," and so I waited for a week and I called them back. They said, "We don't want you here because we don't need you here," so, scratch that idea. Apparently, what they didn't tell me was that there were stairs to get into the place- and me, I can't get up stairs. When I called them back, I asked them is your place accessible, and they said yes. But when I went there for the interview, I found that they had stairs. I said, "I thought your place was accessible?" And they said, "well, we're sorry, we forgot to tell you that we've got stairs." I said, "You fibbed!" I said, "I was believing that you were actually going to need me." They said, "Well, call us back and we'll reconsider,"

but the reaction I got was they didn't need me. So scratch that idea.

Other volunteers, who often need only minor accommodations, and a bit of creativity, have had to push hard for their rights or struggle to find solutions.

I didn't have trouble with accessibility, but in terms of vision issues, yes. If I had gone to a particular place to volunteer and say I have vision issues, usually I get "Oh, hold the phone here!"

So I asked the person [where I volunteer]- she wanted me to roll money. I said, the rolls are too small and the print is too small. So she says, we'll make a chart up for you with the coloured squares, and we'll put the amounts beside the squares and all you have to do is look at the charts. I said, gee, we could have done this before. I am so frustrated. I would like to help you with your workload, but if you can't help determine what I need to help me, I can't do the work.

Here's what one volunteer observed about attitudes among volunteer agencies towards people with disabilities.

The one thing I wanted to mention, I really believe- and I don't want to be discriminatory here, because I'm not that way at all- but I truly believe that people who do not have disabilities have a harder time dealing with people whose disabilities are more severe or not. I have a visual impairment, and I am legally blind, but I don't tend to look blind. I don't walk with a cane, and I don't have a dog. I have friends who

are totally blind who do walk with a cane and have a dog and they have a lot more difficulty than I do.

Several volunteers described experiences that insulted their dignity.

...they placed me...working at the database. After two weeks they put me in a separate room and every time I needed a new piece of paper I had to go out of the room and a long way away to get it. I said, this is not safe for me or them...and I'm not doing it....There must have been a negative attitude there...I have to fight every day for what I need.

I went through five weeks of training and at the end of it they said, most of our kids need physical activity and you can't do it, so we can't match you up with them. I was quite upset...I don't understand it, and I've never understood it. I can understand what they said that a lot of their kids have aggression that they need to let out, and so we can't match you up with anybody because all of our kids need to do sports and all of that, and I'm sure that's true, but to make a blanket statement that they can't match you up with somebody...it probably would have felt awful no matter how it happened, but I think it was pretty stinky of them to let me go through the whole training program and then tell me. Why wouldn't they have said right off the bat, we need somebody who can be physically active with these kids? They made me go through all of that and then told me, "No."

In this example, the difficulty is in the circumstance and the setting.

I'm not sure it's a negative attitude, but at a lot of functions, I need to go to where everyone is standing around and it is noisy and they can't hear me talk. I have a soft voice, and for them to bend down, it's uncomfortable for them, so I avoid a lot of those functions because you end up sitting by yourself a lot of the time. It's a combination. First, wheelchairs make people uncomfortable. Having a dog has been a big benefit because he breaks down barriers, but then when people are having to bend over to speak with you, they are uncomfortable and they feel like they are invading your space. Plus it's hard to hear. In most functions, if they could have a place where people could sit, it would make a difference.

A volunteer who has severe multiple disabilities has tried hard through a number of positions that have not worked out for him. He is not completely discouraged yet, but the experience has been difficult. His conclusion is this:

They do treat you differently from other people. It's not right and it's not fair.

The Future

When asked whether they would pursue more or other volunteer work in the future, focus group participants displayed a consistent undercurrent of fear and reluctance as they offered guarded responses. This non-verbal undertone may be a better indicator than words of the struggles people with disabilities go through to find volunteer work.

Advice for Others

Despite their fears and the difficulties, participants had generally rousing, enthusiastic advice for other people with disabilities seeking volunteer work. This response came from some of the same participants who expressed some fear for themselves and their future search for volunteer work.

I would say go for it! Volunteer where you want to volunteer.

Stick at it.

Make sure you like it.

Know what you want to do. Have an idea in your head and don't be afraid to try it. You have to have some courage.

It's important to get out there and try to network...So, word of mouth-people working together to connect you...Use your contacts.

One participant gave sage advice about realistic expectations:

I'm really practical, so I'd say, if you're going to volunteer, be realistic about it. Don't volunteer to be an astronaut if you don't even know how to do less. Your skills need to match the thing you want to do.

Others recommended getting some help:

Go to the Volunteer Action Centre.

Go call the K-W Habilitation Centre to get some help to get involved.

Help in the Future

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought would make their future search for volunteer work easier.

Having contact people in agencies.

Agencies have to understand about different disabilities and where people are. Not to be afraid.

...education around volunteer opportunities, or whatever, but I think some education for ourselves around assertiveness and how to say, these are my needs or how to feel comfortable.

Some more ideas about who to call, where, what, when, how.

Summary and Conclusions

Because the purpose of the OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL project is “to increase the community’s capacity to open up new opportunities for all persons to exercise more control over their own lives and make a contribution to this community through volunteer work,” an initial assessment of where the community is with respect to supported volunteering was an essential starting point for this project. The goal of the focus group research was to obtain more detail about supported volunteering in the Waterloo Region than was gathered in the initial community agency survey⁶.

The focus group research, based on six separate sessions with a total of twenty-six agency representatives and sixteen individuals, should not be considered a comprehensive overview of supported volunteering as it has been experienced by all, or even by a majority, of agencies or volunteers or prospective volunteers in the Waterloo Region. Information gathered here

has allowed identification of key observations and issues about supported volunteering as experienced by this subset of agency and individual representatives. The data gathered here may be useful to guide further research.

Many organizations in the Waterloo Region are deploying volunteers who have disabilities, and there was a general sentiment among agency representatives in these focus groups that this is a good thing. Most agencies would fall short of feeling that they have an obligation to do so, but most felt that inclusivity is consistent with organizational values and a reflection of the type of community we all want to live in.

Other observations from the focus group research include:

- Involving people with disabilities as volunteers is not always easy and not always successful. It can absorb more time and energy from organizations and staff, all of whom are pressed to work harder in light of cutbacks and increasing service demands. Although it cannot be said with certainty how pervasive this pattern is, some staff in some settings are resistant to the involvement of volunteers in general, and seemingly even more resistant to involvement of persons with disabilities as volunteers. This resistance is, at least in part, due to increasing work pressures on staff through the service system, although discrimination and prejudice seem to play a part as well.
- Many agencies indicated a need for information about disabilities and the process of job accommodations, as well as a further need to learn how to work with people with various kinds of disabilities. Discomfort, ignorance, and embarrassment stand in the way of creative job

accommodations and problem solving. Agencies also indicated a strong need for consistent sources of information and support- someone to call when help is needed- during the course of placements.

