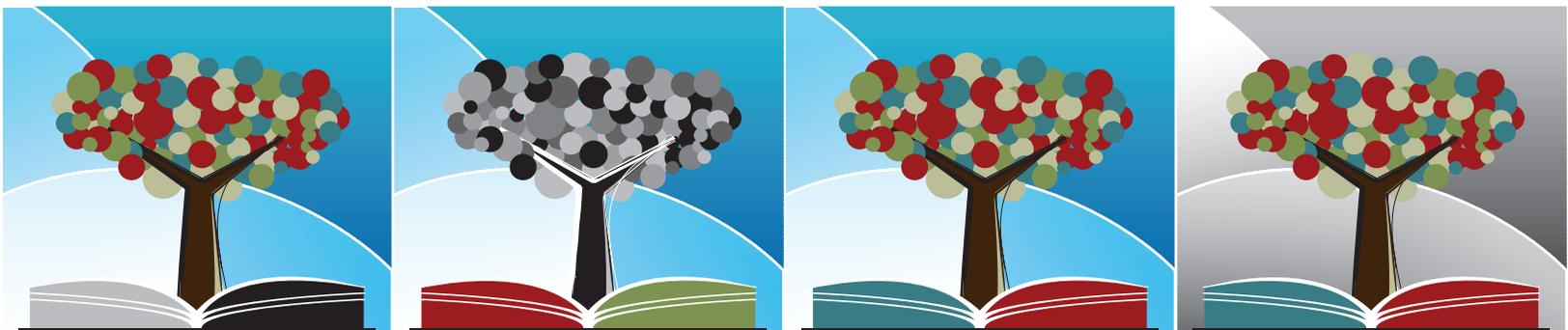


K N O W L E D G E D E V E L O P M E N T C E N T R E



Youth Volunteerism

Research Report

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ISBN# 1-55401-263-5

Imagine Canada's Knowledge Development Centre is funded through the Community Participation Directorate of the Department of Canadian Heritage as part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter "a".

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Acknowledgements

First of all, we would like to thank the youth volunteers in Laval who participated in this research through discussion groups or the survey questionnaire.

We would also like to thank the spiritual life and community service facilitators from the *Commission scolaire de Laval* middle and secondary schools who enabled us to establish contact with the youth volunteers.

We also thank all the individuals who work in Laval's institutions and organizations and who participated in individual or group interviews.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the financial contribution of the *Bureau des loisirs et de la vie communautaire de la Ville de Laval*, which facilitated the distribution of survey questionnaires at the middle and secondary schools.

Youth Volunteerism

Introduction

Youth volunteerism is an area of growing interest in the west. Numerous studies have shown that volunteer engagement is likely to have a positive effect on young people's psychosocial development and sense of belonging to the community.

The *Direction de santé publique de l'Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Laval*, in cooperation with the *Centre de bénévolat de Laval*, undertook research for the purpose of documenting the volunteer engagement of youth aged 12 to 17, based on the *Réseau jeunes bénévoles en action* (Réseau JBA) initiative. We hope that an expanded body of knowledge on youth volunteers will help communities develop strategies to increase volunteerism among youth.

This report is divided into three sections. The first section is a review of the literature on volunteerism among youth. The second section includes the research objectives, the methodology used, and the results obtained from discussion groups with youth volunteers, interviews with individuals who work with youth volunteers, and the survey questionnaire that was administered to youth volunteers in a number of neighbourhoods in Laval. The third section contains a discussion of the most revealing findings and recommendations for facilitating youth volunteerism.

Literature review

In this section we explore the main aspects of youth volunteerism that have been analyzed in the literature.

First, however, we present a brief overview of volunteerism in Canada and Quebec.

Youth volunteerism in Canada and Quebec

According to the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001), 27% of Canadians 15 years of age and over volunteered in 2000. Youth 15 to 19 years of age volunteered more than other age group (37%). This group volunteered more than youth 20 to 24 years of age (22%). On the other hand, their participation was greater than that of 25 to 34-year-olds (24%) and that of 35 to 64-years-old (29%). In 2000 in Canada, youth 15 to 24 years of age volunteered an average of 130 hours.

In Quebec in 2000, 19% of youth 15 years of age and older stated that they had volunteered. Among 15 to 24-year-olds, the rate of volunteering is close to the national average (18%), with an average of 140 hours volunteered.

