

The Booze Buzz

Peer Education Project

A resource manual for recruiting young volunteers



SECTION 2

VolunTEEN's:
A Research-Based Process on
Recruiting and Working with Young Volunteers



Acknowledgements

This resource was researched and written by **Benjamin Rempel**, Manager of Alcohol Projects at the Ontario Public Health Association. His main areas of work consist of increasing awareness of alcohol promotion and the effects on youth consumption along with promoting the effectiveness of alcohol policies in Ontario. He is a graduate of Laurentian University with an Honours degree in Health Promotion.

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The purpose of this manual is to provide an overview on how to safely recruit and effectively utilize young volunteers. By no means is this manual meant to exhaust or fully explain the concepts associated with volunteerism. The author and contributors encourage the reader to explore the Resources portion for further reading on the topic of youth volunteers.

For more information, or to order additional copies of this manual, please contact:

Association to Reduce Alcohol Promotion in Ontario
c/o Ontario Public Health Association
700 Lawrence Avenue West, Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario, M6A 3B4
P: 416-367-3313 ext. 264
F: 416-367-2844
E: ARAPO@opha.on.ca
W: www.apolnet.ca/arapo

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SECTION TWO

VolunTEEN's: A Research-based Process on Recruiting and Working with Young Volunteers

1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The ability to recognize and utilize youth in a volunteer role is a positive trend being explored among organizations. The benefits of using young volunteers to plan and accomplish tasks far outweigh the challenges associated with their management, and many organizations are reaping these benefits. To volunteer is to provide a service to others of one's own free will with no monetary reward. Young people (defined in this manual as those 15 to 24 years of age) are involved as volunteers at higher rates than nearly any other age group (Involving Volunteers Effectively, 2004). Canadian Council on Social Development (2002) reports that almost 1.2 million young Canadians volunteer an average of 130 hours annually. In fact, Involving Volunteers Effectively (2004) estimates that close to one-third of Canadians over the age of 15 are volunteers. Public health, community health, and health promotion sectors are logical environments to utilize youth as volunteers. Most health units have public health nurses and health promoters who work with youth in various youth targeted programming on a regular basis. Tapping into teenagers' talents, energy, and passion as volunteers, will prove invaluable to various streams of organizations.

The purpose of this section is to provide a simple overview on how to safely recruit and effectively utilize young volunteers in the public health sector. This section explains why young people volunteer and how to prepare an effective case for utilizing youth as volunteers. This section is divided into three separate sub-sections – Before volunteering, During volunteering, and After volunteering – that include relevant subtopics in each. Before volunteering discusses the importance of creating and adhering to a volunteer policy and how to effectively manage volunteers while considering health and safety issues and logistics. Within During volunteering, the recruitment, selection, training, and support of volunteers is covered in detail. After volunteering explains how to show appreciation for youth volunteers, along with ideas for succession planning and evaluation. This section concludes with a list of resources intended for further reading and research.

"It has been said that volunteers are Canada's greatest natural resource."

- Volunteer Canada, 2001c

1.1 Why do young people volunteer?

In 2000, the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating recorded that 29% of youth volunteered in the current year throughout Canada. If these findings are applied to the youth population of Ontario (approximately 1,586,000), then it can be estimated that more than 523,000 youth aged 15 to 24 currently volunteer throughout the province of Ontario (adapted from Statistics Canada, 2003).

So, what are the reasons why these young do-gooders do good? It may not come as a surprise that 78% of youth believe volunteering will help their chances of obtaining jobs (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002). In addition to developing new and valuable work skills, and attaining valuable 'hands-on' experience, youth "are more likely than any other age group to volunteer to improve their job opportunities or explore their

own strengths” (Involving Volunteers Effectively, 2004). The belief that volunteering will lead to employment is the main thought echoed in the literature surrounding youth and volunteering; however, there are a vast number of secondary reasons why youth become involved in their communities.

“All children (those 18 years and younger) have a right to express their views and to have them taken into account in all matters that affect them.”

- International Agreement, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

Involvement Youth (2004) highlights some of these reasons, including social appeal. Connecting youth to other youth with the same interests in their community is a major selling point for volunteers. Youth take pleasure in building theirs’ and others’ esteem and confidence, while making new friends. Utilizing teamwork skills and being part of a group leads to feelings of acceptance and importance. Young people also understand the value of developing important skills. Leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and networking are valuable skills that can be learned and honed through volunteer opportunities. Furthermore, youth enjoy the chance to utilize their energy and creativity through productive and meaningful outlets. Volunteering at various charities can fulfill this need among young people.

“Recent studies indicate that those students who are involved in school activities and felt they ‘belonged,’ were less likely to make health-compromising choices than those who felt less well connected and involved.”

- J.W. Higgins et al, 2003

However, never underestimate the allure of having fun. According to Volunteer Canada (2001a), laughter is a characteristic young people consider when seeking volunteer activities. Youth look for

enjoyable, satisfying, and fun environments when considering volunteer opportunities. Other reasons noted for volunteering include:

- incentives such as: tangible and intangible rewards,
- community recognition,
- employment reference letters,
- opportunities to fulfill personal goals and interests,
- strong support towards the cause or charity; and
- to fulfill religious obligations or beliefs.

A mandatory volunteer requirement is another reason why many Ontario teens volunteer their time. Initiated in 1999, the Ministry of Education announced that every student who began secondary school during or after the 1999/2000 school year must complete a minimum of 40 hours of community involvement activities as part of the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (Etobicoke Food For Kids and York Partners for Child Nutrition, 2001). The purpose of the community involvement requirement is to encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility, the role they can fill, and the positive contributions they can make in supporting and strengthening their communities (Etobicoke Food For Kids and York Partners for Child Nutrition, 2001).

Many authors suggest that young people become involved simply because they are good people. Reed and Selbee (2000) sum up that volunteers become involved for the simple pleasures of charitable giving, informal volunteering, social activity, and civic participation. Many young people want to feel important and have their voice heard on issues that they view important. Youth want to exercise their rights, voice their ideas, influence decisions, and improve the lives of others. At times, youth “become involved by committed adults and organizations that believe that truly inclusive societies cannot leave out the young” (Golombek, 2003). As Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, clearly states, “A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline.”

