Engaging Young Volunteers (age 15 – 34) in Rural Newfoundland

A Research Report

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Table of Contents

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1. Introduction

Across Canada, the rate of volunteering is declining and the burden on core volunteers is increasing, with 73% of volunteer activities carried out by 25% of volunteers, according to Statistics Canada's National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) as reported by Hall, McKeown, and Roberts (2001). Add to this the increasing demands being placed on the nonprofit sector, and it is not surprising that a further study, the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO), reported by Hall et al. (2005), found that 57% of nonprofit organizations say they have difficulty recruiting the types of volunteers they need.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the population is decreasing in every community.[1] This is especially true for young people in rural areas.[2] Consequently, the province faces particular problems in volunteerism. Unless new volunteers can be successfully recruited and leadership skills developed, there will, in the foreseeable future, be even greater expectations placed on those engaged in community service activities, resulting in higher levels of stress and burnout and, potentially, the shutting down of programs and services. The Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government's priority on the survival of rural communities (it recently established a Rural Secretariat) and the search for economic diversification underpin the need for a growing body of younger people to become involved in the community and to assume leadership roles.

In 2004, the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador undertook research to find out why young people do and do not volunteer and what nonprofit and voluntary organizations, especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, can do to attract and retain young volunteers and to develop young leaders within the voluntary sector. This report presents the finding from that research.

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1 In 2001, the populations of the main communities selected for this research ranged from 1,000 to 13,500. The overall population of these communities decreased by between 5% and 12% between 1996 and 2001. The population of the 15-34 cohort declined by 22% in the same period. For the various age groups within that cohort, the decrease was as follows: ages 15-19, 0-23% (16% overall); ages 20-24, 14-36% (21% overall); ages 25-29, 30-50% (35% overall); and ages 30-34, 2-33% (16% overall). Source: www.communityaccounts.ca (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency).

2 For the purposes of this project we defined young people as those between the ages of 15 and 34.

2. Volunteering and Youth

It is often said that young people are not interested in volunteering, but, in fact, Hall et al. (2001) showed that the volunteer participation rate for the 15-24 age group (40%) is higher than for any other age group in Newfoundland and Labrador.[3] However, there is also a large pool of non-volunteers who could be tapped. Hall et al. (2001) indicate that in Newfoundland and Labrador, 69% of the overall population (age 15 and over) do not formally volunteer, compared to 73% nationally. In a study by the Community Services Council (2003) in which more than 1,500 people were interviewed, 35% of respondents said that they were interested in becoming active or more involved as volunteers.[4] However, many individuals were unaware of the range of volunteer opportunities and organizations in their community; had never been asked to volunteer; had concerns about the expenses associated with volunteering, such as travel and child care; thought that they did not have the right skills; or felt unwelcome. National reports by Barnard, Campbell, and Smith (2003) and by Hall et al. (2001) confirm that young people are willing to volunteer but may be unaware of opportunities. Thus, the researchers feel that there is a solid base for new recruitment efforts and that voluntary organizations would be wise to think about how to approach the non-engaged segment of the younger population and how to retain them as volunteers once they become involved.

Anecdotal evidence gathered by the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) through consultations, conversations, training sessions, etc., indicates that young people may not be interested in the work of traditional organizations (i.e., the type of organizations that their parents and grandparents were involved with, such as service clubs and church auxiliaries). Barnard et al. (2003) and McClintock (2004) showed that young volunteers support causes they believe in and use volunteering to enhance employment opportunities by learning new job-related skills. Hall et al. (2001) found that youth are more likely to volunteer to improve job opportunities, to explore their own strengths, and because their friends volunteer. Barnard et al. (2003) concluded that to attract young people, "organizations need to offer flexible, relevant, authentic and hands-on volunteer opportunities…that are growth-oriented, with achievable goals and tangible benefits" (p. 29) and that young people "want involvement, innovation, and impact" (p. 100).

However, Barnard et al. (2003) acknowledge that their data does not give them a clear picture of engagement among young people in rural areas. With an aging populace and a shrinking pool of people to draw on, it is important to understand the nature of this engagement. Organizations need to look at programming, outreach, and retention practices that will support the involvement of young people. If organizations are to maintain sufficient volunteer involvement to retain the programs their communities deem important, it is vital that they understand and implement effective techniques that will bring young people into their organizations on an ongoing basis and provide them with positive experiences. Studies such as Independent Sector (2002) and Locke, Rowe, and Oliver (2004) have documented evidence

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3 CSC research (Community Services Council, 2003) indicates that volunteering rates for all age cohorts in Newfoundland and Labrador may be higher than reported by Hall et al. (2001). See *Volunteering in Newfoundland and Labrador* fact sheet available at http://www.enVision.ca/pdf/FactSheetJan2004.pdf .