Benefits of volunteer engagement

A number of studies confirm that volunteer engagement has a positive effect on many aspects of adolescent development, such as:

- social, cognitive, and psychological development (Kuperminc et al., 2001);
- development of identity and political awareness (Youniss et al., 2001);
- reduction of risk factors (Allen et al., 1994); and
- development of autonomy and feeling of belonging (Allen et al., 1994; McKinney, 2002).

Conditions for successful volunteerism

Although the benefits of volunteerism are beyond doubt, they nonetheless require particular conditions. A number of studies have found that the benefits of volunteerism are tied to the conditions; they are limited in time and are not directly related to acquiring various skills (Kuperminc et al., 2001; Moore, 1994).

Matching volunteer activities to youths' needs is shown to be a proven condition for successful volunteering (Henderson, 1980; Sergent & Sedlacek, 1990). Some studies also indicate that mandatory volunteerism may have better results with girls than with boys (Stukas et al., 1999). Furthermore, it is important to structure volunteer programs based on the developmental needs of youth, which vary according to age (Hart et al., 1998). Finally, it has been shown that youth who become involved have parent role models as examples (Clary & Miller 1986).

Thoughts on the literature review

Although volunteerism among adults and seniors is well documented, youth volunteerism remains less so. First of all, the majority of studies on youth volunteerism concern youth aged 15 to 24; data for 15 to 17-year-olds is often merged with that for 18 to 24-year-olds, and 12 to 14-year-olds are rarely studied.

Reviewing the literature enabled us to summarize articles on youth volunteerism according to the research topics addressed by the authors of these articles. It also allowed us to become familiar with existing research on youth volunteerism and the main aspects addressed by the research. This enabled us to focus our own research and to identify the main issues that we needed to explore to better document volunteer engagement among Laval's youth.

Research objectives

Our study had four main objectives:

1. to identify the nature and focus of youth volunteer engagement;
2. to determine the conditions for the success of and the barriers to youth volunteer engagement'
3. to determine the conditions for the success of and the barriers to youth volunteer recruitment; and
4. to determine the conditions for the success of and the barriers to youth volunteer retention.

The understanding of our research is in keeping with the point of view of promoting health among youth by better understanding the expectations, needs, and interests of youth volunteers. By doing that, it is possible to develop strategies for significantly increasing youth engagement in the community.

Methodology

We collected data from various sources, using various tools, in order to provide a broader and more in-depth understanding of the subject matter we were studying. There were four components to the research methodology:

1. a review of the literature (see the literature review);
2. five discussion groups conducted with youth volunteers;
3. 15 individual and group interviews conducted with individuals who work with youth volunteers; and
4. a self-administered questionnaire completed by 140 youth volunteers attending schools located in various Laval neighbourhoods.

Findings

Youth volunteer discussion groups

The purpose of the five discussion groups conducted with youth volunteers was to explore volunteerism among young people in Laval and to determine the focus of the survey questionnaire that was to be developed. The discussion groups allowed us to identify a variety of themes, which are discussed below.

1. Young people's ideas about and definitions of volunteerism

Young people in our discussion groups think of and define volunteering as an altruistic act and an act whereby they give their time while enjoying themselves. Their ideas and definitions of volunteerism are the very basis of their motivations for volunteering. In addition, for some young people, volunteering represents a personal achievement; for others, it is a work experience.

2. Young people's motivations for volunteering

Young people are especially motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons. They want to help people and to make them happy. They are also motivated by the desire to become involved in community or school life.

Young people also want to enjoy themselves while carrying out their volunteer activities, particularly if they are interested in the volunteer project, the tasks to be completed, or the clientele. The opportunity to work on a team and to learn through new experiences, as well as the social recognition associated with volunteerism, are also sources of motivation for youth.

3. Young people's positive and negative assessments of their personal volunteer experiences

Young people express more positive than negative assessments of their volunteer experiences.

They feel useful and appreciated, and gain a sense of personal accomplishment from volunteering. They learn through the team work and social activities involved in volunteering. In addition, they appreciate the fact that they have fun while volunteering.

Young people are less appreciative of the lack of organization demonstrated by some host organizations. Other negative factors that they cited included adults' lack of confidence, 'prickly' relations with other volunteers, the lack of results of certain activities, the problems associated with working on a team in some contexts, boring tasks, and the negative opinions of other youths who are not volunteers.

4. Main difficulties young people encountered while volunteering

Young people report occasional problems with the following: keeping their commitments and seeing their responsibilities through to the end; becoming involved when they are not interested; organizing activities; accommodating volunteer activities and school schedules; sharing tasks fairly among the young people; and working with the various individuals in the context of volunteer engagement.