1.2 Making the case for young volunteers

Almost all privately run companies focus on one goal – maximize profit to minimize expenses. Expenditures, unless directly tied to revenue, are seen as wasteful and harmful to the organization. Fortunately, public health takes a different approach to the profit-loss equation. From the perspective of non-profits or public health agencies, “expenditures represent benefits to the community, not as costs to be lowered to increase profits” (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003). Private sector investors benefit when “costs are kept low in relation to revenues. However, communities benefit when non-profit expenditures are kept on par with revenues.” With these guidelines in mind, one can conclude that utilizing volunteers keeps revenues on par while adding incredible value to the organization and the community. Student volunteering may add to your organization’s value, worth, and message being spread much further than could have been achieved without volunteer involvement (Heart Health Resource Centre, 2000).

Unfortunately, for some organizations, the process of engaging young volunteers in programs can be quite complex. Due to union issues and legalities surrounding volunteers, and the initial expense of hiring volunteer management staff, it may not be feasible to utilize volunteers in specific situations. This process and decision will be based on individual organizations.

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline.”

- Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

Although the financial argument generally takes precedent when discussing volunteers, there is a much simpler answer as to why organizations should use young volunteers: because it’s the right thing to do! Health, education, and social service providers have proven to be reluctant partners in including youth volunteers and projects in their decision-making and policy discussions (Health Canada, 1998). This needs to change. People in the voluntary

sector know it’s “good for young people to be given a chance to serve and to grow. It is good for our society to be inclusive and to foster inter-generational opportunities” (Volunteer Canada, 2001a).

“Both for young people and the organizations receiving them, volunteer work offers a gold mine of possibilities. As a society, we all have a stake in nurturing this kind of involvement. Young people are our future – and their future lies in the present.”

- Janet Lautenschlager, 1994

Although unpaid, volunteers come with a price to the organization. One must consider the financial investments associated with volunteers versus the expected dividends to justify the use of volunteers. Some challenges, or financial expectations, involving volunteers that should be considered are:

- Increased cost of supplies, equipment, and utilities;
- Increased cost of communication (i.e., time for meetings, public notices);
- Cost of turnover which leads to increased training costs;
- Travel expenses and uniform fees;
- Public relation fees;
- Additional space or rental charges;
- A paid volunteer coordinator position; and
- Recognition gifts and events.

Other costs can be attributed to staff recruiting, training, managing, and supporting volunteers throughout their duration with the organization (Heart Health Resource Centre, 2000). More often than not; however, the payback far outweighs the challenges, and organizations reap the benefits of volunteers. “Youth participation can lead to better decisions and outcomes. It promotes the well-being and development of young people; it strengthens their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy; it protects them better; and it answers the call of young people who want to take part in decision-making processes” (World Youth Report, 2003). Utilizing young volunteers often alters the organizations’ thinking from “can we afford to have youth volunteers” to “can we afford not to have youth volunteers.”

1.3 Benefits to employers

There are several characteristics that seem to be shared among effective volunteers that can be beneficial to an employer. Some of these characteristics are summed up on Ourcommunity.com.au (2004) which suggest that young volunteers are usually energetic, enthusiastic, and creative. Despite little experience and few professional skills, young volunteers are open-minded, readily accepting change and responsibility. These characteristics are echoed from The Marin Institute (2004), which suggest young volunteers have unique perspectives, insights, and experiences with community projects. Effective student volunteers are passionate about their projects, and devote more energy when a personal bond is present. In general, they are not afraid of challenge and understand the positive potential of their actions.

In addition, young volunteers can provide a link with the community and a “bridge to the culture and reactions of the people one is trying to reach” (Ourcommunity.com.au, 2004). “Many have outstanding technology skills or language abilities and they have benefited from a different and more enriched education than their older counterparts” (Volunteer Canada, 2001a). When young people get involved, not only because they have to, but also because they want to, it sends a clear and sincere message to paid staff that can heighten commitment and enthusiasm towards work (Involving Volunteers Effectively, 2004). Volunteers add spirit and life, warmth and energy to programs. They are able to raise staff morale resulting in increased productivity (Heart Health Resource Centre, 2000).

Involve Youth (2004) makes the case that organizations can benefit from youth volunteers by broadening their perspective on decision-making. Incorporating innovative and dynamic ideas from youth will present a broader range of views and help with ‘target-market’ decisions. Enlisting young volunteers will also improve the image, reputation, and credibility of the organization.

Through recruiting young volunteers, organizations can save money – a lot of money! Employers can utilize ‘expanded value’ to demonstrate the value of volunteers to an organization. Quarter, Mook and Richmond (2002) explain that expanded value is “value added by including values for social (i.e., non-financial) contributions such as the non-paid efforts of volunteers. It is based on the premise that many stakeholders, including volunteers, add value. It can be used by voluntary organizations to demonstrate their value or worth.” When assigning a dollar value to your volunteers’ contributions, three important areas should be considered: the dollar value of volunteer hours, non-reimbursed expenses, and the dollar value of volunteer skill development. Depending on the size of the organization and the number of volunteers utilized, these savings can add up to a large sum of money.

“Youth participation is our greatest hope for lasting social transformation and is at the core of our mission to create compassionate, sustainable and equitable societies.”

- Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004

1.4 Benefits to young volunteers

In the document Working with youth by The Marin Institute (2004), there is a brief section titled ‘Everyone wins: youth and communities.’ This title rings true in regards to youth volunteers as they are exposed to a learning environment where they are able to network, learn new skills, share ideas, develop their abilities, discover their talents, and gain valuable experience as community stewards. Volunteering not only prepares young people to be proactive, involved adults, but can also challenge stereotypes of youth (e.g. that youth are apathetic).

More than three-quarters of volunteers revealed that volunteer activities helped them with interper-

sonal skills including understanding and motivating others, and dealing with difficult situations, as recorded by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and Volunteer Canada (2004). Other noted benefits of volunteering for students include the development of effective communication skills, an increase in knowledge on volunteer issues, developing personal and professional skills, networking, and creating and strengthening community action.

