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Editorial

At this busy time of year, we are all looking for ways to cope and ease our personal and professional stresses. And so our December issue is rather timely, focusing on the complexities of volunteerism – discussing not only challenges but practical strategies to make your professional life easier.

We all know that volunteer contributions are extremely important, especially at this time of the year. But how exactly do we determine the value of such contributions? Tony Goodrow helps reduce some of these complexities by describing The Relative Impact Model: Attributing value to volunteer accomplishments

Ulyana Osorio acknowledges that recruiting diverse board and committee members can be challenging. Learn helpful tips in her article, Ensuring diversity of volunteers from service delivery to decision making. And Sammy Feilchenfeld's article, Get your staff excited about volunteer involvement, gives several coping tips for busy managers of volunteer resources. The number one tip: get your organization's staff on board. Joanne Fine Schwebel discusses with us some of the challenges of integrating highly skilled immigrant newcomers in an informative article.

A trio of articles discuss some of the complexities of managing volunteer-clients. It can be difficult to tell a long-time, dedicated volunteer that their services are no longer required. This task is even more complex when that volunteer may now need to access the very services they have provided. In her article, Blurred lines between volunteers and clients, Jennifer Lalonde emphasizes that preparation and



compassion can make this task much easier. Mira Dineen's article about The Stop Community Food Centre reminds us that volunteers and organizations benefit when service users are included as volunteers. And finally, Annemarie Nicholson talks about how peer volunteers in the mental health sector can help us meet our shared human need of meaningful connection in her article, Oscar-worthy performances: Peer volunteers.

We've tackled the complexities of volunteerism before in other Journal volumes with various themes. For a summary of important articles from previous issues, check out Ruth Vant's article, Dusting off the archives.

The holidays are no doubt a busy time. Holiday celebrations, like volunteerism, help us feel connected to something larger than ourselves, no matter what our beliefs. I hope that you find some quiet time this holiday season to peruse this issue of the Journal and find strategies to help you get your new year off to a great start.

Best wishes,

Inika Anderson

Editorial Board Member

Internationally educated professionals as volunteers: The challenges of integrating highly skilled immigrant newcomers

by Joanne Fine Schwebel, Toronto ON

Defining the issue

Every day, as the Director of Volunteer Services of a large hospital in downtown Toronto, I see internationally educated professionals (IEPs) applying for volunteer positions in health care. In the past they explored many other options, but now many are coming during their first week in Canada as part of their pre-determined plan, and a few have even come directly from the airport!

These new immigrants are looking for ways to learn the culture of Canadian hospitals, enhance their English skills, network with professionals, enhance their employability, or learn about non-regulated health care professions when considering career transition options. It has been increasingly challenging to find ways to use their considerable skills to benefit both them and patients, while respecting risk and regulation.

Do you wonder why your program is seeing more and more foreign-trained professionals? Canada is a country that encourages skilled immigration. The Ministry of Citizenship website states, "Demographics show that our population is aging, and our birth rate is low. Without further immigration, our labour force will shrink." This undoubtedly will have a significant impact on the country, economically and socially.



We are seeing a trend that is reflective of burgeoning immigration. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, there are “an estimated 3,611,365 foreign-born individuals in Ontario, representing 28.5% of total population.” This number is increasing rapidly, and “between 2006 and 2011, Ontario’s foreign-born population increased by 6.3%, slightly faster than the Canadian-born population which grew by 4.6%.”¹ Forty-three per cent of the 1.2 million newcomers to Canada end up in Ontario and 48% of the population in the Greater Toronto Area is foreign born.

With the current focus on refugees, we need to be thinking about their integration. A December 2015 Globe and Mail article entitled “Syrian refugees are arriving: Where will they work?” outlines challenges in securing employment that uses their skills, education and experience. They say we need to “think outside the box” and “We just have to start being a little less arrogant about our skills being the best, and look for creative ways to recognize the professional skills and abilities of those coming with professional qualifications obtained outside of Canada”.

Volunteering and acquiring experience

According to a report by the Martin Prosperity Institute, immigrants arriving in Toronto had higher levels of education than native-born Torontonians. Despite this, the unemployment rates are far higher with 6.6% unemployed (vs. 3.5%) and their average income was \$48,488 compared to \$64,239 for non-immigrants.²

A 2003 report from Statistics Canada states, “The most common problem cited by immigrants who encountered barriers when looking for employment was the lack of Canadian job experience.”³ Regardless of past experience, some employers require Canadian experience before consideration, leading to a chicken and egg scenario. In the words of Ontario Human Rights Commissioner Barbara Hall, “Ontario attracts highly-skilled immigrants from all over the world, but if they have to meet a requirement for Canadian experience, they are in a very difficult position – they can't get a job without Canadian experience and they can't get experience without a job.”⁴

Even new immigrants with great credentials or hard knowledge are sometimes thought to be missing what is referred to as tacit knowledge: soft skills which may be harder to acquire and are culturally embedded, such as communication skills, teamwork, conflict resolution and other nuances of the Canadian workplace. When employers talk about lack of Canadian experience, they often mean the things that make integration difficult, according to a study by Sakamoto, Chin and Young.⁵ Volunteering may be seen as a worthwhile way to experience these nuances in the workforce.