- Referral agents need to learn more about the nature of work and the limitations of prospective placement agencies, so that the volunteers who are referred have a good initial chance of finding success.
- Even though a significant proportion of placements do not work out or are short term, other placements, even those of a short term nature, turn out to be extremely productive, and play important roles in the happiness, well-being, and recovery of the volunteers engaged in them.
- It seems that for many volunteers who have disabilities, relatively minor and low-cost accommodations have made enormous differences in how possible and comfortable volunteer work can be. Without question, however, some participants need substantive accommodations, which when already present- as in the case of elevators and ramps- are nearly taken for granted, yet which pose absolute barriers when not in place.
- Some participants need help to determine what kind of accommodation would make the difference, but most of the volunteers in this research seemed able to identify immediately what their own needs are through long experience navigating through the other aspects of their lives.

The general conclusion drawn from this research is that, overall, locating suitable and satisfying volunteer work has not been easy for the largest proportion of volunteer

and prospective volunteer participants in these focus groups. Most have encountered barriers and negative attitudes. Many have had to try several placements before finding one that works. Although this can be said of anyone seeking to do volunteer work, some of the respondents in this research have experienced hurtful encounters and rude and inconsiderate behaviour along the way. Many feel trepidation when thinking about having to find new or different volunteer work in the future. Nonetheless, they are, as a group, enthusiastic about their involvement.

Volunteer work responds to a wide range of motivations, and is mostly a positive, rewarding, and enjoyable experience once the specifics of the position are worked out. Most of the participants in these focus groups found their volunteer work with the assistance of disability service agencies and the Volunteer Action Centre. Given the struggles they have encountered along the way, one wonders how other people with disabilities would manage without the assistance, information, and advocacy of referral agents such as have been involved with those in our research groups.

Although barriers to persons with special needs to do volunteer work are significant, they are surmountable. Success has often been due solely to the persistence and perseverance of the prospective volunteers who have continued to search for placements even after encountering obstacles, rudeness, and insults to their dignity.

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Endnotes

¹ Formally known as The Regional municipality of Waterloo, Waterloo Region, located 100 kilometres west of Toronto, comprises the cities of Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge, plus several towns and rural areas. The population of the Region in 1998 was 418,000, representing 155,590 households.

² Association for Volunteer Administration (Winter 2000). *Opportunities for All-The potential for supported*

volunteering in community agencies. Richmond, VA.

³ Ibid., pp 10-16.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to note that the agency survey found that the input of resources to support volunteers with physical disabilities was often minimal.

⁶ Graff and Vedell, op. cit.

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**What's in it for Me and My Agency?
A Survey on the Benefits of Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities**

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(Editor-generated) Abstract

The authors describe the status of engaging volunteers with disabilities, including making accommodations for disabled volunteers as well as the potential benefits and drawbacks to utilizing volunteers with disabilities.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:
volunteer, disabilities, inclusion

Introduction

In 1998, the Association for Volunteer Administration adopted a formal Statement of Inclusiveness (AVA Board of Directors, 1999) that defines diversity in its broadest terms, and proclaimed the value of inclusiveness in volunteering and throughout the profession. This followed a 1995 process that identified professional ethics in volunteer administration. Among the professional ethics identified were citizenship and respect. Within these two

values the Association recognized (a) human dignity- volunteer programs and initiatives should respect and enhance the human dignity of all persons involved; and (b) accessibility- volunteer administrators will work to understand and treat with respect individuals from diverse backgrounds.

While these are unquestionably worthwhile values, creating inclusive volunteer communities can be a complex undertaking. When it comes to those volunteers who appear to be more difficult

to engage effectively, many volunteer administrators are left wondering why it is to their, and their agency's, benefit to be inclusive. Individuals with disabilities represent one such population that may leave volunteer administrators asking these questions. In a time when volunteering is being scrutinized from a cost-benefit perspective, and bottom-line concerns are ubiquitous across the nonprofit world, what the agency will receive by engaging volunteers in general, let alone volunteers with disabilities, comes into question.

Management, staff, and other volunteers can quickly lose sight of the advantages to being inclusive, and instead direct their foci toward the barriers to inclusion. Various difficulties encountered by volunteer administrators when engaging volunteers with disabilities have been documented. Barriers such as a lack of transportation for individuals with disabilities, perceived increases in staff necessary to supervise and support those individuals, lack of staff training in how to supervise volunteers with disabilities, negative attitudes, potential costs (e.g., accommodations, liability), physical accessibility, and perceived skill deficits have all been cited (CSV's Retired, and Senior Volunteer Program, 2000; Graff & Vedell, 2003; Miller, Schleien, & Bedini, 2003). However, many volunteer administrators with experience in engaging volunteers with disabilities find the benefits far outweigh the barriers (Miller et al., 2003). Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research available that reveals the benefits to agencies of broadening their volunteer pools by adding volunteers from underrepresented groups.

This study focuses on the inclusion of volunteers with disabilities, examining the perceptions of volunteer administrators regarding organizational benefits that result from engaging this segment of our diverse

communities. The study was designed to answer the following questions: (a) Do volunteer administrators perceive benefits to engaging volunteers with disabilities, and if so, what are those benefits? and (b) Does a relationship exist between the proportion of volunteers with disabilities in an agency and the benefits perceived by volunteer administrators?

Literature Review

Engaging Individuals with Disabilities

Approximately 19% of the American population has some form of disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Yet a U.S. study indicated that individuals with disabilities account for only 5.7% of the current volunteer pool (Miller et al., 2003). Similar results have been cited in the United Kingdom, where individuals with disabilities comprise only 5.9% of the overall volunteer pool, yet comprise nearly 20% of the overall population (CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, 2000). Despite the low number of volunteers with disabilities, many volunteer administrators have had experience engaging these volunteers. Surveys across the globe cited 77%, 85% and 56% of agencies engage volunteers with disabilities in the U.S. (Miller, et al., 2003, Canada (Graff & Vedell, 2003), and the UK (CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, 2003), respectively.

Employing Individuals with Disabilities

Volunteer administrators are not the first to grapple with the complexities of engaging individuals with disabilities. In recent years employers have felt compelled to address the cost-benefit analysis of employing individuals with disabilities. Employers of the individual with disabilities have found these employees to be hardworking and highly motivated (Sandys,

1999), competent (Olson, Cioffi, Yavanoff, & Mank, 2001; Sandys, 1999), loyal (Kregel, 1999; Shafer, Hill, Seyfarth, & Wehman, 1987), trustworthy (Shafer, et al., 1987), and dependable/reliable (Kregel, 1999; Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, Vander-Hart & Fishback, 1996; Sandys, 1999; Shafer et al., 1987). Employees with disabilities were found to have a positive impact on the productivity and profitability of businesses (Kregel, 1999) and to contribute to a businesses' efficiency (Sandys, 1999) by working productively and performing quality work (Mank, O'Neill, & Jensen, 1998; Sandys, 1999).