Volunteering also brings about change – a change in the organization, a change in the community, and perhaps the most noticeable, a change in the individual. Golombek (2003) identifies specific

desired outcomes for youth involved in volunteering. These include a change in character – the ability to accept responsibility and to be accountable to others. Second, to build confidence – volunteering brings about a sense of self-worth and heightens self-esteem. Third, to bridge a connection – young people appreciate a sense of belonging within their peer groups, their co-volunteers, and their community. Fourth, through volunteering youth are awarded with competence – the ability to learn educational and vocational skills that will prove invaluable in the working world. Finally, volunteering brings about a sense of contribution – youth feel proud when they have bettered their communities

through their time, energy, ideas, and talents. “By providing positive opportunities, communities are consciously assisting young people to reach their potential and to develop skills and competencies to support them through adolescence... and throughout adult life” (AusYouth, 2002).

“Volunteerism is a long standing tradition in Canada. From our humblest beginnings, the ethic of giving freely of oneself, of helping one’s neighbour and serving one’s community has been integral to our social identity and national culture.”

- Management of Volunteer Services in Canada, 1999

2

2.0 BEFORE VOLUNTEERING

2.1 Volunteer policy

Most companies and organizations have policies through which employees are informed of the rules and regulations of the workplace. A policy is normally developed, implemented, enforced, and reviewed by the board of directors or there designates. Linda Graff (1997) explains, “Policy development and implementation will go a long way to reduce the dangers and risks which currently exist in the field of volunteering.” Normally, volunteer policies attempt to:

- Clarify responsibilities
- Communicate values and beliefs
- Articulate rules
- Develop guidelines
- Ensure consistency
- Guide and supports company programs.

These same objectives hold true for a volunteer policy. It should clearly - in concise, simple language - explain the mission, goals, and objectives of the volunteer program. A policy outlines the company’s principles and values, and identifies a course of action in maintaining them. A volunteer policy needs to be congruent with other policies of the organization while being consistent with the Human Rights Code and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. A volunteer policy may even be derived out of, or added to, the company policy, if key concepts and responsibilities have already been clearly identified. Shaw (1990) explains quite simply that a volunteer policy needs to apply

to everyone associated with the organization, including paid and unpaid workers, stakeholders, etc. He clarifies that a volunteer policy sets strict boundaries, where “inside the boundary, things are acceptable; outside the boundary, things are not” (Shaw, 1990).

There are several reasons why volunteer policies are developed. Graff (1997) explains that policies “clarify responsibilities and define lines of communication and accountability”. Policies establish values, beliefs and directions while ensuring continuity over time. In addition, policies can be a source of pride and satisfaction for managers while conveying a message of responsibility, which satisfy the community and company stakeholders. Other reasons to develop a volunteer policy may include “the increasing degree of risk associated with volunteering; the deficit of organizational and administrative support for volunteer programs; and the increasingly litigational nature of our culture” (Johnstone, 1999). In basic terms, “the greater the degree of responsibility of volunteer work itself; the greater the need for rules to govern and regulate its accomplishment; the greater the need for guidelines to ensure safety; the greater the need for policies” (Johnstone, 1999).

A volunteer policy will be as simple or comprehensive as your organization warrants. AusYouth (2002) suggests a volunteer policy should include at

minimum:

- the company's philosophy, values, and goals;
- reference to the Human Rights Codes and equal opportunity;
- roles and expectation of volunteers;
- roles and expectations of the organization;
- a code of conduct while volunteering;
- occupational health and safety reference;
- insurance and liability reference;
- a disclaimer; and
- signatures from both parties – the volunteer and the employer.

It is common practice today to screen volunteers through a criminal record check, or at the very least, a reference check before the recruitment process is initiated. Screening volunteers through police checks are at the discretion of the individual organization, which should have their own coverage policies in place to help determine the level of risk associated with the volunteer position (Hathaway, 2004). Generally, the higher the assessed level of risk, the more in-depth the screening procedures should be (Volunteer Canada, 2001b).

This assessed level of risk can be based on several factors, including whether the volunteer will be:

- Working with children or young adults
- Working in a school environment

- Unsupervised for long periods of time
- Volunteering outside the physical space of the organization
- Handling money.

Screening procedures should be delivered consistently and continuously throughout the volunteers' involvement with the organization. In regulations made under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the minimum age requirement for youth volunteers to be in a workplace is 14 years old (for most establishments) and can increase to 16 depending on the type of hazards present (e.g., a construction site) (Ministry of Labour, 2002a). Although volunteers of 14 years and older can generally volunteer without consent, it is highly recommended that those between 14 and 18 have a guardian sign a 'Guardian Recognition of Participation' form (Hathaway, 2004). These forms should include a detailed placement description, volunteer responsibilities, and emergency contact information. This procedure ensures that guardians have been notified of the volunteer position and are aware of the type of work that is expected. The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (2001) points out that these protocols "should not be viewed as an insult, but as evidence that the organization cares about its programs and its people."

2.2 Volunteer Management

It should go without saying that to have an effective management system, you first need an effective manager. Quality management and support is important if volunteers are to be productive and feel valued. Satisfied, happy volunteers are more likely to remain with the organization for longer durations than unhappy, unsatisfied volunteers.

The volunteer manager will work with youth volunteers from inception to conclusion of a project, and their individual attitudes, skills, and experiences will permeate all aspects of the process. Therefore, selecting and appointing a manager of volunteers is a very important and crucial first step in volunteer management. Lautenschlager (1994) highlights certain desirable soft-skills needed for a supervisor of youth:

- Genuine respect for young people
- Belief that young people can make a positive contribution
- Acceptance of individual, social, and cultural

differences

- Respect for diverse perspectives and opinions
- Ability to listen without judging and advise without preaching
- Patience.