In a survey of 1,200 members on LinkedIn⁶, 46% of Canadian professionals stated that when they evaluate candidates, they consider volunteer work equally as valuable as paid work experience. Twenty-four per cent of the hiring managers surveyed agree they have made a hiring decision based on a candidate’s volunteer work experience.

A study conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto,⁷ interviewed 45 people from 17 countries who had secured volunteer placements, as well as representatives from social agencies serving new immigrants. Specific reasons for volunteering included



gaining Canadian work experience (47%); improving understanding and use of English, especially work-related language (36%); learning about Canadian culture (22%); getting a job (20%); networking (18%); and being in a real Canadian workplace (16%). Participants felt that the informal learning from the volunteer work placements was more significant than the formal job-related training they received.

In 2006, the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative funded “A qualitative study into the experiences of immigrant volunteers at mainstream agencies.” They examined the differences in perceptions of immigrant volunteers, looking at how immigrants viewed volunteering, and how organizations could be more welcoming and accommodating. In many countries, volunteering was viewed as free labour and therefore devalued. And since volunteers tended to work with people who are most in need, there was an association with low status. In many countries, there is no formal organization responsible for volunteering.

So, should we be surprised that there is confusion surrounding the requirements and parameters of volunteering? Do all immigrants understand the object of a formal volunteer program if it does not exist in their country? Do they view it as a way to secure employment, as outlined on some immigration websites and as supported by many sectors?

The local experience: Surveying programs in Ontario

As part of this paper, a survey was sent to managers of volunteers in healthcare-related agencies, through the Provincial Association for Volunteer Administration Ontario (PAVRO) to assess their experiences with internationally educated professionals (IEPs) as volunteers. Of the 63 respondents, 78% had IEPs in their volunteer programs. There were some encouraging results: 40% of respondents were able to place 80% to 100% of applicants. Only 8% were able to place less than 20%. When broken down by sector, community health agencies were better able to successfully place IEPs than were hospitals or other community programs. In programs that serve the community, no one was able to successfully place more than 80% of applicants.

One question was how much of a challenge it was to accommodate/work with IEPs. Eighteen per cent said it was not a challenge at all; the majority (65%) found it moderately challenging, and the remainder found it very challenging. When asked to list the challenges, volunteering as a way to gain paid employment was cited by a whopping 85% of respondents.

Another significant challenge (65%) was that most highly skilled immigrants are told that volunteering is seen as a pathway to employment. Many then come to volunteer programs expecting employment training, being considered as an internal applicant, mentoring and shadowing. A similar number cite English language skills as a barrier. However, volunteering is touted by some community programs as a way to proactively acquire these skills, and even to get employment-specific terminology. However, only 35.4% of survey respondents viewed IEPs as valuable assets to the hospital with the skills they bring and only 14.6% saw volunteering as a valuable way for IEPs to gain employment at the hospital. While the expectation of immigrants is that volunteering is a panacea of sorts, the reality is that this is not borne out.



We should not be surprised by the findings of this survey. Frustrations with expectations in what volunteering can offer in terms of potential employment and enhancing English language skills have all been identified as benefits of volunteering. However, new immigrants who are wrestling with a myriad of issues from housing to schooling to employment may not see volunteering as an end, but rather as a means to an end as they grapple with resettlement issues.

Many people in health care see the positive benefits of having IEPs in their organizations. This might lead to determining ways that the experience can be more mutually beneficial. When asked what programs have been put in place for IEPs, answers included: formal and informal networking (41%), shadowing (40%), mentoring programs (36%), workplace seminars (15%) and language classes (9%). What is more problematic is that half of the respondents did not answer this question, and so, overwhelmingly, there are probably very few special programs in place.

Best Practices and Resources

When examining who was successful in integrating IEPs into their programs, there were a few that stood out. For example, one hospital partnered with an English-as-a-second language (ESL) program from the local school board. Upon successful completion of the ESL program students have the opportunity to join the Adult Volunteer program at the hospital. More than 650 participants have graduated from this program.

There were many examples of mentoring programs, some in collaboration with organizations serving IEPs. Volunteer Canada lists useful resources and links on their Newcomers webpage that are helpful in planning to welcome new immigrants or a diverse volunteer workforce. The network of supports through government, colleges and community agencies is extensive but can also be daunting for a newcomer. There are many community resources that help individuals navigate the difficult road to employment, including settlement services, mentoring programs, occupation-specific skills and language training. Many assist with licensing and certification with regulatory bodies.

Conclusions

The popular business adage that you cannot manage what you do not measure led to this pilot project. It was a way to understand what the issues are in the voluntary sector in Ontario in incorporating internationally educated professionals into our programs. The success of the community sector over the health care sector should lead us to a further examination of best practices.

Canada is a country built by strong immigration. The multicultural nature of our country and the prospect of security and opportunity are why many immigrants choose to settle here and make a positive contribution. Many gravitate to volunteer work as a means to understanding the Canadian system, to network with professionals, to see the workforce from the inside out, to gain practical language skills and to be considered for employment.