Employees with disabilities were also found to enhance a company's public and community image (Nietupski et al., 1996; Olson, et al., 2001). In addition, employees with disabilities have had positive effects on workers without disabilities (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Petty & Fussell, 1997), have brought employers personal satisfaction (Nietupski et al., 1996; Sandys, 1999), and have had a positive impact on the overall workplace (Olson et al., 2001). In addition, employers with experience hiring employees with disabilities reported having more favorable attitudes and perceptions toward employing individuals with no such experience (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, & Levy, 1992; Nietupski et al., 1996).

While the volunteer and employment fields are different in many ways, the world of work is the closest known literature base from which to borrow in order to broaden our understanding of the effects of engaging volunteers with disabilities. It would be natural to assume that similar benefits would be introduced to agencies by volunteers with disabilities. Currently, research is unavailable to validate such an assumption.

Methodology

Instrument

A self-designed, online survey instrument was used, consisting of two demographic questions addressing agency mission and the total number of volunteers as well as the number of volunteers with disabilities engaged by the agency; nine questions on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) concerning perceptions of the work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities; 12 questions using a Likert scale addressing the benefits associated with engaging volunteers with disabilities; and three open-ended questions, targeting volunteer administrators who had had experience in engaging volunteers with disabilities, on perceived benefits.

Content validity of the instrument was established by a consultant in the field of volunteer administration and was further validated by board members of AVA. Internal reliability was strong for both the perceived work characteristics items ($\alpha=.91$) and perceived benefits items ($\alpha=.90$). The instrument took an average of 8 minutes to complete.

Disability was broadly defined for the subjects of this study in the introduction of the survey with the statement, "For the purpose of this survey, disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities (e.g., self-care, community use, employment) of the individual."

Procedures

A cover letter introducing the survey was sent by e-mail to all AVA members with e-mail addresses on file and to cybervpm, UKVPM, and OZvpm electronic mailing list subscribers. The letter stated the purpose of the survey, voluntary nature of participation, and confidential nature of the

data collection. It also contained a link to the online survey. One week later, AVA members were sent an electronic reminder that included a link to the original online survey. In an attempt to broaden the international response to this survey, a notice requesting participation in and a link to the online survey was also placed in newsletters distributed by the following agencies: Volunteer Vancouver, Scottish Association for Volunteer Managers, and Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency. No tracking of individual responses occurred, with all respondents remaining anonymous. Online data collection limited respondents to completing the survey online once.

Results

The online survey instrument was accessed by 755 potential respondents. Fifty-two of these individuals chose not to answer the questions, reducing the number of usable surveys to 703. Respondents overwhelmingly resided within the United States (82.5%) and Canada (5.8%). Other respondents were from England, Australia, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Italy, Nepal, Singapore, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and New Zealand (in order by response rate of return). Due to the limited amount of data collected from outside the U.S. and Canada, the results reported reflect only North American respondents (n=621). Due to the substantial amount of data collected via the three open-ended survey questions, reporting on the analysis for these data will appear in a follow-up article.

Volunteers with Disabilities

It was determined in the North American sample that 4.5% of volunteers (N=213,770) had an identifiable disability (n=9,598), providing information on the number of volunteers with and without disabilities in their agency (n=565). As

expected, agencies that identified their mission as “working with people with disabilities” and “working with seniors” reported higher numbers of volunteers with disabilities. It was noted in the qualitative data set that many of the agencies working with seniors indicated that their volunteers often were from among their participants and had age-related disabilities. When excluding the respondents whose agency mission was “working with seniors” (n=47) and “working with people with disabilities” (n=33), the percentage of volunteers with disabilities decreased to 3.9% (n=485, volunteers=191,386, volunteers with disabilities=7,531). Only 16.6% of the respondents had not engaged volunteers with disabilities in the prior month.

The survey instrument did not collect data on the types of disabilities represented among these volunteers. However, the review of the qualitative data indicates a wide variety of disabilities, including the intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, and mental illness. Information gathered relating to specific disability groups will be discussed in a follow-up article, which will focus on the qualitative data.

Work Characteristics of Volunteers with Disabilities

Volunteer administrators’ perceptions of the work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities were more positive than negative (see Table 1). Volunteers with disabilities were perceived as hard workers (99.5% strongly agreeing or agreeing), dedicated (99.5%), conscientious (98.8%), motivated (96.0%), reliable (95.4%), and willing to learn new skills (93.7%). Volunteer administrators’ perceptions of volunteers with disabilities were somewhat less positive regarding their lower rate of absenteeism (70.7%) and lower turnover (79.0%). There were no significant

differences between the perceptions held by U.S. and Canadian respondents.

TABLE 1
Perceptions of Work Characteristics Possessed by Volunteers with Disabilities

Volunteers with disabilities...	m	sd	n
Are hard workers	3.47	.52	614
Contribute quality work	3.37	.51	614
Are conscientious workers	3.45	.51	617
Are dedicated workers	3.48	.51	610
Have a lower rate of absenteeism	2.90	.72	583
Have a lower rate of turnover	3.03	.67	576
Are reliable	3.30	.56	606
Are willing to learn new skills	3.27	.58	609
Are highly motivated	3.34	.55	606

Benefits to Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities

Respondents strongly agreed with a number of benefits perceived through the engagement of volunteers with disabilities (see Table 2). For example, these volunteers were perceived to increase the diversity of agencies (98% strongly agreeing or agreeing), help the agency reach its mission (95.1%), be loyal to the agency (94.8%), help the staff accomplish needed tasks (94.7%), and help the agency reflect the makeup of their consumers and community (92.4%). Other benefits were also revealed: volunteers with disabilities help enhance the agency's community image (88.4% strongly agreeing or agreeing), are an untapped group from which to recruit (82.1%), motivate fellow volunteers and staff (82.1%), and offer unique skills and abilities (79.3%). At somewhat lower rates, it was perceived that volunteers with disabilities help staff to experience personal satisfaction (74.7% strongly agreeing or agreeing), be available during hours when many others are not (73%), and improve staff morale (68.7%).

TABLE 2
Perceived Benefits to Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities

Volunteers with disabilities...	m	sd	n
Help our agency to reach its mission	3.31	.57	610
Are available during hours when many other volunteers are not	2.94	.70	600
Offer unique skills and abilities	2.98	.64	598
Are an untapped group from which to recruit	3.09	.66	601
Help agency reflect the make up of our consumers and community	3.25	.61	606
Help enhance our agency's community image	3.18	.62	603
Improve staff morale	2.83	.66	590
Help staff to experience personal satisfaction	2.87	.61	586
Motivate fellow volunteers and staff	3.01	.62	598
Are loyal to our agency	3.27	.56	591
Increase the diversity of our agency	3.42	.53	608
Help staff accomplish needed tasks	3.22	.53	602

The only perceived benefits variable that yielded significant differences between the U.S. and Canadian respondents was "volunteers with disabilities motivate fellow volunteers and staff," where 83.5% ($m=3.03$, $sd=.61$) from the U.S. agreed in comparison to 62.5% ($m=2.75$, $sd=.67$) from Canada ($t(596)=2.80$, $p<.01$).