It is essential that the volunteer manager understand the organization's philosophy and values and how this will affect youth. Effective management policies and practices are required to maximize the skills, knowledge, energy, and talents that young volunteers bring to programs and activities (AusYouth, 2002). Youth managers need to build the esteem, worth, and confidence of youth volunteers, while understanding that they are on a personal level. Ideally, "the program leader should play a role similar to that of a coach or mentor" (Lautenschlager, 1994).

Volunteer management also involves the clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the

volunteer position. This can be clearly communicated through a placement description. Such a description differentiates between paid and non-paid positions by outlining specific duties and responsibilities, while establishing the boundaries within which young volunteers must work. This type of document can be used as a management tool when agreeing upon deliverables or controlling any problems that may arise.

Placement descriptions should include specific information, as adapted from Heart Health Resource Centre (2000):

- Title and purpose of position
- Expectations of volunteer and Volunteer Manager
- Specific tasks, duties and responsibilities of position
- Specific skills, qualifications, and experience recommended
- Pre-requisites for placement (e.g., training course, required school semester)
- Time commitments required
- Support, supervision, and resources available
- Reference to office policies and procedures
- Benefits for volunteering (i.e., tangible and intangible rewards).

“Like youth development itself, volunteering is too important to be left to chance. It must be actively and consciously planned for and managed.”

***- Volunteering and Youth Development:
Making a positive difference, 2002***

Other forms that should be considered when managing young volunteers, as suggested by the Heart Health Resource Centre (2000), include:

- Application forms – these can be generic or specific to the volunteer position
- Volunteer contract – through co-signing, both parties have committed themselves to specific obligations
- Guardian recognition of participation – informs the guardian of the risks and responsibilities of the volunteer position
- Tracking forms – these ensure accurate volunteer involvement statistics are maintained
- Letter of welcome – clarifies main objectives while officially accepting the volunteer to the organization
- Emergency contact information – include contact information for both the volunteer and the organization
- Policies and Procedures – used as a reference guide if questions about company policy and procedures arise
- Volunteer health and safety statement – clarifies the rights and responsibilities of both parties involved – the volunteer and the employer
- Post-volunteer survey – use this information to improve the existing volunteer program
- Other forms – generally, the more information you can provide new volunteers, the safer and more productive they'll be.

2.3 Volunteer health and safety

Ensuring the health and well being of employees should be a primary concern for employers; and therefore, extending this care to volunteers should be a natural course. Volunteers are not legally covered by the Employment Standards Act, 2000, and may not be covered by the Workplace Safety & Insurance Act, 1997, or the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (Dahlstrom, 2004). That leaves the Occupational Health and Safety Act to cover volunteers as stated by the Ministry of Labour (2002b). This Act provides protection for paid employees, but also states that employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of those visiting or helping out in their workplaces (Ministry of Labour, 2002b). Unfortunately volunteers are

occasionally put in questionable working situations with little knowledge about health and safety plans, which could put them at risk for injury or illness. For this reason, the process of risk management must be implemented before volunteer recruitment occurs. Linda Graff (1999), explains “the essence of risk management is planning and prevention. The aim is to anticipate risks in advance and then take deliberate and appropriate measures to control or reduce those risks to a tolerable level.”

Graff (1999) goes on to present the Risk Management Model: a four-step process by which most risks can be controlled. Step One consists of identifying the risks – pointing out dangerous

situations that the volunteer is or may be exposed to. Step Two is evaluating the risks – determining whether the situation is of low-risk or high-risk will determine the course of action. Step Three is controlling the risks – this can be accomplished in four ways: stopping the activity; eliminating the risk; minimizing the risk; or transferring liability. The final step is review – assess the decisions made and repeat the process to ensure a safe and healthy environment for young volunteers.

It is quite possible that most risks in your workplace have been assessed and made noted of in the company policy or health and safety manual. It is also quite possible that volunteers are covered under this policy or by private liability insurance. If not, it is very important to communicate the health and safety policy and enforce compliance with young volunteers. This can be done through formulating a volunteer health and safety statement. This

statement defines both the organization and volunteer obligations that clarify the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The statement should cover such issues as creating and maintaining a safe work environment, duty of care, proper communication processes, and managing young volunteers safely (AusYouth, 2002). Other components may consist of hazard identification, assessment, response, emergency procedures, emergency contact information, and parental consent.

An organization must establish and clearly communicate health and safety policies and procedures to youth volunteers. When this process is omitted, the likelihood of risks occurring, or the improper response to risks, increases. In fact, “not managing and controlling risks will merely increase liability, and increase the odds of losing a legal action if or when one is launched” (Graff, 1999).

2.4 Volunteer Logistics

Before the actual process of recruitment occurs, there should be time dedicated to discussing program logistics. This can simply mean meeting with those involved with the youth volunteer program in attempt to raise questions or foreseeable complications. Some outcomes may involve staff being more flexible with their schedules, and allocating more time for supervision, follow-up, and problem solving (Ourcommunity.com.au, 2004). During a volunteer program, mistakes will inevitably be made. However, discussing the volunteer program in both general and specific terms may surface issues before they become problems. Volunteer Canada (2001a), provides logistical sample questions that should be considered:

- What and when is the time commitment for the youth volunteers?
- What skills are required to complete the tasks?
- Is this job unsuitable for younger volunteers?
- Do we provide appropriate training and support to enable tasks to be completed successfully and safely?
- Where and what is the setting for this job? Is it solitary or teamwork?
- Will the volunteers be happy and safe? Are there alternate tasks that could be assigned?

This process of brainstorming and asking questions will better enable staff members to deal with problems as they arise. In some instances, rethinking

or changing practices may need to be considered before proceeding. Many voluntary organizations recognize the value of rethinking volunteer engagement. Periodically, organizations need to re-evaluate how they assign volunteers to tasks and how they train and support them. Organizations need to discuss how volunteers are assessed, and be clear about how volunteer performance affects the organization. Additionally, organizations need to re-evaluate how they incorporate volunteers into decision-making processes and how they keep them informed of organizational shifts and changes (Volunteer Canada, 2001a).