4 Individuals in communities around Newfoundland and Labrador were interviewed by telephone. Most were selected randomly from the phone book.

that volunteer engagement breeds re-engagement, provided the early experience is a good one. If organizations can effectively recruit young people, they will be cultivating a climate of ongoing civic participation and responsibility.

3. Objectives of the Research

The current study focused on the barriers and bridges that hinder or aid the involvement of young people as volunteers in rural Newfoundland. The main objectives of the study were:

1. to explore current and potential organizational practices, strategies, and attitudes that are likely to attract or 'turn off' young volunteers and emerging leaders;
2. to identify the types of activities of interest to young people and how this might inform organizational practices and management such as volunteer recruitment, coordination, and retention strategies, and program delivery and administrative styles, and to inquire why some young people may not volunteer; and
3. to develop materials to assist organizations in rural communities with recruitment, utilization, and retention of more young people as volunteers and leaders.

Building on the research results, we set out to develop tools to attract more young people to volunteering and to help organizations make changes specifically to engage more young volunteers. To get young people actively involved and to develop their commitment to community service, organizations need to understand, appeal to, and accommodate young people in ways that suit their lifestyles and interests. Young people need more information on volunteer opportunities and the benefits of volunteering to both themselves and the community. Good early volunteering experiences will likely lead to continuing involvement and the development of skills that build leadership capacity (Locke et al., 2004).

4. Methodology

Defining "Young"

The attitude and commitment to community service, volunteering, and the assumption of leadership roles can begin with teenage experiences (Locke et al., 2004). However, our knowledge of rural Newfoundland communities tells us that references to young people encompass a wide range of ages and include people who have completed their education, are working, are raising young families, or are unemployed. We also know that individuals attending post-secondary institutions have likely relocated from rural towns, as have many others in the 20-29 age range.[5] In the context of rural Newfoundland, the largest cohorts of young people are those still in high school (15-19) and those aged 30-34 who remain in or have returned to their communities. In this study, therefore, we decided to go beyond the standard definitions of young (15-24 years, Hall et al., 2001, and 15-30 years, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) to examine the volunteer involvements of people between the ages of 15 and 34, the range referred to as the "Information Age Generations" by Barnard et al. (2003). Although there may be significant variations across this age range, Bernard et al. point out that people in this age group have one thing in common – they grew up during the "Information Age" and, as a result, may be most affected by new societal trends "influencing the way citizens interact with the state and community organizations" (p. 6).

Data sources

The project was conducted in five diverse (based on size, economic base, and type, i.e., inland or coastal) rural locations in Central Newfoundland.[6] A huge geographic area with more than 120 communities and approximately 1,000 identified nonprofit and voluntary organizations, the Central region offered a choice of locations and types of organizations. In some cases, the locations selected incorporated more than one community. In addition:

- The CSC had conducted several pieces of preliminary research in the Central region: Community Services Council (2002, 2003), and four case studies that led to *Growing From Within*, a self-assessment handbook for nonprofit organizations. These provided a solid foundation for the present research.

- The CSC has a regional Voluntary Resources Centre with a full-time voluntary resources facilitator in Gander, one of the larger towns in the region. Familiarity with the region is strong and there had already been workshops conducted with youth in the area. The Centre helped organize project activities, facilitate community meetings, and conduct training. This research will help the Centre reach out to more organizations and individuals in the region.

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5 In the main communities covered by the research (i.e., Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, St. Alban's, Harbour Breton, Twillingate, Summerford, and Botwood), the total populations in 2001 of the age groups studied were as follows: age 15-19, 2,505; age 20-24, 2,080 (17% less than the 15-19 age group); age 25-29, 1,800 (13% less than the 20-24 age group); and age 30-34, 2,475 (38% more than the 25-29 age group). Source: www.communityaccounts.ca (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency).