Correlations

Work characteristics and benefit scores were calculated for each respondent. To calculate these scores, the following values were assigned to the Likert scale responses: strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, agree=3, strongly agree=4. Following these assigned values, subjects' responses to the nine questions addressing work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities were summed to calculate a work characteristics score that could range from 9 to 36. Likewise, subjects' responses to the 12 questions addressing perceived benefits of engaging volunteers with disabilities were

summed to calculate a perceived benefit score with a potential range of 12 to 48. The mean work characteristics score was 29.68 ($sd=4.0$, $n=555$) and perceived benefit score was 37.51 ($sd=5.0$, $n=536$).

Volunteer administrators with more positive perceptions for the work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities (i.e., higher work characteristics scores) were more likely to perceive benefits (i.e., higher perceived benefits scores) from doing so ($r(491)=.629$, $p<.01$).

Analysis of Variance

Analysis of variance was conducted to determine if a relationship existed between the proportion of volunteers with disabilities in an agency and the benefits perceived by volunteer administrators. Data addressing the percentage of an agency's volunteers that had a disability were recoded into four groups: no engagement of volunteers with disabilities, low engagement ($>0-3\%$), medium engagement ($>3\%-9\%$), and high engagement ($>9\%$).

Volunteer administrators who did not engage volunteers with disabilities and those supporting a medium level of engagement ($>3\%-9\%$) had a less positive perception of volunteers with disabilities as dedicated workers ($F(3,539)=5.34$, $p<.01$) compared to volunteer administrators with low ($>0-3\%$) and high ($>9\%$) engagement levels (see Table 3). Similar findings appeared for other work characteristic variable: volunteers with disabilities are conscientious workers ($F(3,546)=3.99$, $p<.01$), hard workers ($F(3,543)=3.95$, $p<.01$), and contribute quality work ($F(3,543)=2.71$, $p<.01$).

Volunteers with disabilities were less likely to be perceived as benefiting an agency by helping it reach its mission ($F(3,541)=4.82$, $p<.01$) by administrators who did not engage volunteers with disabilities as compared to those with a high engagement level (see Table 4). The same is

true for the perceived benefit of helping an agency to better reflect the consumers and the community ($F(3,538)=4.53$, $p<.01$), and helping staff accomplish needed tasks ($F(3,534)=3.03$, $p<.05$).

Volunteers with disabilities were less likely to be perceived as improving staff morale ($F(3,524)=3.84$, $p<.01$) by administrators with a medium engagement level than those with a high engagement level. No significant differences were found between administrators with no volunteers with disabilities and those with a high engagement level on the perception the volunteers with disabilities would improve staff morale.

Discussion

Results indicated that volunteers with disabilities comprised only 4.5% of the overall volunteer pool in North American nonprofit and public agencies. Volunteers with disabilities were currently engaged in 83.4% of the agencies surveyed. Volunteer administrators generally had a positive perception of the work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed to the myriad benefits associated with engaging volunteers with disabilities: increasing the diversity of the agency, helping it reach its mission, being loyal, helping the staff accomplish needed tasks, and better reflecting the makeup of their consumers and community. Although less enthusiastically, respondents also netted the benefits: helping staff to experience personal satisfaction, being available during hours when many other volunteers are not, and improving staff morale.

A high positive correlation was found between administrators' perceptions of the work characteristics of volunteers with disabilities and the benefits perceived through their engagement. Volunteer administrators who engaged many

volunteers with disabilities were more likely to have positive perceptions of their work characteristics, particularly as they related to being hard workers, contributing quality work, and being conscientious and dedicated workers. Likewise, administrators engaging volunteers with disabilities at a high rate were more likely to indicate that these volunteers helped agencies reflect the makeup of their consumers and community, helped staff accomplish needed tasks, helped agencies reach their missions, and improved staff morale.

It is interesting to note that volunteer administrators with medium engagement levels (>3%-9%) of volunteers with disabilities were less positive in their perceptions of these volunteers' work characteristics than administrators with low (>0%-3%) or high (>9%) engagement levels. A possible explanation is that these volunteer administrators recognized the need for inclusion, and have attempted to be inclusive in their practices, but lacked the resources (e.g., time, knowledge, experience) to ensure that these inclusive experiences were successful. Until further research is conducted, one can only speculate as to the nature of these discrepant administrator attitudes.

Implications for Practice

The Association for Volunteer Administration has identified human dignity and accessibility as ethical principle that should be reflected in all volunteer programs (AVA Board of Directors, 1999). Results of this study indicated that managers who have effectively engaged volunteers with disabilities had a higher awareness of their benefits to the mission, agency staff, and their overall organization. Practices that increased the accessibility and accommodation of the diverse groups served to strengthen and reinforce perceptions

regarding the benefits of inclusive volunteering.

Volunteer administrators were aware of the benefits to engaging volunteers with disabilities; however, experiencing it increased their overall awareness of these benefits. Perceived barriers, such as the increases in staff needed to supervise and support, lack of staff knowledge regarding working with persons with disabilities, and the potential costs of physical accessibility were outweighed by the perceived program benefits among those managers with practical experience.

Volunteer administrators may cite organizational restrictions, liability concerns, and lack of senior management support as rationale for not engaging volunteers with disabilities. However, those that engaged volunteers of varying abilities became much more willing to accommodate, to appreciate the benefits, and to be less concerned about the barriers.

Offering organization-wide staff training on how to supervise volunteers with disabilities, including underlying negative attitudes, perceived skill deficits, and potential administrative and accommodation costs, is a strategy offered for addressing barriers. This study indicated that practice leads to success and success leads to more successes. Organizations that effectively engage volunteers with disabilities build upon successes and benefits. Consequently, perceived barriers become less significant and restrictive.

Volunteer administrators are called upon to be principled leaders who establish inclusive volunteer programs founded on core ethical values that support citizenship and respect for all facets of our diverse society. It was determined that most volunteer administrators were politically aware of the benefits to creating inclusive programs. It also suggested that effective leadership led to action and action changed

peoples' perceptions. Demonstrated success is a powerful force for changing and/or reinforcing perceptions.

Implications for Research

This study was limited by classification of all individuals with disabilities as one group. It is possible that volunteer administrators' perceptions are influenced by the type of disability (e.g., physical disability, cognitive disability, mental illness) involved. Further exploration of administrators' perceptions based on specific disability descriptions is warranted. Also, it should be noted that many respondents expressed difficulty, and even contempt, when asked to share their perceptions about individuals with disabilities as a homogenous population. This sense of unease is understood as many individuals wish to avoid stereotyping. Perhaps scenarios that describe a particular volunteer with a disability (e.g., their limitations, personality, strengths, and interests) could be used to assess attitudes in future studies.