The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (2001) highlights ten logistical items that should be considered before proceeding with a youth volunteer program. The organization should ensure:

- Board of directors and senior management acknowledge and support the vital role of volunteers in achieving the organization’s mission
- Policies and procedures provide a framework that defines and supports the involvement of volunteers within the organization
- That a qualified person is designated to be responsible for the volunteer program
- That a screening process is clearly communicated and consistently delivered
- Volunteer assignments address the purpose of the organization and involve volunteers in

meaningful ways that reflect their various abilities, needs and backgrounds

- Volunteer recruitment and selection reaches out to diverse sources of volunteers
- Volunteers receive an orientation to the organization and its policies and procedures, and receive training for their volunteer assignments
- Volunteers receive appropriate levels of

supervision according to their task and are given regular opportunities to receive and give feedback

- Volunteers are welcomed and treated as valuable and integral members of the organization's human resources
- Contributions of volunteers are regularly acknowledged with formal and informal recognition methods.

3

3.0 DURING VOLUNTEERING

3.1 Recruitment

“The majority of volunteers get involved because they are asked to by someone they know” (Volunteer Canada, 2001a). This statement is echoed in AusYouth (2002), which states “research shows many people who volunteer do so because someone asked them or was a source of inspiration.” With this knowledge, it is important to vitalize the ‘word of mouth’ method of advertising when attempting to recruit young volunteers. Current volunteers are terrific endorsements for your future volunteer projects. However, if your organization currently doesn’t utilize volunteers, then a recruitment strategy should be developed.

Who?

Compose a list of potential youth volunteers among the committee or group put in charge of managing volunteers. Examples of these may include: family and friends, school groups or clubs with an established interest in your organization’s cause, school leaders or student council, local volunteer agencies and centres, youth workplaces, churches, and community centres such as the YMCA/YWCA or youth drop-in centres (Volunteer Canada, 2001c). It is also wise to designate a recruiter. A recruiter is someone who has enthusiasm and public speaking skills to approach youth with the opportunity to volunteer.

It is important to match the placement with the student volunteer as best as possible. Avoid recruiting ‘anyone for anything.’ Be selective during the recruitment process. Interview potential candidates and recruit only those who have the required skills and/or motivation to be successful. Many agencies feel they do not have the luxury to

be selective; and as a result, suffer from the ‘we will take whoever we can get’ disorder. Unfortunately, this can be a disadvantage because “attracting and retaining suitable volunteers is essential to the sustainability of youth development programs” (AusYouth, 2002).

How?

There are many different avenues in which an organization can advertise for volunteer positions. AusYouth (2002) suggests advertising through main media including local newspapers, radio, and Internet sites. Brochures, posters, postcards, and flyers advertising volunteer positions can be distributed through local schools, clubs, and community centres. Another option is to conduct presentations, attend events, or facilitate a display on volunteering where youth audiences gather. Tap into principals, teachers, youth counsellors, and public health nurses who have constant connection with schools and who can advertise volunteer positions. Utilize contacts from local service clubs, community groups, and volunteer centres as prescribed in Ontario Volunteer Centre Network (2004). And, as previously mentioned, never underestimate the word of friends and colleagues. Utilize current volunteers to canvas the community with placement descriptions and testimonials.

In many cases, young people will need to be convinced that a specific volunteer opportunity is a strong match for them. Therefore, the Institute for Volunteering Research identified eight key interests of young volunteers as recorded in Volunteer Canada (2001a). An organization should consider each of these interests as it could relate to their

volunteer program:

- Flexibility – offer both short and long-term opportunities during a variety of times (weekends, after school, summer holidays, etc.)
- Legitimacy – explain the significance of volunteering for a specific cause
- Ease of Access – explain the placement description and training procedures
- Experience – highlight the chance to gain valuable employment experience
- Incentives – highlight tangible and intangible rewards
- Variety – offer an array of tasks and opportunities
- Organization – ensure an efficient, relaxed, and supportive environment
- Laughter – make the volunteer position enjoyable, satisfying, and fun.

After recruitment strategies have been formulated, it is important to assess results and modify as needed. It is important to know why some approaches work and others do not. This process will build on successes while minimizing failures as described in Johnstone (1999). Recruiting young people, as volunteers, can be a productive strategy.

By providing a mechanism to encourage volunteerism, positive behaviours and attitudes will be carried out by youth into adulthood (Heart Health Resource Centre, 2000).

“Often the youth we engage come to us. Sometimes friends or parents encourage them to come and volunteer...”

... One volunteer recruitment program is matching a volunteer youth with an intellectually disabled individual. Some youth found it fulfilling to work with these people. The act of volunteering was in and of itself engaging for them. They were able to have fun, play sports, organize and attend dances, do arts, go out into the community with them, etc. Basically, whatever the individuals they volunteered with enjoyed – the youth enjoyed as well. It was win-win.”

- Ruth Pentinga, National Volunteer Resources Coordinator; Girl Guides of Canada, 2004

3.2 Selection

A comprehensive selection process should always be implemented. “Placing young people in volunteer positions means placing the ‘right’ person in the ‘right’ assignment” (Lautenschlager, 1994). This will ensure that tasks are enjoyed and completed successfully by young volunteers. Simply put, if a volunteer does not appropriately match the programs goals and requirements, then they are not recruited.

Some key principles to include during the selection process are outlined by AusYouth (2002), and should be implemented where appropriate:

- The selection process should be documented, transparent, accountable, and free of discrimination and unlawful practices
- Match skills, interests, and experience of potential volunteers with volunteer positions
- Include young people or current volunteers on the selection panel, along with the Volunteer Manager
- Prepare a list of key questions for all inter-

viewees based on volunteer specifications

- Ensure time commitments and deliverables are achievable and understood
- Ensure health and safety statements and company policies are reviewed and understood
- Confirm that a criminal record check has been performed.