Youth have problems meeting adult demands and this keeps them from asserting themselves to people they don't know. Moreover, they often lack supervision and monitoring while carrying out their volunteer activities. Youth also experience difficulties when supervision is too strict or harsh, or if there are too many demands

when they are not paid to do the required tasks. Added to this is the fear that their opinions will not be taken into consideration by the adults.

Youth have reported limited cooperation and a lack of flexibility on the part of teachers and the administration at certain schools when it comes to letting students out of class in order to volunteer, reserving work space or facilitating the organization of volunteer activities in an extra-curricular context.

5. Expectations about volunteer involvement and adult supervision

On the one hand, youth expect their spiritual life and community service facilitators to support them, suggest projects, encourage them to become involved, and make them accountable for their volunteer assignments. On the other hand, they expect the staff of the organization for which they are volunteering to provide appropriate supervision. They made suggestions for improvements based on their experiences with poor supervision.

6. Young people's recommendations on the recruitment of youth volunteers

Young people feel that direct contact, word of mouth, and advertising are good ways for organizations to recruit youth volunteers. They also feel that appreciating volunteerism, facilitating contacts between youth and organizations, and paying attention to young people's interests are factors in recruitment.

7. Factors in the retention of volunteers

The quality of the volunteer experience is the main factor in the retention of youth volunteers. According to youth, good experiences are those in which they are given recognition, their work is appreciated, they are encouraged, and they are made to feel that their contribution is significant. Good experiences are also those in which youth are well-received, are consulted about the assignment of tasks to be performed, are offered attractive and dynamic activities, and are provided with supervision, support, and trust during the activity.

8. Desirable information

In order to better carry out their volunteer activities, some youth would like to receive training on interpersonal relations and the various clienteles with which they will be interacting (e.g., seniors, youth, etc.). Others would also like to receive information about the organization for which they are volunteering and its mission.

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders

Through our interviews with stakeholders (individuals working with youth volunteers), we identified important factors for organizations that recruit youth volunteers.

1. Traits of youth who volunteer

From the interviews, it was evident that young people who volunteer do not have any specific traits in common. Although some personal traits of youth volunteers were identified (e.g., ability to adapt, being proactive, ability to make choices, independence, trustworthiness, maturity, sensitivity, etc.), they were only cited by one or two individuals. Thus, the general finding on youth volunteers is that they have very diverse personal and social traits that do not allow us to categorize them. They come from all socio-economic backgrounds and have very different personal profiles.

2. Young people's motivations for volunteering

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors are the basis of young people's motivations for volunteering. The feeling that the volunteer activity is important and that it produces positive results and that it is of real help, motivates young people to volunteer and promotes the success of volunteer activities.

"...[youth] feel good, they feel useful, they feel that having done, performed these tasks whatever they are, they feel useful."

The intrinsic factors of pleasure, altruism, interest in a given activity, the feeling of belonging to a cause, and positive perceptions of volunteer engagement all govern volunteer activity, according to the interviewees.

Among the extrinsic factors emphasized by the interviewees were social recognition, the influence of family members, the academic (facilitator) and social (friends) environment, and interest in acquiring work experience with a view to future employment. They also noted that some youth volunteer because they are required to do so.

3. Characteristics of activities suitable for youth volunteers

The characteristics of activities suitable for youth volunteers are quite diverse and are determined by the distinctive traits of the young people involved, particularly their expectations, abilities, interests, and motivations.

According to the interviewees, suitable activities are those that can be carried out through projects related to a cause that concerns youth. In addition, activities must be simple, familiar, pleasant, and satisfying. Finally, youth prefer to volunteer with a group or with friends.

4. Youth involvement in volunteer activities

The interviewees made particular mention of the type of activity, supervision, and what is expected of the young people.

a) Type of activity

It is essential to provide an overview of the organization's or institution's activities. This enables young people to see their contribution in an overall context and to appreciate its importance.

Youth must be supervised. Pairing a young person with an adult volunteer ensures adequate supervision.

“I think that the first time the young person volunteers, he really must be paired with an adult to help with the task and to provide support. It is also easier for the organization because there is less supervision than when the young person isn’t paired with someone who already knows the job.”