6 What was formerly called the Central Strategic Social Plan region comprises about 50,000 km², or nearly half the area of the island of Newfoundland, containing 100,000 people, or about one fifth of the province's population. The communities at the extremes of the Central region are separated from each other by 400 km of road. Our study encompassed communities within 300 km of each other, hence covering most of the region.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants by age group, participation type, and community type

Age Range	In-person[8] Central Newfoundland (rural)	Online Survey (rural)	Online Survey (urban)	Online Survey (missing town data)	Total
15 – 19	20	6	0	0	26
20 – 24	6	6	6	1[9]	19
25 – 29	6	2	3	0	11
30 – 34	12	5	2	0	19
Missing Age	0	0	0	4[10]	4
Total	44	19	11	5[11]	79

The group of young volunteers who participated in the project, both through discussion groups and written questionnaires in Central Newfoundland, and through a subsequent province-wide online survey, is broken down by age group and community type (rural or urban[7]), as shown in Table 1.

The province-wide online survey was carried out as a check against the results obtained through the discussion groups and questionnaires in the Central region. The responses to the online survey questions were scanned, revealing the same issues and themes as were identified in the discussion groups and written questionnaire. The additional data obtained through the online survey allowed researchers to compare responses to some questions based on age. However, because the 25-29 age group was small, the researchers combined responses from that group with the responses from the 20-24 group when doing age comparisons. In this way we felt that we had three distinct groups: the youngest would be high school students (age 15-19), the oldest (age 30-34) would likely be established in careers and/or have families, while the middle group (age 20-29) might be unemployed, attending post-secondary institutions, or beginning to establish careers and/or families.

We started with the assumption that many young people are indeed willing to volunteer or volunteer more, but that there may be a degree of mismatch between the aspirations of young volunteers and the objectives, practices, and activities of many existing organizations. We hypothesized that the nature of the commitment that young people make is more likely to be short-term and centred on causes that appeal to them rather than to their parents' generation. This short-term commitment may be detrimental to leadership development.

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7 The online survey was open to young volunteers from around the province. For the purposes of this research, urban is defined as the cities of St. John's and Mount Pearl (populations about 100,000 and 25,000 respectively).

8 Participants who were in discussion groups.

9 This respondent gave no information about his or her community. The record was examined and data incorporated.

10 These respondents did not report their age or community. The data were not incorporated into any of the results broken down by age.

11 An additional two online respondents identified their community as being outside Newfoundland, and two said they were over the age of 34. These were removed from the respondent sample.

Data collection

We contracted five interviewers to conduct interviews, enter interview data online, and organize meetings in the five communities, and a project facilitator to oversee interviewers and activities in the region, help with meeting facilitation, and assist with data analysis.

A one-day training session for contract staff was held in Gander, conducted by the principal investigator and the voluntary resources facilitator. This included an outline of the project; an introduction to the CSC and www.enVision.ca, CSC's virtual resource centre for the voluntary sector; a discussion about interview techniques and confidentiality; practice and feedback on several of the interview forms; and a review of lists of nonprofit organizations for each area, generated from the CSC provincial directory of nonprofit organizations.

The first step for the interviewers was to set up small reference groups in their communities to provide support and advice and to test the survey forms. The interviewers passed on recommended changes to the principal investigator, and forms were revised. The research began with a quick telephone survey of organizations in each community to find out which ones had young volunteers, which did not, and which were interested in recruiting more young volunteers and involving them in more responsible positions.

From this telephone survey, a cross-section of organizations by type and number of young volunteers was selected for in-depth interviews of senior staff and/or board members, which we refer to as key informants. Following this, young volunteers in each location were invited to participate in discussion groups and to complete a written questionnaire. The principal investigator attended and helped to facilitate the first meeting. The project facilitator conducted the subsequent meetings. Young non-volunteers were interviewed in person. These young people were identified through the reference groups, key informants, or through other young people. Sometimes the interviewers added to the list through their contacts and knowledge of the community. The interviewers were asked to try to find volunteers and non-volunteers who were between the ages of 15 and 34.

After the data from these various sources was compiled, the principal investigator developed a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the findings. We brought organizations and young people together at community meetings to present, validate, and discuss the research results and to consider potential programs and strategies to involve more young volunteers. Community meetings were promoted through phone calls, e-mails, faxes, public notices, and public service announcements. Attendance at these five meeting varied considerably: 16 participants, more than 33 participants, 3 participants, 0 participants, and 1 participant. People said they were interested in attending the fourth meeting, but no one showed up. The fifth meeting was rescheduled several times because of other conflicting events in the community and intervening holiday weekends. The researchers then decided to try a different approach and offered a training workshop in concert with the meeting as an incentive. This would be a chance to network and learn practical skills.