The selection of young volunteers can be done in a variety of settings depending on the type and length of the volunteer position. Individual interviews are the most personal, but may also be the most intimidating for potential recruits. Group interviews can be the preferred choice for selecting volunteers. Benefits of group interviews are that they: save time by interviewing several candidates simultaneously, highlight potential leaders and listeners; are generally less stressful than personal interviews, and easy to observe interactions between individuals in the group. Group interviews are normally more casual than personal interviews and can easily be

incorporated into an orientation session. However, the type of selection process utilized depends mainly on the type of position. For example, a group interview may be suitable for those interested in volunteering for a sporting event, where as an

individual interview would be better suited when screening for volunteers to work with in more sensitive areas.

3.3 Orientation and training

Orientation sessions are a great venue to introduce the volunteer program, to introduce the people involved, and to generally prepare the volunteers for their first day on assignment. Try to schedule the session at convenient times for young people such as after school or on weekends. The sessions should be conducted at a convenient location, and in a comfortable and casual environment. Greet volunteers as they enter the office and provide food and refreshments to initially illustrate the appreciation of volunteers. The orientation session should be kept to a minimum amount of time with a flexible agenda, allowing for social interaction and questions (City of Toronto, 2004). The orientation session is the opportunity to engage and commit volunteers to the organizations' cause. An enjoyable and successful orientation can easily lead to an enjoyable and successful volunteer experience.

Management of Volunteer Services in Canada (1999) provides a detailed checklist of items that should be considered when conducting an orientation session. Such information should include:

Welcome to the organization

- Introductions to other volunteers and staff
- Mission, vision statements, philosophy, and values
- Current and future programs, services, and clients
- Partner organizations

Operational Information

- Role of Board, committees, staff and their relationship with volunteers
- Rules, policies, and procedures
- Health and safety statements and emergency procedures
- System of accountability
- Expectations and responsibilities
- Volunteer benefits

Practical Details

- Tour of facility
- Location of washrooms, lunchrooms, volunteer managers office, etc.
- Check in/out procedures, secure location for personal belongings
- Transportation details including parking
- Use of equipment with facility
- Important phone numbers of supervisors, managers, general reception, etc.

Resource Materials

- Welcome letter
- Placement description
- Volunteer handbook or training manual
- Code of Ethics
- Contract signed by both parties
- Miscellaneous items, including nametags, parking pass, maps, etc.

The number of volunteers and length of commitment will determine the length and depth of an orientation session. Obviously, if individuals were volunteering for one afternoon, it would be unwise to offer a two-hour orientation session. However, if volunteers will be involved with the program for an extended period of time, then a more comprehensive orientation session may be appropriate. A final thought to consider: an orientation session is not a training session. Potential volunteers should not be inundated with training protocols and procedures; rather it should be a casual, informal session covering just the basics and providing an opportunity to ask questions.

Appropriately structured training needs to engage the interest of both adult leaders and youth volunteers, stimulate motivation, and are an enjoyable and rewarding learning experience (AusYouth, 2002). Training is much more specialized than orientation, and generally takes a step-by-step format. Timelines, goals, and learning objectives are established in order to complete all agenda items. Effective training should equip and enable youth volunteers to complete objectives with confidence.

The training schedule should be adhered to, yet contain room for flexibility. Proper training takes time but the effort invested is well spent (Lautenschlager, 1994). Health Canada (1998) stresses the importance of covering topics that include: communication skills, conflict resolution, public speaking, writing, motivational skills, and group dynamics. When youth are armed with organization, planning, advocacy, and facilitating skills, projects are most likely to succeed and the youth-adult partnership strengthened (Marin Institute, 2004).

When beginning a youth training program, one of the greatest benefits an adult teacher can have is respect from the young volunteers. Youth are rarely concerned with someone's experience or employment record, number of books published, or the type of degrees on the wall. As an adult teacher, you must earn respect and relate to youth on a personal basis. Use humour, a friendly demeanour, an open-mind, and acceptance of all people and their contributions. Simplify or avoid office and industry jargon. Also, avoid sarcastic remarks. Ask the volunteers their expectations for the youth manager (Lautenschlager, 1994). Youth will only feel comfortable to share their thoughts and input if a comfortable environment is first created.

It is also important to consider the different approaches to learning which work best for youth volunteers. Although each volunteer is different, Volunteer Canada (2001a) points out that youth generally learn through a variety of methods, including multi-media, print materials, lecture format, panel discussions, group activities, and individual tasks. As well, youth generally have higher energy levels than adults and therefore learning should take a variety of modes, including physical activity, group cohesion activities, site visits, role-plays, and practice sessions.

Training is a process specific to each organization, and therefore content, length, and method of training will depend on particular outcomes. When training young adults, however, there are a few

constants worth noting. The content of the training sessions should only contain pertinent information. It is common to introduce inapplicable facts and statistics during a presentation to fill time gaps. Try to avoid this practice. Only present material useful to the volunteer position.

The length of training can mean the difference between young volunteers accepting or declining an offered position. Training sessions should be scheduled around the most convenient times for the majority of participants. (A quick survey during the orientation session will help with this process). These can take the form of morning, afternoon, or evening sessions; weekdays or weekends; half-day or full-day formats. Keep in mind that the volunteer is volunteering their time; and therefore, their time should be respected.

The method of training can be established before or during the sessions. Informal surveys regarding the effectiveness of different delivery methods will help in planning future modules. For example, if volunteers lose interest during a lecture format segment, but remain alert and interested during role-plays, then utilize more role-plays in the future.

Some overall general training tips to consider are:

- Test the presentation equipment before hand. Perform a mock run of the presentation to ensure all material is covered and flows smoothly
- Schedule regular breaks to socialize, stretch, and use the facilities
- Maintain a comfortable and informal learning environment throughout the training
- Provide a summary of the training or a volunteer manual for future review.

Training should be viewed as an on-going process. After young volunteers have been familiarized with assigned tasks, consider offering additional and advanced training. This would allow them to take on additional tasks, assume more responsibility, hone acquired skills, and boost confidence levels (Lautenschlager, 1994).

3.4 Support and supervision

Support is the effective monitoring and communication of tasks performed by youth volunteers. Support is also a key element in retaining volunteers. Once orientation and training have commenced, the volunteer will begin completing assigned tasks.