Volunteer engagement must give youth a sense of responsibility, be interesting to them, and correspond to their abilities. It is also important to limit waiting times during activities and to adapt tasks based on young people’s availability.

b) Stakeholders’ expectations of youth volunteers

Stakeholders expect young people to be able to express their desires and motivations in order to better direct their participation. They also want youth to take their involvement seriously and show respect.¹

c) Stakeholders’ expectations of what youth will learn through volunteer involvement

In a school environment, facilitators expect youth to learn how to work on a team and to use the related procedures appropriately. In a community environment, stakeholders feel as well that youth should learn from their activities in order to gradually familiarize themselves with the demands of the adult world.

Stakeholders also expect youth to develop an awareness of other situations and to learn to feel useful. Stakeholders want youth to experience human contact through their volunteer activities.

5. Barriers to youth volunteerism

The barriers to youth volunteer engagement are related to volunteering itself, to young people themselves, to their social and family environment, and to the organizations with which young people volunteer.

First, volunteering is demanding and this can create obstacles to successful participation. Difficulty completing projects may also lead to a loss of motivation.

Second, a lack of interest in the clientele, the activity, or simply the organization where the volunteer activity is carried out are definite barriers. It was also pointed out that the rapid change in adolescents’ interests is an obstacle to involving youth in volunteer initiatives that extend over several months.

The stakeholders pointed out youth’s fluctuating availability, their difficulties working with the clientele, and their lack of conscientiousness with respect to the responsibilities. They also observed that youth fear the unknown, occasionally have transportation problems, and are subject to negative perceptions of volunteering by other youth. Occasionally even their parents downplay the importance of volunteering.

Third, factors related to the organization itself can constitute barriers to volunteerism among youth. Adults’ lack of acceptance of young people, difficulty providing adequate supervision, heavy workloads, scheduling problems, and the nature of the organization’s activities were also mentioned as possible pitfalls.

¹ By stakeholders we mean the people in our research who have worked with youth volunteers.

6. Adult involvement with youth volunteers

Adult involvement is a fundamental dimension of youth volunteerism. The relationship that is established between the adults and youth can affect young people's motivation to volunteer, their success, and their continued involvement.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of mentoring as a form of coaching and a means of raising young people's awareness of volunteerism. Mentors are role models for youth and are likely to motivate young people to become involved as volunteers.

7. Recruitment of youth volunteers

Through the interviews, we were able to identify means and strategies for recruiting youth volunteers.

Interviewees unanimously supported the effectiveness of the direct approach, i.e., establishing a direct contact between an adult motivator and the young people who are being asked to volunteer. Word of mouth, advertising, *Centre de bénévolat de Laval* itself, and structured youth groups (Scouts, cadets, hockey clubs, social clubs, etc.) are also means for recruiting youth.

8. Volunteer retention

a) Factors typical of youth

According to the stakeholders, youth must have a positive volunteer experience in addition to feeling that they're useful. They must enjoy and be interested in their volunteer activity. Moreover, their relationship with the adults involved has an impact on whether or not young people will continue to volunteer.

"The secret is the employees, the people who are there. If they are good, if they are confident, if they have fun, they enjoy themselves and work hard and are in step. Youth have to have fun. That way they're happy to come back."

In addition, continuity in the relationship with the adults in charge of the volunteer initiative enables youth to develop a relationship of trust and ties that encourage them to continue volunteering.

b) Strategies for encouraging continued participation

The stakeholders observed that raising awareness of volunteerism and conveying its value are valid strategies for promoting continued involvement. Creating a pleasant work environment, providing adequate supervision, proposing tasks that correspond to youth's expectations, and appreciating volunteer involvement were also mentioned as good retention strategies. They believe that following up with youth to suggest activities contributes to retention.

9. Training

a) Training for youth volunteers

Interviewees had mixed opinions on the relevance of offering training to youth volunteers. Some considered it appropriate to develop training that would improve the engagement of youth volunteers; others believed that all too often youth volunteers are involved on a one-time basis and that this does not justify the investment of time and energy required to train them.

b) Training for adults

In addition to training youth volunteers, interviewees raised the importance of training the adult supervisors. Training adult supervisors can make them more aware of the importance of making room for young volunteers and equip them to adequately supervise these volunteers.

10. Benefits of youth volunteerism

a) Benefits for youth

Depending on the type and quality of the volunteer initiative, youth can acquire various skills and knowledge. They can also acquire a first work experience through volunteering that will enable them to orient themselves professionally. The importance of social awareness and citizen engagement acquired by youth is also very important. Youth who volunteer also learn how to work as part of a team and develop interests that may help to keep them from dropping out of school.

b) Benefits for organizations and their clientele

Young people's vitality and creativity benefit the organizations. In addition, youth have the potential to replace older volunteers and can be a 'breath of fresh air' to an organization's clientele.

c) Benefit for the community

Volunteer engagement and the opportunity for youth to find their place in society instills in youth the value of volunteerism and makes them feel that they are part of their community.