After the first session, led by the principal investigator, the project facilitator and the voluntary resources facilitator conducted the meetings, presented the results, and facilitated discussion.

Meeting attendance

There is a lot of activity in rural Newfoundland that involves meetings and the exchange of ideas at a fairly sophisticated level. Government consultations on various issues, health boards, school boards, school councils, town councils, regional economic development boards, local development associations, and numerous community-based groups tax the dedication of core volunteers. We must keep in mind that the same people may be drawn on repeatedly. This might have had an impact on the turnout at some of our meetings. Indeed, some people said that to come out to a meeting was difficult as they already had enough meetings to attend.

Training workshops

Organizations represented at the first three community meetings expressed a need for training and assistance with recruitment. Organizations and young people who had participated in the project in three of the locations were called to gauge interest in training and to ascertain what kind of training they thought would be most useful. Based on this feedback, the team decided to offer "Recruiting Volunteers" to organizations in Community A (seven people representing nine organizations attended) and "Shaping Your Future Through Volunteering" to young people (11 people aged 13–26 attended). These sessions were promoted publicly and by phone, e-mail, and fax.

In Community B, an organizational self-assessment session was offered to interested groups, working with the new handbook, *Growing From Within*, developed through the local Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) network and CSC. Four people representing four organizations attended. Most of the young people from the community meeting had already attended

volunteer training sessions. The facilitator is planning future workshops to which all young people who participated in the research project will be invited.

In Community C, the main research results as well as the handbook *Growing From Within* were discussed with the one organization representative who attended (12-14 had registered). "Shaping Your Future Through Volunteering" was widely promoted, but no young people signed up.

Online survey

The survey for young volunteers was posted online at www.enVision.ca in February 2005.

Good news story

The most enthusiastic response to project activities came from Community A, and new volunteer connections were made between young people and community groups. The training facilitator conducted interviews with three organization representatives and one young volunteer, from which a case study was written, giving a more personal account of the activities and their impact in that community. (See the Fact Sheet entitled "A Community Profile" that is associated with this report)

Summary of project activities

In brief, our research consisted of:

1. a scan of 117 nonprofit organizations, conducted by telephone, using a structured questionnaire;
2. in-person key informant interviews with senior staff and board members from 41 of the 117 organizations, using a structured questionnaire with many open-ended questions;

- a discussion group with young volunteers in each location (6-10 per community, for a total of 44 participants, all of whom were paid a $15 honorarium);
- a young-volunteer questionnaire completed in writing by discussion group participants;
- in-person interviews with young non-volunteers (a total of 21, 10 who had never volunteered and 11 former volunteers, all of whom were paid a $15 honorarium);
- an online survey of young volunteers to confirm issues province-wide (35 respondents);
- four community meetings, as outlined in the previous section (five meetings were planned, but only four drew participants), where findings were presented, followed by a facilitated discussion of the findings;
- a short follow-up telephone survey of project participants in three of the targeted locations to see if new volunteers had been recruited or new volunteer positions had been obtained (several organizations had connected with new young volunteers) and to gauge interest in training;
- training sessions, as outlined above, conducted in three communities; and
- interviews on the impact of the project with one young volunteer and three organization representatives in one community.

5. Challenges

Finding contract staff in rural communities with the ideal mix of qualifications and research experience is not always possible. Initially, we had hoped to engage a researcher at a Master's level, but there was no one forthcoming. Therefore, we decided to hire five interviewers, as well as a project facilitator with research and community development experience.

Conducting several pieces of research in five locations in a short time frame involved complications, as some work had to be completed before other work could start. We organized five discussion groups, five community meetings, and three training sessions in locations that were geographically distant from each other, coordinating around holiday weekends, winter weather, poor driving conditions, other community events, and the schedules of the facilitators. However, the persistence of the project staff and the cooperation of community groups and volunteers allowed all activities to be completed on time.

The declining population in rural Newfoundland is most pronounced among the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups. There has been a large drop in sheer numbers in these age groups in all communities. This may help to explain the difficulty interviewers had in identifying young volunteers between the ages of 20 and 29. Another point to consider is that, according to the CSC (2003), the volunteering rate in Newfoundland and Labrador decreases from 51% in the 15-19 age group to 45% in the 20-24 age group. So not only are there fewer young people in this age group, but there is also reason to believe that fewer of them volunteer than do young people in other age groups.

6. Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data from interviews, group sessions, and surveys were stored in a database through online data entry by project interviewers. The quantitative data was analyzed using statistical software. For the qualitative data, we examined the information to see if there were common themes and trends. Most of the results in this report are from the analysis of the qualitative data.

There were not enough individual participants to do comparisons based on gender, education level, and socio-economic status, as was originally considered. We made some comparisons based on age.

7. Findings

The issues identified during this research are similar to those that arise during most discussions of volunteerism, both at the national and local levels. A few of the specifics may vary because of the age range we looked at; nevertheless, our findings corroborate previous research (e.g., Hall et al., 2001, and Community Services Council, 2003), as well as anecdotal evidence informing us that there is a lack of awareness in communities about volunteer opportunities and in some cases a lack of appreciation of the activities undertaken by volunteers; certain types of positions (particularly short-term positions) may be more appealing; organizations tend to rely on the same people and do not reach out very well to non-volunteers; and friends and family have a strong influence.

The number one reason cited for why people do not volunteer was time constraints. We learned that young volunteers get a great deal of satisfaction from their volunteer involvement; they like to help the cause and to feel part of the community. They also appreciate the benefits that they gain from volunteering. Our findings are summarized under the following headings:

- recruitment and awareness;
- what appeals to young volunteers;
- motivations and benefits of volunteering;
- leadership;
- stress and burnout of core volunteers;
- time constraints;
- appreciation and respect;
- transportation and financial constraints;
- exclusion and the generation gap;
- retention;

- competition and potential for cooperation among organizations; and
- unmet community needs.

Recruitment and awareness

Methods of recruitment

Organization Scan (Telephone Survey) – Successful Methods of Recruitment

During the telephone interviews, organizations were asked what methods they had found to be successful in recruiting young people (under age 35) as volunteers. They were also asked what methods they had tried that were not successful. These were separate open-ended questions. People could give more than one response. They were not asked to rank or scale their responses. Of 117 organizations that participated in the telephone survey, 75 responded to the question about successful recruitment efforts. Their responses, with the percentage of organizations that mentioned each method, follow:[12]

- word of mouth, asking, a direct approach, and person-to-person communication (68%);
- advertising, announcements, posters, and flyers (20%);[13]
- appeals through other groups, schools, and churches (15%);
- offering incentives, showing appreciation, and touting the benefits (15%);
- offering workshops or making presentations (less than 1%);
- through successful events (less than 1%);

- appeals to former members, service users (less than 1%);
- unspecified methods of creating awareness (less than 1%).

Only 1% of organizations said volunteers came of their own initiative.

Organization Scan (Telephone Survey) – Unsuccessful Methods of Recruitment

Fifty-one of the 117 organizations that participated in the telephone survey responded to the question about unsuccessful practices they had tried for recruiting young volunteers. Their responses were:[14]

- advertising (69%);
- word of mouth, personal invitations, and personal contact (16%);
- through schools (8%);
- letters and mail-outs (6%);
- inviting prospective volunteers to meetings (6%); and,
- miscellaneous methods, including information booths, leadership workshops, coaxing, asking current volunteers to bring a buddy, recruitment events, changing by-laws to attract different age groups (18%: 1 or 2 respondents mentioned each method).

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12 The percentages total more than 100% as some organizations mentioned more than one method.

13 Only 2 of the 15 respondents here mentioned advertising alone as successful. Everyone else mentioned advertising along with at least one other method. We note this because advertising was the most frequently mentioned *unsuccessful* method.

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14 The percentages total more than 100% as some organizations mentioned more than one method.

Young Volunteers Survey (Central)

The 44 young volunteers who attended focus groups also completed a written survey in which they gave details of up to five volunteer positions they had held. For 141 of these 151 positions, they reported how they had found out about them.[15] 'Word of mouth' through family and friends was by far the most common source of information about volunteer opportunities, followed by contact from other volunteers or through community groups. In fact, with the exception of 'ads' and 'own initiative,' all of the sources could be classified as 'word of mouth,' including through school, through being a member of the organization, through church, through employment, or as a result of using a service or a family member using a service delivered by the organization.