Rather than put up additional obstacles, volunteer programs need to discover ways in which to contribute to successful integration. This can be done proactively through policies that encourage diversity, and through the removal of existing barriers to success.

Joanne Fine Schwebel is the Director of the Volunteer Services and Interpreter Services Departments at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Canada, where she is responsible for the strategic oversight and implementation of the departments' more than 1,000 Volunteers and 4,000 annual interpretations. Joanne has over 30 years of experience in the voluntary sector and holds a Master of Education degree in adult education and counselling.

She has co-authored a recent book, 'Measuring the Impact of Volunteers' with four colleagues. This book addresses the need for a standardized way to measure the impact and outcomes of volunteer programs, focusing on the creation and implementation of a Volunteer Resources Balanced Scorecard. Joanne also has a strong interest in mentoring programs and has been involved in them for the voluntary sector as well as coordinating mentoring opportunities for new immigrants and students. She has held leadership positions in the voluntary sector, healthcare and language interpreting communities, and has extensive training experience both within her organization and the broader community.

This journal article was adapted from a *PAVRO Marilyn MacKenzie Innovation Pilot Project*, with permission.

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Dusting off the archives: A collection of complexities

by Ruth Vant, Ottawa, ON

As you were beginning your role as a manager of volunteer resources you may have thought how easy your job was going to be: just find out what needs to be done, ask the volunteers to do it and make sure the schedule works and you thank everyone afterwards. You were probably in the position for only a short time before you realized that, although many people think the role is simple, it is actually very complex.

I decided to review past issues of the Journal to see if we had already explored the topic of complexities of volunteerism. What I discovered is how vast the subject really is. And so I present a brief collection of articles published by CJVRM in the past several years, which examined some of the complex areas that managers of volunteers deal with on a daily basis.

Advocacy: Issue 18.2 (2010)

Many volunteer groups advocate for their organizations' causes. In fact, many social justice changes have materialized because of involvement from the voluntary sector. This issue of the Journal provides insight into advocacy through tips and tools to foster good relations with government officials, as well as examples of success by organizations which advocated for change.

Recruitment and Screening: Issue 18.3 (2010)

Recruiting volunteers has been a challenge for decades. But things are different now from when our parents and grandparents were recruited for volunteer positions. Changing demographics means that recruitment efforts must be targeted to reach young people and professionals, and to seek a more diverse group of volunteers. These topics, along with the many steps of screening, including Police Records Checks, are presented in our issue on.

Recognition: Issue 19.2 (2011)

Saying thanks to volunteers is more complex than you may think. Volunteer Canada wrote an informative article about the changing landscape of volunteerism. This has a direct impact on trying to stay both creative and relevant when recognizing our volunteers' successes. Other articles in this issue present imaginative and effective strategies for volunteer recognition.



New Trends: Issue 19.3 (2011); **Going Against the Trends?:** Issue 24.1 (2016)

How can you stay on top of every new trend that comes along? Five years ago, CJVRM devoted an issue to new trends: evolving from traditional volunteer management to volunteer engagement; social media and how to use it effectively; and how to identify trends using survey data. What trends in 2011 are still relevant? What new trends have arisen since? In 2016, we looked at trends once again, but rather than keeping up with them, we questioned if and when it is more lucrative for our programs and our volunteers if we go against the trends. Of particular interest is an article from Volunteer Canada that looks at the big picture and asks whether we should become trendy or remain true.

Strategies for Inclusion: Issue 21.1 (2013)

One of the most complex issues managers of volunteers face is inclusivity. Even the topic is complex, as being inclusive means reaching out to and involving people from so many backgrounds, capabilities and areas of interest. The Journal issue devoted to strategies for inclusion has articles that provide useful suggestions for including people with disabilities or newcomers to Canada, and retaining volunteers who come to your organization as one-day event volunteers.

Vested Volunteers: Issue 21.2 (2013)

While this issue of the Journal provides many examples of volunteers who are committed, enthusiastic and loyal to their cause or their organization, it also highlights some of the complex problems that can arise when working with volunteers who have difficult-to-manage personality types. There is also an excellent article that follows the stages of a volunteer's journey from tourist to traveller, then guide and finally to fully vested.

Risks and Demands: Issue 21.3 (2013)

Managers of volunteers are always attempting to minimize risks. The issue on risks and demands addresses the complex arena of balancing program demands and initiatives with potential liabilities. Articles provide input on how to keep risks and legalities from outweighing the benefits of volunteering on boards, how to fill other hard-to-fill positions and how to assess a volunteer's emotional stability to handle a high-stress role.

Engaging Youth: Issue 22.2 (2014)

It is always a challenge to find creative ways to engage our young people as volunteers. Mix that with ever-expanding technology and social media opportunities, and the challenges become even more complex. Several articles in the Journal's issue on engaging youth explore creative and unique ways to reach young people and to entice them not just to volunteer, but to become volunteers for life.

When Volunteers Leave: Issue 22.3 (2014)



Just when life appears to be running smoothly, something changes and life becomes complex once again. When volunteers leave, whether they leave on their own or are asked to leave, matters can become complicated. In this issue, authors provided Journal readers with useful information on best practices for change management, succession planning and dismissing volunteers.