Youth volunteer survey questionnaire

1. Traits of the youth volunteers in the sample

The survey questionnaire provided a sample of 140 youth volunteers, 12 to 17 years of age, who attended Francophone public secondary schools in various neighbourhoods in Laval. According to the data we collected, twice as many respondents were in the upper grades of secondary school (67%) as were in the lower secondary grades (36%). Nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents were female and just over one third (35%) were male. The majority (80%) of the youth who participated in the survey were Francophones.

2. Level of engagement of youth and their family members

The youth in our sample became involved in volunteerism at a rather young age: over 50% began volunteering at 12 years of age or younger, and this percentage increased to 85% before the age of 15.

The parents of the youth in our sample were not typically very involved in volunteerism. Less than 14% of the parents volunteered at least on a monthly basis. Nearly half (47%) of respondents reported that

their friends volunteered a few times per year and one quarter stated that their friends were involved on a weekly basis.

3. Youth volunteer interests

a) Areas of interest for volunteerism

Survey respondents most often reported that they were involved in community (64%), socio-political (44%), and leisure (41%) activities over the course of the year. Relatively few were involved in the areas of religion (13%) or the environment (9%).

b) Interest based on the characteristics of the volunteer activity

Youth volunteers showed a marked interest in certain types of volunteer activities and tasks. First, the social dimension of volunteer engagement is of major importance to youth: 98% of them reported an interest in group volunteer activities. Second, youth are interested in activities that allow them to learn new skills (94%) and to take responsibility (89%). Finally, youth do not want simply to complete tasks that are assigned to them; most (84%) reported that they want to take part in organizing volunteer projects or activities.

The young people we surveyed are mainly interested in financing or fundraising activities (76%), coaching and support (75%), and raising awareness or promoting a cause (69%). Performing manual tasks such as maintenance or housework was of interest to only one out of two youths (51%).

c) Interest based on clientele

Youth volunteers are interested in different types of clientele. They are most interested in working with children 11 years of age and younger (88%). They also want to work with the poor (82%), the sick (81%), and youth their own age (80%). Many would like to become involved with the elderly (77%) and the disabled (77%).

4. Motivations for youth volunteerism

Our study indicates that both altruistic and personal factors motivate youth aged 12 to 17 to volunteer. It must be emphasized that 29% of the 140 youth who complete our survey had volunteered on at least one occasion because it was mandatory.

a) Altruism

The primary motivations for volunteering cited by the young people who completed our survey were to help those in need (91%), to be useful to the community (83%), and to take an active role in society (77%).

b) Acquiring knowledge and new skills

A majority of respondents stated that they volunteered in order to acquire new skills (76%), to gain a better understanding of their areas of interest (74%), or to gain work experience that could lead to future employment (68%).

c) Recognition

Over half of respondents (54%) cited the feeling of being appreciated is a source of motivation. This motivator appeared to be stronger among males (59%) than among females (51%). People's gratitude (91%) and the perception that their participation is important to others (95%) also motivate young people to continue volunteering.

d) Socializing

Approximately half of respondents (52%) were motivated to volunteer in order to be with their group of friends. This motivation appeared to be stronger among males (61%) than among females (46%).

5. Barriers to youth volunteerism

The findings from the study show that the barriers to youth volunteerism are related to youth and their social and family environment as well as to the organization with which they become involved.

a) Barriers related to youth and their social and family environment

The majority of respondents stated that lack of time (81%) and problems accommodating both school and organizations' schedules (72%) are the factors most likely to interfere with their volunteer involvement. It must be stressed that the need to work has an impact on young people's availability; lack of time because of paid employment was reported as a barrier to volunteering by approximately one fifth (22%) of respondents.

b) Barriers related to the organization

Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents reported that they are hindered by volunteer schedules that do not take their time constraints into account.

Another significant barrier is the negative work atmosphere within an organization. More than one half of respondents reported that an environment that is not motivating (56%) or in which supervision is too strict (52%) is likely to interfere with their volunteerism.

6. Aspects of volunteering that are important to youth

Deriving personal satisfaction and having an impact are important factors to youth volunteers. Enjoyment (98%) and interest (96%) on the one hand, and usefulness (98%) on the other, are most important for youth volunteers. There are three components to interest: interest in the organization (96%), its cause (99%), and its clientele (96%).