Due to the paucity of research in the inclusive volunteer area, disability employment literature served as the lone source for the development of survey questions addressing possible benefits perceived by administrators through engagement of volunteers with disabilities. This may also have limited the ability of our survey instrument to reveal benefits that are unique to volunteerism. Initial analysis of the data from the three open-ended questions provides hope that we may soon have the capability to identify and understand the benefits associated with engaging volunteers with disabilities. We plan to present these findings following further analyses.

In the future, an attempt should be made to translate the identified benefits of inclusive volunteering into more quantifiable terms. Objective outcomes

would potentially have more "currency" for the skeptics of inclusive volunteering, including certain agency boards, funders, and agency staff. Broad "perceived" benefits, such as "helping the agency reach its mission," may not be a compelling enough argument to persuade the doubters of inclusion.

In addition to further defining and quantifying the benefits, further research is needed to determine the processes that are essential to ensuring that these benefits are perceived by a larger number of volunteer administrators. At this time, it is unclear whether the varied experiences- both positive and negative- that volunteer administrators have had when engaging volunteers with disabilities are due to the policies and procedures of different agencies, differential tasks that volunteers with disabilities have been performing, personal characteristics of volunteer administrators and/or the volunteers, some combination of these factors, or other factors yet to be determined.

Since this study was exploratory in nature, it posited more questions about the possible benefits associated with engaging volunteers with disabilities than it may have answered. Future research should attempt to validate and expand upon these preliminary results, and begin to answer the questions that were raised. Intuition suggests that the engagement of volunteers with disabilities is a "win-win" for everyone involved, and this study leans toward the validation of these benefits. Additional research to help us understand the components of these "win-win" scenarios is warranted and timely, as the inclusive volunteering movement continues to gain momentum. Now is the time to give that momentum an extra nudge.

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Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities: A Qualitative Study

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(Editor-generated) Abstract

The authors outline the benefits to engaging volunteers with disabilities. They discuss their research study focused on the qualitative benefits of such engagement for both volunteers and volunteer administrators.

(Editor-generated) Key Words:

perceived benefits, volunteer, disabilities, inclusion, volunteer administrator

The Benefits of Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities

Many volunteer administrators often wonder what they can do to increase their volunteer base and improve the efficiency, longevity, and morale of their current volunteers and staff. One virtually untapped, and certainly underutilized, population from which new volunteers may be recruited comprises individual with disabilities. Volunteer coordinators with limited-to-no experience engaging volunteers with disabilities may be concerned, however, that

increased time and money to supervise may be required, or special accommodations may be needed to engage this population. These concerns are commonly cited by volunteer coordinators as barriers to successfully engaging volunteers with disabilities (CSV's Retired and Seniors Volunteer Programme, 2000; Graff & Vedell, 2003; Miler, Schleien & Bedini, 2003). Nevertheless, many agencies have deemed these barriers worthy of addressing and overcoming.

The current study addresses the benefits of engaging volunteers with

disabilities as perceived by volunteer coordinators who took part in this practice. This research focuses specifically on the benefits that volunteer administrators perceived, both personally and for their agencies, through their engagement of volunteers with disabilities as compared to engaging volunteers who are not disabled.

Literature Review

Including Individuals with Disabilities

Few studies on volunteers have addressed the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. This may be due partly to the fact that volunteers with disabilities only account for 5.7% of the volunteer pool (Miller et al., 2003), although approximately 20% of the population has some form of disability (CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). While the overall number of volunteers with disabilities is relatively low, Miller et al. (2003) discovered that 77% of agencies surveyed had engaged volunteers with disabilities at one time. Of these, a majority would consider future placement of additional volunteers with disabilities in their agencies (Graff & Vedell, 2000; Miller et al., 2003).

Overcoming Barriers

Graff and Vedell (2003) found that agency representatives believed that certain strategies needed to be implemented in order to successfully include volunteers with disabilities. Most important, a good match between the volunteer's abilities and his or her assigned duties was essential. Next, it was necessary to identify and provide special accommodations and support for volunteers. Lack of time, resources, and knowledge of how to support volunteers with varying abilities was commonly reported. Other strategies included the provision of disability awareness training to

staff, access to an ongoing source of information and support for volunteers with disabilities, convincing administrators about the value of inclusive policies, and creative insight in job design and accommodations. Involving volunteers with disabilities does not have to be a difficult task. Most organizations that engage volunteers with disabilities report that they are involved in the same tasks as volunteers without disabilities (CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme, 2000).

Potential of Volunteers with Disabilities

Previously, Miller et al. (2003) found that 62% of volunteer coordinators surveyed perceived the benefits of inclusive volunteering to far outweigh the barriers. It was reported that one third of all volunteers with a disability required no additional support (Graff & Vedell, 2000). When necessary, accommodations were usually minimal, ranging from physical accessibility, patience by the volunteer coordinator, larger and easier to read labels for a volunteer with limited sight, and audiotaped minutes of meetings (Graff & Vedell, 2003). Fitting the task to the person, rather than the person to the task, can help foster a successful experience (CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme, 2000). With a positive attitude, perseverance, and creativity, volunteer coordinators can support inclusive volunteering to benefit both the agency and volunteers alike (Miller et al., 2003).

Methodology

Procedures

A cover letter introducing the survey was sent electronically to all AVA members with email addresses on file and to cybervpm, UKVPM, and OZvpm electronic mailing list subscribers. The letter stated the purpose of the survey, voluntary nature of

participation, and the confidential nature of the data collection. The letter also contained a link to the online survey. In an attempt to elicit a more international response, a similar notice was also published in newsletters distributed by Volunteer Vancouver, Scottish Association for Volunteer Managers, and Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency. No tracking of individual responses occurred, with all respondents remaining anonymous.

Survey Instrument

A self-designed, online survey instrument was used consisting of two demographic questions addressing agency mission and the total number of volunteers, and specifically, the number of volunteers with disabilities engaged by the agency in the previous 30 days; nine questions on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* concerning volunteer coordinators' overall perceptions of volunteers with disabilities; 12 questions using a Likert scale addressing the benefits associated with engaging volunteers with disabilities; and three open-ended questions on perceived benefits that were only answered by volunteer administrators who had experience engaging volunteers with disabilities. The open-ended questions included (a) Have volunteers with disabilities been an asset to your agency in a way that is different or varies from volunteers without disabilities? Why or why not? (b) What benefits has your agency received as a result of engaging volunteers with disabilities? and (c) Of these benefits, which has been the most important? Content validity of the instrument was established through careful review by a consultant in volunteer administration and by the board members of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA). The survey took an average of 8 minutes to complete.