Regular support from the Volunteer Manager will ensure those tasks are completed successfully. For support to yield positive results, the Volunteer Manager must build an open and supportive relationship with each person involved. This is done

through a variety of methods.

Communication

Like in most situations, communication is key to success. Heart Health Resource Centre (2000) states, “When asked, volunteers cited lack of communication as the most de-motivating element of their volunteer experience.” It is, therefore, important that volunteers receive the same information related to volunteer projects as staff and partners to prevent problems from arising. Relevant information can be distributed in several ways including: a group email, a group meeting, office memo’s, company newsletters, and postings on the notice board. Feedback from youth volunteers is crucial as well. Over-time, acquired feedback can shape a volunteer program to better suit the volunteers. This feedback can be relayed in a variety of ways including: a suggestion box, group debriefings, communication book, regular meetings, and informal talks.

Other items to consider in regards to volunteer communication are regular performance reviews. Listing many positive attributes about the volunteer with few improvement suggestions will increase self-worth and sense of value among young adults. These performance reviews can be summarized at the end of the volunteers’ involvement and condensed into a reference letter. Lastly, young volunteers should be armed with a complete listing of contact information. This should include office and home phone numbers and email addresses of the Volunteer Manager and support staff, office manager, and general reception. By providing such information, it conveys the message that someone will always be available to help.

Teamwork

It is quite popular among organizations utilizing youth volunteers to create teams in order to accomplish tasks. A variety of characteristics, attributes, and strengths exist within a group, which can potentially produce an efficient and creative team. As explained earlier, the social appeal of volunteering rates high amongst youth. A team environment allows youth to socialize while supporting each other and receiving a sense of accomplishment (Johnstone, 1999). It is recommended by Johnstone (1999), that teams have a range of six to 10 individuals. Less than six may not allow

sufficient diversity of talents, and more than 10 may discourage full effort and participation from all members. The size of your group, however, will depend mainly on the number of volunteers and the activity. Finally, teams can be quite successful and more focused when a staff, committee member, or older adult is a contributing member. Shared leadership responsibility between paid staff, adults, and youth is desirable in the achievement of project goals (Health Canada, 1998).

Mentoring

Mentoring can be an effective method of supporting young volunteers. The process of utilizing an experienced person to informally guide a newer person can prove beneficial to both the protégé and the mentor, and skills attained can be applied both immediately and later throughout different situations. Mentoring is based on the ‘buddy system’ and only works if the mentor is patient and wise and the protégé trusting and open (Johnstone, 1999). Effective mentorship programs should ensure that:

- clear outcomes and expectations are communicated,
- participation is completely voluntary,
- roles by both parties are understood and accepted, and
- the relationship is monitored and supported.

“Difficulties have come up in terms of lack of maturity of the youth in terms of not taking their position seriously. This is sometimes the nature of youth, but should not deter health units from utilizing this untapped and inspiring resource. It is easily remedied by having clear guidelines for describing their position and supervision. Make the experience fun and flexible using food as an appreciation gesture.

We have had many success stories of youth enjoying their experience and taking with them new skills and health promotion information that they have since shared with their friends. Staff also have felt this has been a good partnership. A little extra work initially leads to many rewards.”

- Dawn Barr, Supervisor of Volunteer Programs, Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Health Unit, 2004

4

4.0 AFTER VOLUNTEERING

4.1 Recognition and retention

One of the key roles of adults in a youth-volunteered project is that of affirming the work done by youth (Health Canada, 1998). The commitment and longevity of young volunteers to specific organizations could easily be correlated with the amount and type of recognition received. Appropriate, individualized, timely, and sincere recognition are paramount in motivating and retaining youth. This recognition should be on going and specific to the volunteers' interests. The World Youth Report (2003) observed that the "recognition of the value of youth participation has taken hold from the global level to the local community." The importance of such recognition has many benefits including increasing esteem, self-worth, enthusiasm, and confidence, along with the communities' positive perception of the organization. A lot of time and effort has most likely been devoted to orientation and training sessions and it would be a waste to lose volunteers simply because they feel unappreciated (Volunteer Canada, 2001a).

Tangible Recognition

Presenting youth volunteers with a gift is a simple, yet very effective method of showing appreciation. These tokens can be large or small, costly or inexpensive, but should strive to be individualized. Heart Health Resource Centre (2000) presents an extensive list of gift ideas. Some examples include: plaques, certificates, awards, pins, letters of appreciation, group t-shirts, thoughtful cards, gift certificates for the movies or a CD store, reference letters, and personalized business cards. Volunteer Canada (2001c) recognizes that small gifts can be just as appreciative. These may include: thank you letters, food and refreshments provided spontaneously or at meetings, posting a sign within the office naming and congratulating the volunteers, and distributing a page of testimonies and positive comments regarding their work.

Intangible Recognition

Perhaps even more important than tangible awards is the way in which young volunteers are treated. Providing praise, congratulations, and encouragement through words, actions, and gestures are vital to a youth volunteer program (Marin Institute, 2004). To determine how much appreciation your

organization conveys, Involving Volunteers Effectively (2004) suggests that staff consider the following points:

- Kindness – does the staff smile and greet the volunteers, accommodate personal needs, and are aware of personal limits?
- Thoughtfulness – does the staff send birthday or thank you cards, offer to purchase refreshments after a job well done?
- Helpfulness – does the staff reimburse expenses, provide a babysitting service, offer to provide a reference or job opportunities?
- Leadership – does the staff supply orientation, training, or mentoring programs, provide skill-developing workshops?
- Fun – does the staff present a friendly and enjoyable working environment, plan social outings, host recognition events?

"In the late 1990's, I was part of a group working to increase the acceptance of anti-impaired driving programs and messages in Toronto (e.g., In the Driver's Seat, Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving, Teens Against Impaired Driving). The planning group included several youth from then Metro Toronto, plus police, public health, parks and recreation, school boards and other youth-serving organizations.

The youth were extremely capable, creative and energetic – and completed an amazing amount of work. What we as adult supporters needed to do was reinforce their ideas and help them to resource these ideas till they came to fruition."