Positive spin-offs from the activity, particularly with regard to learning (86%), are important for a number of youth. Validation in the form of expressions of gratitude (78%) and acknowledgement (91%) were also cited as being important.

Finally, the social aspect of being with a group of friends was important for more than two thirds (77%) of respondents.

7. Perception of and satisfaction with various aspects of youth engagement

Enjoyment while volunteering was important for 98% of respondents; 95% felt that their volunteer activities allowed them to have fun. Moreover, the vast majority of respondents reported that their volunteer activities take their abilities (89%) and their interests (80%) into account.

In addition, 89% of respondents felt that volunteering enabled them to acquire knowledge, and 90% felt that the volunteer activities they had been asked to participate in encouraged them to carry on volunteering.

The youth volunteers who completed our survey reported that most adults take them seriously (86%) and that they have confidence in their ability to perform tasks (87%).

Overall, 89% of respondents felt that they had received appropriate supervision and that the adults were “there for them” (84%). However, half of respondents nonetheless felt that the adults were authoritarian in their supervision style.

8. Recruitment of youth volunteers

a) Important considerations for youth

Young people want to know what the organization does (91%) and the tasks they will have to perform (88%). The vast majority (88%) also want to know if the organization needs youth volunteers. Knowing an individual who works for an organization (81%) or being referred by someone (80%) also facilitates youth volunteerism.

b) Recruitment methods

Impact of the social and family environment

The vast majority (94%) of respondents stated that they would volunteer if it were suggested to them by a friend. Parents are also in a position to promote youth engagement: 57% of respondents stated that encouragement from their parents could also prompt them to volunteer.

Direct approach

Findings from our survey show that the direct approach is the most effective way to reach youth and encourage them to volunteer. Although 62% of respondents stated that they had become involved on their own initiative over the last year, 84% of them stated that they would volunteer if prompted to do so by an adult. Guided tours of organizations (76%) and information booths on volunteerism (74%) are also likely means for promoting direct contact between those in charge of an organization and future youth volunteers.

Advertising

According to respondents, brochures are the most persuasive vehicle. Approximately two thirds (66%) of respondents reported that a promotional brochure, a website promoting volunteerism, or a poster could prompt them to volunteer. Newspaper ads were cited by slightly more than half (56%) of respondents.

9. Retention of volunteers

Retention of volunteers depends on a number of factors related to both young people and their environment as well as to the organization with which they are involved as volunteers.

Appreciation is important, as is the feeling of importance (95%), people’s gratitude (91%), and being encouraged to continue volunteering (86%). Being able to see concrete results also contributes to encouraging the majority of youth (86%) to continue volunteering.

Appropriate supervision (80%) and a good relationship with adult volunteers (81%) also contribute greatly to the retention of youth volunteers.

In addition, proposing activities based on young people’s interests (93%) and giving young people greater responsibilities (89%) play a significant role in youth’s continued volunteer involvement.

Finally, the social dimension is important: 92% of respondents stated that having friends who volunteer would encourage them to continue volunteering.

Discussion and recommendations

The most significant findings from our research are discussed here, followed by our recommendations.

Young people's motivations for volunteering

Adults' ideas about young people's motivations for volunteering are similar to those of young people themselves. Findings from our study emphasize that factors that are simultaneously altruistic and personal are at the root of young people's motivations for volunteering. These findings are similar to those of most of the studies on volunteers' motivations, which find that motivation is based on egotistic factors (personal) and altruistic factors (notably Morrow-Howell & Mui, 1989; Cnaan & Goldberg, 1991; Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992; Chantal, 1997). In our study, adults were more inclined to feel that youth also become involved because of the benefits resulting from their volunteer activities, particularly social recognition and work-related experience.

Our study also tends to confirm the findings of Schondel and Bohem (2000), which emphasize the motivating factors typical of young people. The questionnaire and interview data from our study point to the need for socializing, overall growth, assurance, and personal skills as motivations for youth volunteers.

Young people's interest in the types of volunteer work

Data from the survey questionnaire and interviews agree on the types of volunteer initiatives that are suitable for youth (mainly community, socio-political, recreational, cultural, youth support, and ecology initiatives). Data from the questionnaire reveal a discrepancy between young people's interest in various types of volunteerism and the activities they are involved in, particularly in the areas of culture, sports and leisure, support to youth, ecology, and the environment. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that not enough volunteer opportunities are offered in these areas of interest or by the fact that youth are not adequately encouraged to become involved by organizations operating in these areas.