Results

This section presents the results of the open-ended questions. In a previous article, Miller, Schleien, Brooke, and Merrill (2005) described the results of the quantitative survey data.

Respondents

The online survey instrument was accessed by 755 potential respondents. Fifty-two individuals accessed the survey but chose not to answer the questions, thereby reducing the number of usable surveys to 703. Respondents overwhelmingly resided within the United States (82.5%) and Canada (5.8%). Other respondents resided in England, Australia, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Italy, Nepal, Singapore, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and New Zealand (in order of response rate). Only respondents who had experience engaging volunteers with disabilities could respond to the open-ended questions. Of the 703 usable surveys, 531 (75.5%) responded to the open-ended questions. Analysis of the responses led to the conclusion that country of origin did not influence the nature of their responses.

The respondents to the open-ended questions were volunteer coordinators working in a wide variety of agencies. Agency missions included social services (n=94, 18.7%), health (n=82, 15.4%), working with children (n=42, 7.9%), working with seniors (n=38, 7.2%), cultural arts (n=35, 6.6%), other (n=34, 6.4%), environmental (n=33, 6.2%), volunteerism (n=19, 3.6%), hospice (n=15, 2.8%), government (n=14, 2.6%), education (n=11, 2.1%), working with animals (n=10, 1.9%), public safety (n=10, 1.9%), emergency response (n=9, 1.7%), faith-based (n=8, 1.5%), blood bank (n=6, 1.1%), public library (n=5, 0.9%), community development (n=5, 0.9%), recreation (n=5, 0.9%), military welfare (n=5, 0.9%),

retirement (n=3, 0.6%), and museum (n=3, 0.6%). There were no data related to agency type on 12 (2.3%) of the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Responses to the three open-ended questions were deemed similar in nature and were analyzed as on comprehensive data set. Two researchers scrutinized the data to identify themes and for comparative purposes. They conferred on the identification of 11 themes, which were further validated by a consultant in volunteer administration. Themes included disability awareness, unique skills, diversity, equality, personality traits, availability, work ethic, personal satisfaction, match, negative perspectives, and win-win solutions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Prevalence of Themes in
Open-Ended Responses

Themes	# of Responses	% of Total Responses
Personality Traits and Work Ethic	329	20.56
Disability awareness	228	14.25
Unique Skills	227	14.19
Diversity	220	13.75
Equality	220	13.75
Availability	162	10.13
Personal Satisfaction	98	6.13
Match and "win-win"	77	4.81
Negative perspectives	39	2.44

Responses were then coded based on the identified themes. During the coding process, many of the responses were placed into more than one category, depending on fit. Reliability of the coding was verified by

comparison to a second researcher's coding of 25% of the responses. The themes "personality traits" and "work ethic," as well as "match" and "win-win" were later collapsed into single themes due to the significant amount of overlap in the coded responses determined by the initial coders and validator.

A note of precaution must be made before presenting the response summaries. Respondents diligently reminded us that there are positive and negative qualities to every volunteer, regardless of ability. Furthermore, everyone is unique; personal characteristics cannot be applied to all individuals labeled as having a disability, as if they were all part of one group or class of citizens. As one coordinator stated, "Volunteers with disabilities are just like volunteers without disabilities. Some of them are good. Some of them are bad." Identified themes and summary statements appear next in order of response rate from most to least frequent.

Personality Traits and Work Ethic

Respondents most commonly spoke of volunteers with disabilities as having great personality traits and strong work ethics. When describing volunteers with disabilities, volunteer coordinators often used descriptors, such as inspirational, loyal, dedicated, tolerant, nonjudgmental, enthusiastic, punctual, productive, willing, and appreciative of the opportunity to contribute. The commitment of volunteers with disabilities to their positions was described in a variety of ways, but the terms "dedicated" or "dedication" were used by 74 respondents. For example, "the volunteers with disabilities that we are engaged with are very dedicated to their jobs and developed excellent reputations at the agencies where they serve." An additional 36 respondents referred to the volunteers' high levels of commitment to the task at

hand, organization, or mission. For example, "I think their commitment, willingness to learn, and energy level is amazing." Loyal was a descriptor used by another 23 respondents.

Individuals with disabilities are not only dedicated to their volunteer positions and the agencies in which they work, but they are also motivators of others. One volunteer coordinator stated,

Whenever our volunteers with disabilities are seen doing whatever they are capable of, it motivates people who think they do not have anything to offer to volunteerism. They are the most loyal [volunteers] and continue to come each and every week.

Another coordinator stated "We have been able to enjoy dedicated, hard-working, volunteers, which challenges our traditional volunteers to strive even harder."

Willingness is another term that was consistently used. Whether referring to their willingness to perform a variety of tasks, meet new challenges, learn new skills, or "do whatever it takes," willingness was used to describe these volunteers by 56 respondents.

Several volunteer coordinators expressed their thoughts on why such powerful terms as dedicated, committed, loyal, and willing are apparent when describing volunteers with disabilities. One coordinator stated,

Volunteers with disabilities have helped us as a staff and institution be more connected and aware of the needs of the members of the community with disabilities. They have also enabled us to build relationships and a reputation in

our community that makes us more valuable as a partnering agency.

Furthermore, volunteers with disabilities have proven to be great role models regarding respect for others and for individual differences. As one volunteer coordinator stated, "Using volunteers with disabilities, we do not usually have to train them in respecting others with disabilities because they already know this information. They are also able to educate us." Staff and volunteers alike can take the lead from individuals with disabilities when it comes to respecting the many differences in people.

Many volunteer coordinators have learned how to solicit the feedback of volunteers with disabilities to make their agencies more physically accessible. A coordinator stated, "One volunteer who uses a wheelchair has been able to do assessments of the accessibility of our special events, buildings, etc., to help us better understand ease of entry/flow rather than just stick to ADA guidelines." Another coordinator reported that "because of the input of our volunteers with disabilities, we have been able to design our site well enough to have received an award for accessibility."

"Both paid and volunteer staff learn about barriers in the community for people with disabilities... it educates our staff who may or may not be aware of people with disabilities and the challenges in our lives." When an agency is more aware and knowledgeable, it is better prepared to serve a broader segment of the community. Simply stated, "We are better able to understand how to serve those in the community with disabilities."

Unique Skills

Multiple respondents indicated that volunteers with disabilities have unique and

specialized talents, such as the commonly cited ability to perform repetitive tasks for extended periods of time. Forty-five volunteer coordinators indicated that these volunteers were more willing to perform tasks that other volunteers deemed to be boring, mundane, “non-glamorous,” or just not interesting or challenging enough, but that are actually essential to the agency’s functioning. For example, “They do some of the work that other volunteers would tire more easily because of the repetition,” and “They have been willing to do some mundane, necessary tasks that other volunteers wouldn’t be interested in.”