Measurements and Impacts: Issue 24.2 (2016)

Not only do managers of volunteers need to ensure effective programs run smoothly, but they also need to measure program impact. This may be one of the most complex elements of the job. Articles in the Journal's issue on measurements and impacts present both the benefits of measuring impact and ways in which it can be done, through using statistics effectively and through storytelling.

This list is by no means complete. Although I did not research Journal issues before 2010, many articles published before then remain timely and may shed light on complex issues you are dealing with now. I hope I have whetted your appetite to learn more and that you will continue to explore the CJVRM archives.

Ruth Vant has been an editorial team member for the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management for seven years, and has enjoyed the role of chair since 2013. For over forty years, she experienced the complex life with many different organizations as a manager of volunteer resources, an executive director and a volunteer.

Blurred lines between volunteers and clients

by Jennifer Lalonde, Ottawa ON

How do you tell a long-time, dedicated volunteer that her services are no longer required? How do you have the conversation with a volunteer that now might be the time for him to access the services he has helped provide for the last ten years?

As a nonprofit in the health and community support sectors, we depend heavily on volunteers. As a service provider for seniors, the majority of our volunteers are over the age of 50. Our volunteers are wonderful. They are often attracted to our organization because they have been touched by our services in some way, either through a parent or loved one who has been supported by our agency. They may also be interested in their own future care and want to know how to better navigate the system.

We are fortunate that many of our volunteers make a long-term commitment to the agency. This is great because it means that we have a stable and loving group of volunteers, providing much-needed front-line support to seniors in our community. It can also pose challenges as we balance the needs of our clients with the changing needs of our volunteers.

Occasionally, our volunteer coordinator finds herself in the unenviable position of needing to have a conversation with a volunteer about their continuing role. This is not a conversation any of us want to



have! No one wants to hear that the service they have been providing, in some cases for years, is no longer helpful. How can this conversation possibly go well?

Surprisingly, it can go very well! it is not uncommon that a volunteer is relieved to learn that the agency will continue to thrive even after they are no longer volunteering.

We have found that with preparation and compassion, the conversation always goes better its is important that the volunteer continues to feel needed and validated, but understands that there is a gap in service that naturally occurs as an individual's strengths diminish with age. We have found that the most successful transitions from volunteer to client happen when we know and understand the volunteer's motivation, interest and abilities. Using open, honest and compassionate communication, we are sometimes able to slowly decrease a volunteer's role. This can be done by bringing in additional volunteers, finding a date when a volunteer will retire, with all the appropriate recognition and thanks. In these cases, we often find that the long-term volunteer transitions easily from volunteer to client, happily participating in our programs and accessing our services.

The challenge is when volunteers are not necessarily aware or accepting of their losses or limitations. In these cases, the transition requires careful planning and maneuvering so that the volunteer does not feel any less valued or pushed out. For these volunteers, it is often a matter of redirecting them to a position that is less taxing and bringing in additional volunteers to help fill the gaps. By reassigning long-term volunteers, we are able to keep the knowledge and dedication that they bring to the agency, at the same time as bringing in new energy and ideas. While these volunteers may not become clients, they are often moved to programs that they would be accessing as clients. In this way, we benefit from their enthusiasm as a volunteer and they benefit from the services that they require and would be receiving as a client we consider this win-win!

In short, how does an organization transition a volunteer to client? by using a mix of compassion, preparation and creativity. By treating each volunteer in a personalized and caring way, it can be done and done well.

Jennifer Lalonde is the Executive Director of Ottawa West Community Support, a nonprofit community support agency providing practical support that assists clients to remain living at home, in a manner which respects their dignity and worth.

Ensuring diversity of volunteers from service delivery to decision making

by Uliana Osorio, Ottawa ON

Canada's new government recently made history by highlighting the importance of diverse leadership. By ensuring gender equality in Cabinet, it also signaled a strong message to corporate and nonprofit governance organizations about the importance of diversity in decision-making bodies. Most



importantly, that is was very well received by the Canadian public and set a new norm for future Cabinets.

As managers of volunteer resources, we often work with diverse groups of volunteers who enrich our organizations in so many ways. However, when it comes to boards and committees, there is often a lack of diversity. Board recruitment is a complex task that often involves coordination between the manager of volunteers, executive director and Nomination/Governance committee.

So how can we ensure that diversity is represented in all volunteer categories from volunteer receptionists, who work with clients, to volunteer board members who make decisions? The manager of volunteers plays an important role assisting with board recruitment by highlighting diversity within the organization's volunteers or lack of it. If your organization has a diverse pool of volunteers, you could take advantage of it by offering board governance training to those volunteers who would be interested in developing leadership skills and maybe already have governance expertise. We can also highlight diversity among the clients that volunteers are helping on daily basis. Manager of volunteers can identify any gaps between the rest of the volunteers and those with decision-making power and bring it to attention of the executive director or the Nomination/Governance committee. Last thing any organization wants is to end up with a diverse group of volunteers and a homogeneous board.