Figure 1 gives a complete breakdown of 141 responses.[16]

Figure 1: Sources of information about volunteer positions

Information Sources

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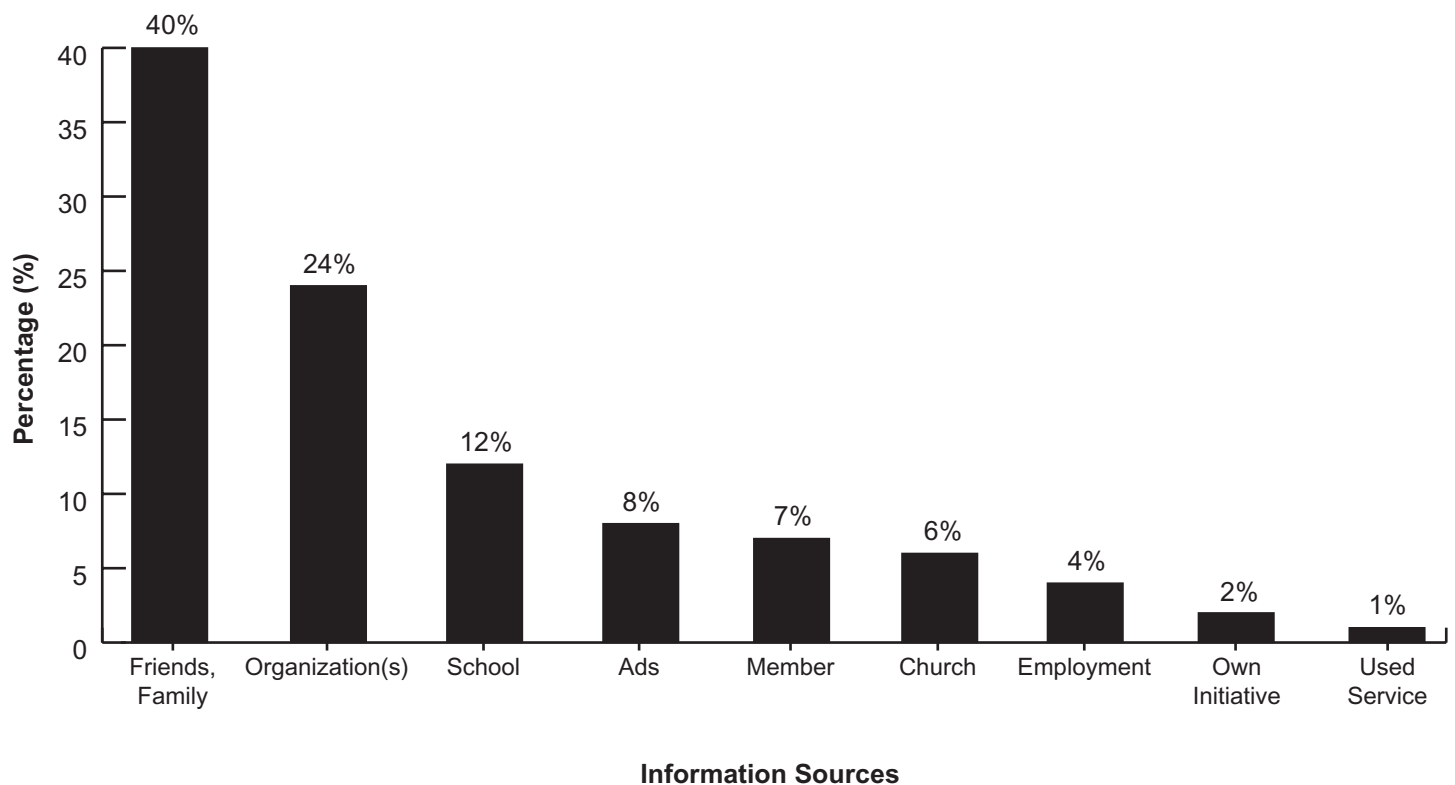
15 Respondents were given space to list up to five positions. Most listed three, four, or five positions (16, 10, and 12 people respectively); five people gave information on one position, and three people gave information on two positions. The limit of five positions per respondent ensured that one respondent could not skew the results by listing, say, 12 positions, all with the same source of information.

16 The percentages total more than 100% as a few people mentioned more than one source for the same position.

Young Volunteers Online Survey

The online responses on sources of information about volunteer positions were not formally analyzed because information sources for some positions were not given and other data were mixed together or entered in the wrong fields. Hindsight tells us that we should have better adapted the survey for easy online completion. However, a scan of the online responses showed that family and friends were again the most frequently mentioned way respondents found out about volunteer positions.