Findings from our research allow us to establish a connection between young people's interest in various aspects of volunteer activities and their motivations for becoming involved. This has an impact on recruitment because youth volunteers wish to become involved based on their interests. This is similar to the findings of Henderson (1980) and Sergent and Sedlacek (1990) who observed that adequate recruitment of youth volunteers and their continued involvement are dependent upon matching their motivations to the volunteer activity proposed by an organization. Data from our survey questionnaire and interviews show that young people's interest in the cause, clientele, or proposed activity is not only a fundamental aspect for youth volunteers but that it is also what motivates them to become volunteers and to continue volunteering.

Recommendation

Vary the volunteer activities offered to youth to correspond to their interests.

First, we must identify organizations with activities that correspond to the types of involvement desired by youth and that already make provisions for youth volunteers. Second, we must identify groups, organizations and institutions with the same objectives, but that do not recruit youth volunteers. Youth volunteerism must be promoted to these organizations and contact between youth and stakeholders facilitated. In the long term, this diversification of volunteer opportunities offered to youth could increase the pool of youth volunteers.

Characteristics of activities suitable for youth volunteers

Two main points emerged from this study regarding the characteristics of activities that are suitable for youth. First, although youth say they are most interested in and more likely to participate in organizing volunteer projects, the adults we interviewed mainly see youth involved in performing tasks that have already been planned. Second, confirming the observations of Schondel and Bohem (2000), the interviews we conducted and data from our study emphasize that the social dimension is essential to youth volunteerism. Being involved in a group, particularly with friends, enhances the volunteer experience of youth.

Our interviews with individuals who work with youth volunteers provide evidence that, ideally, volunteer activities should be concrete and produce visible results in a short amount of time.

Recommendation

Promote youth socializing through volunteerism.

The social aspect is especially important to youth; organizations must take this into consideration. Because it is important for youth to volunteer with their friends, organizations should try to adjust their volunteer assignments – to the extent possible – to allow youth to volunteer in groups. Organizations must also be sure to integrate young people into their volunteer teams so that they can socialize.

Quality and benefits of the volunteer experience

As Allen et al. (1994) and Kuperminc et al. (2001) have maintained, in order for volunteering to have a positive impact on young people's development, the volunteer experience must be a good one. Certain conditions are therefore necessary: the proposed activities must provide a learning experience for young people, the objectives and tasks must meet young people's expectations, and the experience must provide enough satisfaction to motivate participants to continue volunteering.

Findings from our survey questionnaire confirm that youth volunteers place a great deal of importance on the factors identified by Allen et al. (1994) and Kuperminc et al. (2001); they particularly value having an opportunity to learn and having the activity meet their expectations. Our research findings also show that the vast majority of young people have positive volunteer experiences in terms of the three criteria noted above. Our findings do not quantify the extent to which the volunteer activities carried out by youth actually contributed to their development; however, young people's satisfaction with the activities carried

out, the supervision provided, the relationships with other volunteers, and the knowledge they acquired lead us to believe that young people benefit from their volunteer activities.

Recommendation

Develop a theoretical framework for youth volunteerism.

Given that governments, and municipal and community authorities value youth volunteer engagement, we recommend that a framework be developed that clearly identifies the underlying objectives for youth volunteerism and the expectations of young people who volunteer. As was the case for the volunteer programs analysed by Kuperminc et al. (2001), it would be useful to determine why volunteerism is valued at the local level. This would make it possible to better direct volunteerism and to better promote volunteerism to youth as well as to organizations and educational institutions. The following are some points that should be examined in order to better direct youth volunteer engagement:

- What types of volunteer activities benefit the development of young people?
- How are the volunteer activities available to young people likely to enhance their psychosocial development and community involvement?
- What developmental outcomes are expected through volunteering?
- What conditions must be in place for youths to reap long-term benefits from their volunteer experience?
- What do organizations gain by having youth volunteers?

Supervision and mentorship

Supervision

The experiences of young people who completed our questionnaire indicate that the main conditions identified by adults for overseeing youth volunteers are generally in place. Adequate supervision generally depends on:

- a warm welcome and a clear explanation of the objectives and instructions;
- ongoing supervision, being available, and listening to the young persons for the duration of the activity;
- a volunteer experience that provides youth with responsibilities;
- a positive attitude towards youth that demonstrates that youth are valued; and
- feedback and follow-up on youth participation.