<http://ottawa.diversecityonboard.ca> DiverseCity onboard is a unique tool that many organisations use to ensure diversity among their board and committee volunteers. This program uses social an enterprise model and works towards ensuring governance boards of nonprofit and public bodies that represent the population they serve. DiverseCity onBoard could be used for board development by offering organisations access to high quality, online governance training and governance certification for board members. The board and especially the Governance/ Nomination Committee will benefit from a new course entitled Embedding Diversity in Organizations, developed specifically for boards to assist in maximizing the benefits of diversity throughout the organization. Many organisations also use Board Matching, a ready pool of pre-screened, qualified individuals from which boards can select potential board members, address skill gaps, and increase diversity all at the same time.

Scott Haldane, President and CEO of <http://www.ymca.ca/> YMCA Canada, reflects that it is not just important, it is a necessity to increase diversity in leadership, "if you're going to be a relevant charity in Canada today." Diversity onBoard presents a great opportunity for administrators, coordinators and managers of volunteers to take a look at their volunteer pool and ensure it is diverse through volunteer roles in our organisations.

Uliana Osorio has been working at Volunteer Ottawa for several years coordinating Disability, Youth, Education and Community Engagement programs. For the last two years Uliana worked in collaboration with national partners and has been implementing DiverseCity onBoard in Ottawa. DiverseCity onBoard works towards ensuring governance boards of non-profit and public bodies represent the population they serve. Currently, she is on a mission to connect qualified professionals from under-represented communities with not-for-profit and public boards.



The Relative Impact Model - Attributing value to volunteer accomplishments

by Tony Goodrow, Burlington ON

In issue 24.1 of CJVRM, we looked at why we should consider the volunteer hours logged as something spent as if it was money. In this way, those hours are treated as a cost of accomplishing something for the organization. In the most recent issue we began to look at a simple way to put values on things that volunteers accomplish where there was some commercial offering that could be used as a benchmark. We also looked at how we could measure the return on investment (ROI), simply by comparing the costs of something to its value. In this, the final in a series on the Relative Impact model, we will consider an alternative approach to attributing a value to what volunteers accomplish where there is no existing benchmark. We will see how measurements using this approach will increase what you seek to accomplish.

For example: What value do information booth volunteers create for a hospital?

It is easy to assume that volunteers sitting at the information desk in a hospital foyer provide value to the hospital. The question then is, how much value? Regardless of your sector, this is an important question. If we do not know the answer, we do not have a clue whether the organization would be better off if the time and money spent operating the information booth was spent on something else, such as more patient visits.

Imagine walking into a hospital to visit your very young niece who is recovering from surgery. The information desk is empty. What would you do? Please take a moment and decide before reading on. What if your answer was something like, "I'd look at the signage to determine where to go"? What if that is the answer that 90% of people going into a hospital would give? It would suggest that although having volunteers at the information desk is a nice-to-have, it is not contributing much to the overall hospital operations. But what if the majority of people, stressed by the fact they are in a hospital, simply stop the first person who looks like they work there and ask them for directions? Although it only seems like a small interruption of that staffer's day, the accumulated number could represent a real and significant cost.

"Don't it always seem to go that you do not know what you've got 'till it's gone." Joni Mitchell was not writing about research in her sixties hit *Big Yellow Taxi*, but it certainly does apply. One way to measure the value that information desk volunteers create for a hospital is to take it away and observe what happens.

If everyone simply took a moment and looked for the ample signage installed by the hospital to find the answers to their questions, then the hours spent at the desk really do not have much value. If, on the other hand, staff were interrupted with sufficient frequency, then the value could be quite high. Until we compare the behaviour under both circumstances, we really do not know the difference.

Step 1: Create a benchmark: While the information desk is normally staffed, have volunteers unobtrusively observe the pattern of hospital visitors and tally the numbers. Do visitors go to the desk,



guide themselves or ask someone on staff? If they asked someone on staff, categorize the employee's type job.

Step 2: Test for behaviour without information desk volunteers: Simply put a sign up that no one is currently available at the desk and have volunteers observe as they did in step 1.

Step 3: Across each general staff category noted, multiply the difference in the number of interruptions observed from step 1 and 2 by the two minute equivalent of the applicable salary and total these numbers. That number is the real value of hospital volunteers providing an operational information desk.

It is a commonly understood that what we measure drives how people behave. If a hospital only counts volunteer hours then volunteers feel they are contributing the most they can by simply putting in the hours.

Consider the information desk environment under the two following scenarios, and with the assumption that people will ask someone for directions more often than they will take the time to read the directional signs.

Scenario 1: All we care about are hours

Terry, a warm and friendly volunteer, is at the desk when someone asks where to go for a particular test. Terry provides the answer. Knowing the reasons someone might go for such a test he empathetically engages in conversation. While that is going on, another person needs some assistance and turns toward the information desk. Seeing it is busy, this person then stops to ask a nurse for directions and in doing so, takes the nurse off task for a couple of minutes.