These results parallel previous research (Community Services Council, 2003, and Hall et al., 2001), which also showed that word of mouth, asking, and personal contact were generally the best ways to recruit volunteers.

Influence of friends and family

We discovered that word of mouth through friends and family was the way most young volunteers found out about their volunteer positions. This is consistent with responses to questions about the volunteer involvement of family and friends in community groups. Of 82 young volunteers and former volunteers who responded to the question on having parents as volunteers (Central and Online Surveys), 62 (76%) said their parents were, at some time, volunteers. Of 84 respondents who answered the question about friends as volunteers, 77 (92%) said their friends were, at some time, volunteers. Table 2 gives a breakdown of these answers by age, with the urban respondents separated out.

In contrast, although we realize that the number of non-volunteers interviewed was small, we note that of the 10 young people who had never volunteered, only five (50%) said their parents had volunteered, and six (60%) said their friends had volunteered.

On the flip side, both organizations and young people mentioned peer pressure and/or a feeling that volunteering was 'not cool' as an obstacle to becoming involved. At one of the community meetings, some people said that peer pressure was a big issue. Some organization representatives also said that the lack of role models was a reason why young people didn't volunteer. We conclude that friends and family can have a positive or negative influence.

Table 2: Involvement of parents and friends of young volunteers

	Age 15 - 19 Rural	Age 20 - 29 Rural	Age 30 - 34 Rural	Age 15 - 34 Urban	Total
Parents had volunteered	83%	69%	73%	82%	76%
Friends had volunteered	100%	84%	100%	80%	92%

Getting more young people involved

Young People and Organization Key Informants
When asked about obstacles to volunteering or why some people do not volunteer, all groups of respondents said time constraints were a significant barrier, as was lack of awareness, knowledge, and information about organizations, opportunities, community needs and issues, and the importance and benefits of volunteering. Also, many people had simply not been asked.

When asked how to get more young people involved, all groups of respondents talked most about creating better awareness and more active recruitment. We are yet again reminded that even in small communities, many people do not know about the volunteer opportunities that exist, and many non-volunteers are not being asked to participate. This no longer comes as a surprise to us, as we have been hearing this for years in discussions and through our research (Community Service Council, 2003). We asked how organizations could plan their recruitment strategies so that volunteering is seen in the community as an inclusive opportunity that offers numerous benefits, builds on strengths, and creates a better place to live and grow. The young volunteers in this study suggested that training and other support, better recognition, career-related positions, incentives, job descriptions, short-term opportunities, and leadership development opportunities would help attract young people to volunteering.

Promoting volunteer opportunities
When we consider that only 23 (56%) of 41 staff and board member key informants said that their organizations had volunteer job descriptions and that the same percentage (56%) of discussion group participants said that they had been

given job descriptions, it is not surprising that some organizations had not previously thought about promoting specific volunteer positions or opportunities. This was a strategy suggested by the community meeting facilitators, and it was a real eye opener for some organization representatives. People generally agreed that that this could be much more appealing to young people than the promotion of individual organizations and a general call for volunteers. (An example given at one meeting was that the Crohn's and Colitis Association perhaps did not have much appeal per se, but if it, or any group, advertised for a Web site designer or event organizer, it would be more likely to get responses than if it made a general call for volunteers.)

Organization representatives suggested promoting opportunities collectively through schools, newsletters, the town hall, forums, or fairs. Facilitators also gave information about CSC's Volunteer Connections at www.volunteer.enVision.ca, where organizations can post volunteer opportunities online and potential volunteers can check listings in their community or region.

Opportunities can also be promoted through word of mouth and by organizations individually. A specific position with a brief description of duties might make it easier for organizations to solicit the help of new volunteers. A clear outline of responsibilities and time commitments would help volunteers understand what is expected of them and could make them more willing to become involved. A volunteer experience with a specific position description is also easy to include on a résumé.

What appeals to young volunteers

Types of organizations

Young Volunteers Survey (Central and Online)
For up to five volunteer positions, young volunteers gave information about the organization, how they found out about the position, the activities they were involved in, their role, and how long they had been active.

The length of time respondents had been in their volunteer positions ranged from 'just started' to 20 years (i.e., respondents had become involved with an organization in their teens and were still with the organization in their thirties). The most popular organizations among all cohorts of young volunteers were those that had been set up specifically to serve children, youth, or families. Table 3 shows the most popular categories of organizations by three age cohorts for rural youth volunteers, with the urban data from the online survey separated out.