In some cases, volunteers with disabilities have been not only more willing to participate, but more capable and productive. For example, “A group of mentally disabled [sic] adults has demonstrated remarkable accuracy and speed in large mailing projects.” Another stated,

I have several disabled [sic] volunteers who are much better at checking mailing lists to determine complete addresses than nondisabled volunteers. They actually enjoy finding addresses with missing elements, while nondisabled workers (including me) quickly grow tired and less efficient.

A disability advocate may be quick to say, “Here we go again, sticking people with disabilities into stereotypical, low skill roles.” However, the reality is that some individuals with cognitive impairments have a remarkable desire to perform repetitive tasks and do so with incredible accuracy.

Another unique skill identified is the ability to relate and empathize with those facing difficult situations in ways that many others cannot. One coordinator stated, “We

deal with patients with medical issues. Many times they [volunteers with disabilities] are more empathetic than volunteers without disabilities.” Another coordinator stated, “They relate to hospitalized children’s families really well.” An additional example included, “We work with children with cancer and the children can relate to anyone who appears different because they feel different themselves.” This ability to relate to others was especially important when volunteers with disabilities had the same disability as those being served. A coordinator in a disability-related organization stated, “Many of the people we serve have disabilities themselves and feel more comfortable speaking with another person with disabilities.” One respondent stated, “The volunteer who is legally blind leads a group of seniors who are losing their vision. She teaches them coping skills that a fully-sighted volunteer would not have.”

Those volunteers with sensory impairments were viewed as having unique skills that have allowed agencies to expand their services. For example, “We are able to offer services to our patrons who are deaf that we could not do before.” One coordinator stated, “Our volunteers with disabilities often have skills that those without [disabilities]... do not have. An example is Braille skills that have been a huge asset to the agency.”

Many coordinators viewed volunteers with disabilities as role models. This was particularly true in agencies whose missions included serving individuals with disabilities. One respondent commented, “Because the disabilities of some volunteers are similar to those of our residents, I believe that these volunteers have been role models and have encouraged some residents to continue to live and to try new things.” One volunteer coordinator stated that volunteers with disabilities tend not to have “preconceived notions about our children.

They interact with all our children, not just the one who can verbally communicate. They are role models.”

One volunteer coordinator cited an example of how the perfect match between an individual’s very unique, specialized talent and the need of an agency can be an extraordinary find. The coordinator state, “Another volunteer who has a form of autism works with out tax division and can do the work of two people because of his ability to hand numbers.” Most likely, this individual is often seen as lacking in a functional ability. However, with a strong match between abilities and needs, some individuals have the capability to shine in a unique way that can be beneficial to the agency and community.

Diversity

Respondents were adamant that having volunteers who represent the diversity of the community will facilitate good public relations, new perspectives in the workplace, diversified services, and increased tolerance and awareness of people of varying abilities. One volunteer coordinator stated “They [volunteers with disabilities] are directly involved with the public and this reflects positively on our organization and the community. They better reflect our community and make visits to our facility more comfortable for guests with disabilities.” Another coordinator stated that engaging volunteers with disabilities “give us a volunteer corps that more closely reflects the makeup of the community we serve. They show visitors that this is an inclusive organization.”

Twenty-four respondents indicated that increased diversity resulted in good public relations, increased publicity, and an improved public image, although many respondents also pointed out that these were not the original reasons why the engaged volunteers with disabilities. For example,

“Volunteers with disabilities are high profile, so in addition to the obvious loyalty, hard work, and skill factor, they are also great PR.” Also, “Volunteers [with disabilities] have generated a great deal of positive press for us.”

Many also recognized that the increased diversity led to new insights and perspectives: “Including volunteers with disabilities gives a voice to a group who all too often don’t have one. They bring new ideas and perceptions that are often overlooked.” “Volunteers [with disabilities] bring life experience...a new perspective to their work.”

The diversity effect is not easily quantifiable since outcomes are usually demonstrated in feelings and attitudes. As one volunteer coordinator explained, “The experience for staff and volunteers to a work alongside someone with a disability is a priceless benefit. It celebrates diversity and highlights sensitivity.”

Equality

Many volunteer coordinators stated that all of their volunteers were considered equal; the presence of a disability was irrelevant. Most volunteer coordinators held all volunteers accountable for the same duties and responsibilities. They were grateful for all of the important contributions that were made and were appreciative of the time and energy that volunteers gave. One coordinator stated, “All volunteers are equal regardless of their limitations and/or competencies. Each person offers their own unique skill level. Most are excellent workers. We don’t even really think of them as people with disabilities, just members of the volunteer team.” One volunteer coordinator stated, “All volunteers contribute equally according to their abilities. Each brings his or her unique skills and enhances the program according to those skills.” Another coordinator stated

more bluntly, "They tend to have the same assets and problems as abled volunteers."

Availability

Many volunteers with disabilities have weekday availability and more flexible schedules. These characteristics allow an agency to complete more tasks and fill volunteer positions that are often left unfilled. Weekday availability also enables paid staff to work on other projects. One coordinator stated, "We have a few office volunteers who are very dedicated to a weekly schedule. It's hard to find volunteers who can help during regular business hours, and this group is very dependable and hard working."

Another respondent whose agency provided meals commented about the "great delivery at lunchtime. There was a time in our agency history when we couldn't have got... all of the meals delivered if it weren't for our partnerships with agencies that work with developmentally disabled people."

Personal Satisfaction

While this theme did not yield as many responses as several of the others, it did generate strong positive feelings among the respondents. Many volunteer coordinators believed they were fulfilling a need for individuals with disabilities and increasing the sense of community by engaging them as volunteers. They also enjoyed observing the interactions between agency staff and volunteers. One coordinator stated that an important benefit of engaging volunteers with disabilities was her "personal satisfaction that we have helped individuals feel good about themselves and what they can contribute to our organization." Another stated, "The benefit of working with excellent people who really want to help and get joy from working is highly motivating." Volunteer coordinators found it personally satisfying to observe

volunteers completing meaningful work that brings them joy. Coordinators also enjoyed getting to know and respect the volunteers with disabilities as individuals.

Match and Win-win

Volunteer coordinators clearly indicated a need for finding good matches between volunteers' abilities and interests and the needs of the agency to create win-win situations. One stated "All volunteers have abilities- our task is to place all of our volunteers in positions that benefit those we serve, help our organization, and fulfill the needs of the volunteer." Another coordinator stated, "What is more important is matching the potential volunteer with the right task. A good match will result in a win-win situation for all involved." One of the respondents who provided several exceptional examples of thoughtful matches between individual abilities and interests and agency needs expressed the benefit as, "By focusing on a person's abilities, not disabilities, you are able to take people out of the slot-filling mentality of volunteer job descriptions and create opportunities that an agency may never have thought of before."