Scenario 2: Volunteers understand that they are not creating value unless they are interacting with hospital visitors

Terry, a warm and friendly volunteer, is at the desk when someone asks where to go for a particular test. Terry provides the answer. Knowing the reasons someone might go for such a test he empathetically engages in conversation. While that is going on, another person needs some assistance and turns toward the information desk. Terry, observing this, indicates to the new person that the delay will be minimal and when appropriate, breaks from his conversation. The nurse walking by carries on uninterrupted, thus not costing the hospital nursing wages.

When volunteers understand clearly how they are contributing value to the organization, they will for the most part, by nature, gravitate toward contributing more, without additional hours.

Through using the Relative Impact Model to demonstrate value to the organization, both where there is an existing benchmark and where there is no existing benchmark, we can see the benefits and increase the effectiveness of our volunteer programs.



Tony Goodrow of <http://www.betterimpact.com/> Better Impact Inc. is the founding Chair of the Carpenter Hospice in Burlington, Ontario and has been recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, received the June Callwood award for volunteerism and is one of only three recipients of the designation of Patron of Burlington.

Reconceptualizing volunteer opportunities as pathways to inclusion for marginalized service users

by Mira Dineen and The Stop Community Food Centre, Toronto ON

Every week, Jocelyn volunteers in The Stop Community Food Centre's Drop-in and serves meals to people who are hungry. Once her shift is over, Jocelyn sits down for a meal herself before picking up her own emergency food hamper from The Stop's Food Bank. Here, Jocelyn is both a service user and a volunteer – and she likes it that way. In a recent evaluation of our volunteer services, Jocelyn said, "There's a stigma to being poor and having to use these services, and you feel it. So if you come and you volunteer... I feel a sense of worth and I'm sure that other people do because they're part of this great big organization now. And they're not just that low client."

As managers of volunteer services know, volunteering makes people feel good. Far more than just an ego boost, volunteering helps people to feel that they truly matter—that they are needed, valued and making a difference^{1,2,3,4}. In turn, research shows that this improves a person's self-esteem and that volunteering is associated with:

- A longer life, compared to non-volunteers
- Increased social support and interaction
- Improved quality of life
- Better health coping strategies
- Decreased depression and stress

Importantly, people who are faring poorly – those who are less happy⁵ or more socially isolated⁶ – are likely to experience more intense benefits from volunteering, compared to others. Given that stigma and social isolation are associated with poverty⁷, it is essential that social service agencies consider how to include marginalized service users as volunteers.

Program evaluation

The Stop recently evaluated its volunteer services through a survey, interviews, and a focus group to understand how service users benefit from volunteering. Findings reflected the research literature. Service users who volunteer self-reported feeling less shame when accessing services (i.e. Food Bank, Drop-in), due to a feeling of reciprocity from volunteering. Like Jocelyn, Leanne said that she feels less stigma, "I think I feel more comfortable. Instead of just coming and getting food, at least I know that,



okay, I have my days where I put in and I help out. It makes me feel good. I don't feel so bad when I go to the Food Bank, only taking and I'm not giving back."

Volunteers also reported feeling pride in their work and feeling useful while helping others. While recovering from an accident, volunteering offered Evalise a way to get involved in the community. She said, "For me, it's so important, to start again to feel more useful... You know, come back to my life and start to feel that I am helping people, that I am doing work."

As an immigrant, Katelijjn talked about how volunteering helped her find a community. She said, "I'm active and I'm meeting people. And I think I'm even starting, with some people, developing perhaps more friendship."

Volunteering offers people a meaningful social role, and through this, the opportunity to be included and valued.

Practical steps

Many volunteer opportunities are inaccessible to people who live on a low-income, lack immigration status, have low-literacy, possess a criminal record or experience mental health issues. Organizations and managers of volunteer resources may hold on to assumptions or negative stereotypes about people living in poverty, which emphasize deficits instead of strengths. Recruitment often includes a written application, professional references and a résumé, even if the volunteer role does not require writing skills or previous experience. Sometimes, we adopt best practices without considering who they exclude.

The following offers some insight into including service users as volunteers.

- **Accessible recruitment and orientation:** design a recruitment process with minimal steps and bureaucracy. At The Stop, an applicant fills out a personal information form and meets with the manager of volunteer services, who assesses their interests and abilities and assigns them a role. The process does not include a formal interview, reference checks or a résumé. Criminal record checks are completed only for volunteers who work directly with children and youth.
- **Create and assign accessible roles:** create roles that are accessible to people with variable health or energy. In our Food Bank, some volunteers manage the distribution desk, which requires customer service abilities, tolerance for stress and problem-solving skills. Other volunteers work behind the scenes, unpacking boxes, measuring out portions of food or organizing shelves. Be creative and look for ways to create accessible roles for people with different abilities and strengths.
- **Set clear expectations:** typically, volunteers in our Food Bank and Drop-in are expected to commit to one four-hour shift per week, for four to six months.
- **Say 'no' when necessary:** sometimes a person may not be ready or able to assume the responsibilities of a volunteer position. In these cases, we encourage people to participate in our programs and to access other resources for support.