Our research confirms that these conditions, which are essential to the supervision and guidance of youth volunteers, are generally provided by adults with the exception of the last point: feedback and follow-up. A significant percentage of young people stated that a review of their participation was not conducted at the end of the activity in order to identify the positive aspects and areas for improvement.

Recommendation

Develop and distribute information tools about youth volunteer involvement.

Tools such as brochures and fact sheets would provide support to organizations that wish to involve youth volunteers but that have no experience working with them. It is important that these tools emphasize the benefits of providing feedback to youth volunteers. In the short term, this would help ensure the success of youth participation; in the long term, it could promote the retention of youth volunteers.

Mentoring and coaching youth volunteers

In their analysis of community engagement programs, Kuperminc et al. (2001) and LoSciuto et al. (1996) emphasize that the presence of a mentor to guide the youth volunteers optimizes the developmental gains associated with volunteering. Spiritual life and community service facilitators play an important mentorship role among students in Laval. They oversee youth volunteering by enhancing youth's sense of responsibility as individuals and towards society. These facilitators play an important role in transmitting the values of volunteerism, particularly altruism. The youth who participated in our survey also placed considerable value on the relationships they established with adults while volunteering and on being appreciated, listened to, and encouraged by adults.

Recommendation

Provide mentors for youth volunteers.

Since mentors are an important factor in the success of volunteer involvement, it is important that the adults who supervise youth provide support and guidance. Even though the duration of volunteer activities is often short, youth volunteers benefit more from the experience if they have guidance along the way.

Recruitment

The direct approach

One of the main findings of our research pertains to the recruitment of youth volunteers. According to the youth volunteers who completed our survey and the adults who work with youth volunteers whom we interviewed, the direct approach of a friend, parent, member of the school staff or representative of an organization (co-ordinator, volunteer, client, etc.) is the best way to recruit youth volunteers. Our discussion groups, survey questionnaire, and interviews all indicated that young people generally have to be asked to volunteer.

Although several of the young people who participated in our research had taken the initiative to volunteer, approaching young people directly is the most effective means of reaching those who do not volunteer of their own accord.

Recommendation

Approach youth directly to encourage them to volunteer.

Organizations that wish to involve youth volunteers must take an active approach to recruiting them.

Word of mouth

Youniss et al. (2001) maintain that social networks and peer relations are important to youth volunteerism. This is echoed by the results of the interviews and the questionnaire used in our research. Young people do not volunteer simply to be with their friends (they can do that without volunteering). However, volunteering represents an opportunity to have fun with friends and to be of service to the community.

Among friends, word of mouth represents an important means of promoting volunteer activities. Data obtained from our questionnaire indicate that young people whose friends who volunteer are more likely to volunteer than those whose friends do not volunteer. The validation of volunteering with a group of friends, information about possible volunteer activities, positive accounts about volunteering by friends, and the influence of young people on their peers are factors that are likely to lead young people to volunteer.

Recommendation

Recruit new youth volunteers through current youth volunteers.

Young people encourage one another to volunteer. Having young people recruit volunteers and tapping into their social networks can be an effective means of increasing youth volunteerism.

Retention of Volunteers

Data from the interviews and the questionnaire agree on the factors that are likely to encourage youth volunteerism. First, young people must be interested in and enjoy volunteering if they are to continue. Providing a positive volunteer experience is the best way to encourage young people to continue volunteering.

Recommendation

Make organizations aware of the importance of a positive volunteer experience for young people.

The primary factor that influences young people to continue volunteering is the quality of the volunteer experience. Organizations must be made aware of the importance of providing volunteer activities that youth find enriching. In order to meet young people's expectations, organizations must consult young people and pay attention to their interests and motivations.

Recruiting younger volunteers

The younger the volunteer, the more likely it is that he or she will continue to volunteer over the years. Our research shows that young people who begin volunteering at the age of 12 (or younger) tend to continue volunteering throughout their school years.

Recommendation

Recruit young people at the start of middle school.

When recruiting youth volunteers, organizations should make an effort to reach 12-year-olds. This will foster an early introduction to volunteering and help to ensure that young people will continue to volunteer in the community.

Conclusion

Our research evaluated various aspects of volunteer engagement among young people in Laval, Quebec as well as the interests and expectations of these youth. It has also made it possible to identify means of recruiting and retaining youth volunteers. Beyond these findings, our study opens the door to further research on youth volunteers that could expand our understanding and foster the promotion of youth volunteerism.

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