Two strategies for making such appropriate matches were presented by respondents. One approach was by carefully working with the volunteer directly. By working together to find an appropriate match, both the volunteer and the agency have much to gain. One coordinator stated, "They have shown how much can be accomplished with minimal accommodation or alternate equipment that does not set them apart from the rest of the staff (paid or unpaid)." An additional strategy identified was that of having an agency that works with individuals on a regular basis, such as an advocacy organization, screen the volunteers for their abilities and interests. For example, "The volunteers with disabilities come to us through a special

organization that can screen them for the tasks that we need done.”

A few respondents also discussed the fact that not all volunteer roles are appropriate for everyone. For example, “Disability or no disability, people are recruited on their ability to conduct the volunteer service in a health care setting. Not everyone, disabled or not, is an appropriate candidate to volunteer.” Another stated, “We are also very honest with them if there is no opportunity at that time for their skills.”

The importance of a good match cannot be overemphasized, as is evident in the few negative perspectives that were offered.

Negative Perspectives

Although asked to reveal the benefits of engaging volunteers with disabilities, respondents offered a small number of negative perspectives, many of which reflect what can occur when a good match is not made. These statements included the fact that it was more time-consuming to train and supervise them. Also identified were issues of unreliability, limited abilities, and additional transportation requirements. These situations led to the volunteers with disabilities gaining more from the experience at the agencies expense and, therefore, not resulting in win-win scenarios. For example, “Some are great assets, have wonderful enthusiasm, great attitudes, etc.... others are more of a challenge and at times [I] think they may get more out of the experience than we do.” Another respondent stated “though dependable, the volunteers with disabilities that we have used do not always follow directions, and require more training than our staff is willing to give.” It is hoped that only a few agencies had similar experiences to the respondent that stated,

They are not able to work independently and actually frustrate the staff more than they help. However, occasionally we get one who does an exceptional job. Unfortunately, the ones who cause more problems than they solve run about eight to one.

One respondent reminded us that some problems associated with volunteers with disabilities are also relevant to a much broader group: “There have been times I have had to deal with issues like body odor, transportation, [or] family matters, but this is [also] the case with many regular adult volunteers.

Discussion

One respondent summarized the positive and negative perspectives of inclusive volunteering with the statement, “Depends on the right match- as with ALL volunteers.” When an appropriate match occurs between the abilities and interests of the individual volunteer and the needs of the agency, good things happen. As an agency becomes more diverse and representative of the broader community through an inclusive volunteer pool, it is able to meet the needs of more community members and thus develop a positive reputation as a welcoming and inviting environment. Also, needed tasks are accomplished by a corps of willing, dedicated, and committed volunteers. Skills are brought to the agency that meet basic needs and, many times, expand existing services. Skills are brought to the agency that meet basic needs and, many times, expand existing services.

The respondents in this study described the involvement of volunteers with many different types of disabilities, including individuals with physical disabilities, sensory

impairments (i.e., deafness, blindness), intellectual disabilities (e.g.; mental retardation), autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, renal failure, just to name a few. In the authors' five-plus years of studying inclusive volunteering, we have observed that volunteer coordinators, generally speaking, are more comfortable engaging volunteers with physical disabilities rather than those with mental illness or intellectual disabilities. This may be due to fear of the unknown or the fact that accommodations often require more than just physically rearranging the environment for physical access. This study was not able to gauge whether volunteer coordinators who engaged those with mental illness and/or intellectual disabilities entered into these working relationships hesitantly. However, it was uncovered that regardless of previous experiences or levels of confidence, when a good match was made between the individual's abilities and preferences and the needs of the agency, it typically resulted in a positive volunteer experience for the individual and the agency. The common denominator across most if not all of these positive experiences was the focus on the volunteers' abilities and preferences, and not their limitations.

Implications for Practice

Volunteer administration has continually promoted the core values of inclusion, diversity, human dignity, and the giftedness of every person. The managers of volunteers cited in this study reinforced the benefits of working with volunteers with varying disabilities while noting the importance of good volunteer management practices such as identifying skills, appropriate placement and training, and ongoing supervision. While several spoke of the importance of a balanced exchange between the volunteer and the organization, of particular interest are the implications for

organizations to expand their reach to a broader client base by engaging volunteers with special skills such as the volunteer who was legally blind working with seniors who are losing their vision, or a volunteer who is deaf providing signing for clients who are also deaf. All volunteers augment the work of paid staff. Volunteers with special skills, precisely because of their disabilities, can provide services and accessibility that are beneficial to the organization and the community served.

It is disconcerting to note that some volunteers with disabilities "work extra hard to prove themselves," or "feel they must perform better than their peers." Such comments do not tend to appear in volunteer satisfaction surveys, and managers of volunteers should make every effort to help both volunteers and their organizations have realistic expectations.

The positive comments in this study reflect the continuing emphasis on the synergy that occurs through diversity and inclusion at all levels. Managers identified the negatives and positives associated with all volunteers. Successful volunteer programs, regardless of the abilities or disabilities of individual volunteers, are built on good, consistent management practices that result in positive benefits for the organization and the volunteers.

The study documented the balanced benefits of engaging volunteers with disabilities. The qualities of loyalty, dedication, and work ethic are positive and desirable. The payoff for the organization, however, comes from the increase in disability awareness among staff, clients, and other volunteers, improved agency accessibility, the potential for greater emotional connection with clients, and the potential to expand client services. These are bottom-line benefits that enhance the performance and mission of the organization.

Dr. Jean Houston, keynote speaker at the 1993 International Conference on Volunteer Administration, termed volunteer administrators “social artists,” saying,

There are levels and layers and dimensions of beingness, frames of mind, and modes of intelligence that most of us do not tap. People who did not find their place are being called forth to find a new place. You give to others their greatest of gifts- you give them back their giftedness. You offer the lure of becoming.

Dr. Houston went on to say that “people wander into volunteerism to find their giftedness.” Managers of volunteers have the opportunity to reach out and grab that giftedness. They need not wait for an individual to wander in. This study identified tangible benefits to support the targeted engagement of volunteers with disabilities.

Implications for Research

This study has added to our understanding of the engagement of individuals of varying abilities as volunteers. It has challenged practitioners and researchers alike to move beyond the mere documentation of barriers that prevent participation. Barriers and other inhibitors are easy to document and they grab our attention quickly. Assets and other outcomes, on the other hand, can be more difficult to ascertain. Additional research is needed that addresses diversity in its many forms, and how it benefits individuals, agencies, and entire communities.

Responses to the survey indicated that the positive outcomes were robust when individuals were matched with appropriate volunteer roles. A thorough understanding

of the matching process is necessary for the inclusive volunteering to be successful on a wider basis. The implications are broad since a better understanding of the process of making an appropriate match for the more “difficult” volunteer will lead to more effective matches for the more “typical” volunteer as well. Since there is strong evidence that the appropriate matches lead to more productivity, efficiency, sense of accomplishment, and retention of good volunteers, agencies have much to gain from this knowledge base.

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Endnote

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