- **Material supports:** funding and other material support is required to make it possible for service users to volunteer. On every shift, volunteers receive two subway tokens, a meal and a \$2.50 voucher for our affordable produce market.
- **Review policies:** with a critical eye review organizational policies. Ask, “Who benefits from this policy? Does this policy exclude anyone from accessing volunteer opportunities?”
- **Self-reflection:** facilitate a conversation with your colleagues about assumptions you may have about people living in precarious circumstances. Ask honestly where these assumptions come from and who they serve.
- **Flexible scheduling:** our volunteer schedule is designed to include a mix of volunteers (some are service users, some are not), and more volunteers than are needed. If someone arrives late or misses a shift, service is not disrupted. Sometimes, volunteers need to take a leave from their role due to poor health or other circumstances, and they simply need to notify the manager of volunteer services when they would like to return. It is useful to ask, “How can we adjust so this person can be included as a volunteer?”
- **Staff support:** this includes staff time and energy to offer guidance and encouragement, along with a fundamental commitment to social justice and honouring volunteers’ dignity, worth and capacity to contribute. Professional development may be needed to help staff support service users as volunteers.

Volunteers and organizations benefit when service users are included as volunteers. Society as a whole benefits when people are valued, connected and included. Challenges may arise that require creative thinking, self-reflection and openness to change. By reconceptualizing volunteer services as another way to serve a marginalized community, we can shift the thinking from efficient best practices – which may exclude people in precarious circumstances – to creative solutions and impactful volunteer opportunities that build skills, promote inclusion and restore dignity and pride.

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For over 30 years, The Stop Community Food Centre has been at the forefront of dignified, innovative programs that provide access to healthy food; build skills, health, hope, and community; and confront the underlying issues that lead to poverty and hunger. Our wide range of programs include drop-in meals, a food bank, community kitchens and gardens, perinatal and family support, civic engagement, and children and youth engagement.

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Get your staff excited about volunteer involvement

by Sammy Feilchenfeld, Toronto ON

You know how the volunteer management cycle goes: you have a need for volunteers, you put out the call, then you recruit, screen and select some amazing volunteers. Then comes the ongoing challenge of supporting those volunteers in their new duties, not mention recognition and retention. But you're just one person; there's no way you can manage, supervise and support all of the volunteers your organization needs to thrive! That's where other staff plays an important role. Your organization's program staff can serve as managers, coordinators, schedulers, supervisors and more for your volunteers— you just have to get them on board.

If your staff are managing volunteers in any way, it's important that you have staff buy-in for getting involved with volunteer management. They also need the proper training and knowledge to make sure your volunteers are engaged, motivated and fulfilling their duties effectively. Here's how you can give them the motivation and the tools to effectively manage and support volunteers.

Staff buy-in



In busy organizations like yours, employees may see volunteers simply as extra help who can do whatever they're asked. Often, that's a misperception; volunteers are recruited and engaged for specific roles with specific duties. You want your staff to know that volunteers have come to support your organization in a particular role, and that's the role the volunteers are going to do!

When employees are told they may need to manage volunteers, they might immediately cite a lack of time or knowledge as a reason to avoid working with volunteers. Remind them of the benefits of volunteer engagement for your organization and the community, both in supporting your mission and also connecting with the community in a meaningful way. Don't forget to highlight how supporting the volunteer will actually help them be successful in their own jobs.

You can also let them know that if they are supervising volunteers, they'll get the right training to do so effectively. If they're still not convinced, remind them that the supervisory skills they'll gain from managing volunteers will be a great addition to their resume!

Training staff

It's important to prepare your team to work with and supervise volunteers with training. Start with some information about the volunteer program and share the impact of your volunteers' work and successes. This helps employees understand the value of volunteers and also see the importance in their role as managers and supporters. Make sure to cover the important areas of managing and supporting volunteers, and include activities, including [role playing](http://www.businessballs.com/roleplayinggames.htm), to give staff a sense of what's in store when managing volunteers. Also, ensure there is plenty of time for questions as people management may be new to many of your employees.

Managing volunteers

If it is part of their job, staff will need to know a few things about people management. Remind them that volunteers have a variety of motivations that brought them to your organization, and among those it's very likely they're working with you to contribute to your cause, mission and/or community. Volunteers and employees are on the same team and working toward the same goals, so managing volunteers means guiding them toward fulfilling their duties.

Staff should also know that supervising volunteers shouldn't take over their whole job; in your training, talk about maximizing their own workflow with volunteer management in mind and make sure there is a point person for all volunteer relations in your organization.

Supporting volunteers

Management is often thought of as organizing, planning and coordinating activities and people, to make sure that every job gets done. But an important component of that is providing support when it's needed. In some cases, volunteers might not have formal workplace training or may feel overwhelmed with aspects of their role, and may come to their staff manager for guidance. Making sure staff know how to support volunteers in these instances— and who to send volunteers to if they can't provide



support— will be useful to maintain positive relationships with volunteers. It's important to set up boundaries between your volunteers and employees as well so that these relationships aren't abused.

Sometimes it may be difficult to find the right training expertise in your own organization to ensure your staff are ready – and as volunteer managers, you may have trouble finding the time to make this happen! Work with your human resources department to find appropriate training opportunities. You might even consider engaging external speakers, including trainers from <http://www.volunteertoronto.ca/link.asp?ymlink=4470192> Volunteer Toronto, to work with your staff.