*- Pat Sanagan, President,
Pat Sanagan Consulting, 2004*

Thanking volunteers for the work they have done and the effort put forth can be accomplished in hundreds of unique ways. Brainstorming for a few minutes among a youth volunteer committee will produce a variety of ideas that are suited to the organizations message, timeframes, and budget. Recognition should be an on-going process, not just an event scheduled at the completion of set tasks.

Making sure volunteers know how important and valued they are to your group will go a long way to keeping them involved (Involving Volunteers Effectively, 2004).

People continue to volunteer at specific organizations because they offer a satisfying work experience. Conveying mutual trust and respect to volunteers results in a positive and productive environment. AusYouth (2002) observes that effective induction into the organization, ongoing opportunities for training, continual support, extending responsibilities in a timely manner, and the inclusion of volunteers in decision-making is essential in retaining volunteers. Mutual feedback is

encouraged and both parties should highlight and analyze issues before they become problems as mentioned in Involving Volunteers Effectively (2004).

Finally, the reimbursement of expenses such as travel, meals, postage/telephone costs, entrance and admission fees (e.g., to conferences), and other expenditures should be repaid in a timely manner. This can be done through direct payment or an honourarium. It is important to understand that volunteers shouldn't have to pay to give of their time. All expenses should be covered to convey the message of respect and appreciation, which in turn will result in a higher volunteer retention.

4.2 Succession planning

Change within organizations is inevitable. Planning for the future is important to ensure continuity and avoid disruption to programs when change does occur. This type of planning should be ongoing and initiated from the beginning. There are two major factors to plan for within a youth-volunteered program – change in volunteers and change in program.

To prepare for a change in volunteers, AusYouth (2002) suggests some principles to follow. First, one must accept the fact that volunteers will come and go – that fact is unavoidable. Enabling current youth volunteers with the skills to be effective future leaders can ensure the program is in good hands when turnover inevitably occurs. This enabling process can be done through mentoring and supporting young volunteers as described earlier. Second, policies that increase opportunities for young people to engage with and contribute to their communities should be developed and implemented. Good policies lead to good leaders, which lead to good volunteer programs. Finally, preparing a detailed placement description and training current volunteers to fulfill it is highly recommended throughout the current literature. Preparing people for change through communication will help the transfer of skills and responsibilities among volunteers seamlessly.

To plan for a change in program, certain realities must be considered. First, change is increasing. Today, organizations are progressing rapidly, and therefore policies and programs must keep up (Johnstone, 1999). Programs are not stalled very long before reassessment and change occurs. Volunteer programs should be flexible enough in design to anticipate and successfully integrate such change. Second, change is good. Adapting youth volunteer programs to new populations, new environments, and new outcomes can serve positive in the long run. Looking at existing programs with new eyes, and considering youth input can bring about positive changes.

Succession planning is the responsibility of the youth volunteer manager and committee. It is an important step in ensuring the volunteer program and the volunteers themselves achieve longevity.

“It is only when voluntary sector organizations incorporate this understanding of the importance of volunteers into every layer and aspect of their organizational culture that we will begin to see a real difference and a measurable effect.”

- Volunteer Canada, 2001a

4.3 Evaluation

The importance of evaluation is stressed throughout the literature on youth volunteering. The evaluation process guides changes to existing programs or acts as a template for future programs. AusYouth (2002) points out that each time we choose, decide, accept, or reject something we have completed an evaluation, and the action we take after this decision can shape the direction of a youth volunteer program.

Evaluations should focus on several areas, including: the effectiveness of the volunteer program and policy; the effectiveness of training, support, and recognition of volunteers; the work, responsibility, and confidence of all participating members including volunteers and staff; and, the contributions made to the community through the volunteer program. AusYouth (2002) suggests that at minimum, a successful evaluation should:

- assist in the design of new or existing programs;
- improve effectiveness and efficiency of programs;
- increase volunteer empowerment, connection, and communication; and
- allow volunteers to measure personal performance against organizational standards.

Evaluation of programs or volunteers should be an ongoing process with an annual or end-of-project review (Lautenschlager, 1994). This evaluation can

take many forms, including: informal talks, feedback, and encouragement; team or personal meetings; formal surveys and questionnaires; regular debriefing sessions; and analyzing work plans (Johnstone, 1999).

The process of evaluating youth volunteers and programs can be quite simple when the basics are covered. AusYouth (2002) suggests the following steps be followed when evaluating:

- Reflection
- Planning and design
- Researching information
- Feedback, analysis, drawing conclusions
- Putting results into practice
- Repeating the process.

These action steps should be completed with all participating members to guarantee a full overview and representation. Ensuring these steps are seriously analyzed can lead to stronger, more effective youth volunteers, which will evidently lead to stronger, more effective youth volunteer programs.

“Health promotion will not go far if professionals try to take it into the community alone. The most successful programs have been those in which volunteers have been enabled to help spread the word by participation and example. Belief in the vitality and benefits of involving lay people in health programs is essential.”

***- Heart Health Volunteers,
The Missing Link, 2000***

5

5.0 CONCLUSION

Young people can be invaluable assets in the communities they reside in. Many young people possess numerous talents and abundant energy – all which can be tapped and utilized in a volunteer role. Those in the Public Health or Health Promotion sector should now be aware of the advantages and benefits of utilizing youth in work, responsibility sharing, and decision-making. Good practice and advanced planning in volunteer policy and management, health and safety considerations, recruitment, training, recognition, and evaluation will ensure a successful youth volunteer program.

Perhaps clichéd, but no less true: young people are the future. Opportunities for learning and skills development are critical for young people in order to positively contribute to all aspects of their lives.

They need to be encouraged, respected, valued, and supported in volunteer roles to aid in producing strong and safe communities. Appreciating the full potential of young people in a volunteer role proves invaluable to the organizations and communities they serve.

“Groups that make the effort to include youth are well rewarded. Youth bring a different perspective on current and future activities carried out by the organization, they bring a unique mix of passion and enthusiasm to their volunteer activities and they are eager to contribute to the community and the lives of others.”

- Involving Volunteers Effectively, 2004



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