It's important to remember that your success as a volunteer manager involves more than just yourself and the volunteers you recruit. Bringing staff on board with managing, supervising and supporting volunteers will help your organization thrive with an even stronger volunteer program.

Sammy Feilchenfeld is the Training Coordinator at Volunteer Toronto, providing in-person, online and on-demand training to volunteer managers and coordinators from organizations across Toronto. Learning from charities and non-profits – and relying on a variety of experiences – Sammy helps to support the development and improvement of volunteer programs and serves as Volunteer Toronto's subject matter expert on legislation, policies and diversity.

Oscar-worthy performances - Peer volunteers

by Annemarie Nicholson, Ottawa ON

Coming from a place of shared, lived experience, peers have a unique ability to connect and support one another in a way that only peers can truly do. The space they share is one of deep and mutual understanding, a place of safety and acceptance. As a leader of volunteers in the mental health care sector, I have also come to believe that just as peer support is recovery's ally, so is volunteerism for a number of the very same reasons.

Feeling a sense of meaningful connection — to others, to work and to society at large — is a basic human need we all share, regardless of where we come from, who we are or what health-related challenges we face. One of the most devastating impacts of mental illness is that it is often adept at robbing its prey of these meaningful connections over the length of a serious illness. As a result, once a person is back on the road to recovery, they can find the path to be a very lonely one to travel. Many of their natural and informal, non-professional supports may have been lost or weakened during their illness, so at a time when connecting is crucial, they find themselves largely alone. Volunteerism can be an effective vehicle to break through this isolation and assist people to begin reconnecting with others in meaningful ways. For someone who has lost confidence in their ability to reach out and interact socially, volunteer work can pave the way in rebuilding this lost sense of self. Beginning with tiny and tentative steps, the initial connections may be task-driven only within their volunteer role but over time have the capacity to blossom into truly meaningful para-professional as well as personal relationships. As volunteers begin to reach out to others in their roles and experience success,



increased social self-efficacy is the organic result. Volunteer work can therefore be a building block for recreating a social foundation that fosters resiliency, wellness and recovery.

When meeting someone new, one of the very first questions we ask is what they do for a living. Working fosters a sense of being a contributing member of society and we often derive a significant portion of our identities through the work in which we engage. What we do tells us a lot about who we are. As a result, being deprived of the opportunity to contribute in this way can have devastating effects on self-esteem and identity. Mental illness often seeks to steal from its' victims opportunities to engage in meaningful work and develop new skills. Unfortunately, the symptoms of mental illness can create real barriers to work, and over time, can be for many an erosion of self-confidence and sense of purpose. Volunteerism, however, is an excellent vocational tool because it is often flexible and adaptable to the unique abilities, needs and goals of the individual in recovery. So while returning to paid employment may feel like a goal that is far-reaching and unattainable to someone in the early stages of recovery, volunteer work offers a more flexible and adaptable alternative that can be used as a stepping stone. It can become a tangible and important part in the development of a plan for reaching the ultimate goal of building resiliency and possibly even returning to paid employment one day.

Volunteerism also offers a safe opportunity to test stamina and resiliency throughout the journey of recovery. Recovery from anything rarely follows a linear path. With mental illness and addictions in particular, its journey is often one with relapses that are unpredictable and require careful management and support. This is a challenge that both volunteers and their leaders must prepare for and embrace as a natural part of the journey to wellness. Rather than interpreting a relapse as a set-back, perhaps it is merely an opportunity to re-set. It offers an opportunity to review how their volunteer role was working in support of their recovery and what perhaps was no longer working as effectively. Volunteerism will at times require adjustments to ensure that it is keeping pace with the individual's needs and is responsive to challenges they face with their health. From a program management perspective, the benefits of finding creative and adaptive ways to meet these challenges far outstrip their impact on the volunteer program.

Peers benefit from the volunteer program in all of the same ways that other volunteers do but they also contribute to the organization in a number of unique ways. The most impactful example of this is the hope and encouragement peer volunteers offer to others who are less progressed than they in their own recovery. For example, a client in an inpatient treatment program dropped into the Volunteer Services office after being told by his doctor that many of the volunteers are also living with mental illness and addiction. He learned that just like him, the volunteers were once just as ill as he was at that particular time. He was genuinely surprised because he had never imagined that he could ever be well enough to volunteer anywhere, let alone with the organization that is helping him. To be able to give back and contribute in this way gave him a renewed hope, as well as a tangible goal. He said that those peers he interacted with through their various volunteer roles inspired him to continue the hard work of recovery and keep him focused on his goals when motivation was otherwise hard to find. Recently, he became one of those inspirational volunteers, spreading that same hope and encouragement to others that had been shared with him.



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As a leader of volunteers, observing the transformation that can happen when peers become volunteers is nothing short of humbling. Being given the opportunity to play a small role in supporting one's recovery through volunteerism is an absolute honour. Peers are the ultimate leaders, the true stars of the show. As managers of volunteers, we get to play a supporting role in this inspirational show.