Table 3: Types of organizations with which young volunteers are involved

Organization Type	Rural Age 15 - 19 (n=82 orgs)	Rural Age 20-29 (n=68 orgs)	Rural Age 30-34 (n=54 orgs)	Total Rural (n=204 orgs)	Urban (n=27 orgs)
Child, youth, and family	39%	22%	26%	30%	37%
Education and school	17%	13%	11%	14%	19%
Health	10%	15%	11%	12%	11%
Recreation and sports	10%	10%	13%	11%	4%
Municipal	2%	6%	9%	5%	4%
Church	9%	6%	2%	6%	11%
Other[17]	13%	28%	28%	22%	15%

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17 These include organizations dealing with animals, economic development, environment, heritage, arts, culture, women, seniors, emergency services, service clubs, justice, literacy, and community TV.

Popular activities

Young Volunteers Survey (Central)

Based on the written survey completed by 44 young volunteers describing 151 volunteer positions, the most common activities that young people were involved with were:[18]

- fundraising, which may include events (45%);
- organizing and helping with events, which may include fundraising events (40%);
- day-to-day activities (36%);
- coaching, tutoring, supervising young people or children, and peer support (30%);
- serving on boards, councils, or committees (18%); and,
- public relations (8%).

Organization Scan

Based on telephone interviews with 89 organizations that had young volunteers (out of the 117 organizations in the scan), the most frequently mentioned types of activities that young volunteers were involved in were:[19]

- a wide range of day-to-day activities (60%);
- fundraising, which may include events (30%);
- coaching, tutoring, and supervising young people or children (30%);
- events, which may include fundraising (16%);
- serving on boards, executives, and committees (16%); and
- public relations (9%).

The discrepancy between percentage of organizations (60%) and percentage of young volunteers (36%) who mentioned day-to-day activities may be because young volunteer respondents tended to be 'core' volunteers and, as such, were more likely to be engaged in activities beyond the day-to-day variety. The organizations, on the other hand, spoke generally about their young volunteers.

Appealing attributes of organizations

The data from all sources was examined to identify the attributes of organizations or activities that young people considered to be desirable. Organizations and activities that were seen as most desirable were those that were:

- related to the personal interests and hobbies of volunteers (most often mentioned were sports and recreation, children and youth, outdoor activities, and some social issues);
- clearly beneficial to a community target group that is being assisted by volunteer activity (immediate results over long-term goals);
- fun, social, active, and hands-on; and,
- beneficial to the volunteer (e.g., that offered training, helped to build résumés, or were career-related).

As with the types of organizations and activities of interest, these attributes overlapped, for example: activities with children could be outdoor activities, fun, and related to hobbies; youth activities could be social and fun. Both would benefit the target group and the community, and help the volunteer develop skills.

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[18] The percentages do not add up to 100% as people were often involved in more than one type of activity in a particular position.

[19] The percentages do not add up to 100% as organizations often named more than one type of activity.

Short-term volunteering

Key Informant Interviews with Senior Staff and Board Members

The senior staff and board members from 36 of the 41 organizations selected for in-depth interviews agreed that young people were more interested in short-term volunteering (e.g., special events) than in long-term (i.e., regular, continuing) volunteering.

Motivations and benefits of volunteering

Young Volunteers

We asked young volunteers in the discussion groups what got them interested in volunteering and what they liked about it. The written questionnaire asked why they volunteered and how they benefited. The questionnaire gave them an opportunity to express their opinions away from the influence of the group. Both the discussion groups and the questionnaire produced similar responses. We can say with confidence that young people volunteer for the following reasons:

- **Personal satisfaction:** it is rewarding and feels good to help others, give back to community or to an organization, help the cause, be involved, fill a need, or make a difference.
- **Fun:** young people enjoy the target group they are helping, the activities, meeting new people, and socializing.
- **Personal benefit:** young people gain experience, learn new things, build self-esteem, develop transferable skills, add to their résumés, share ideas and skills, and are recognized by others.
- **Something to do:** volunteering gets young people out of the house, keeps them off the street, and gives them something different to do.
- **Influence of friends and family:** this appears to increase with age as parents volunteer for groups with which their children are involved.[20]

Table 4 breaks these responses down by age group.[21]

Table 4: Why young people volunteer

	Age 15 - 19 (n=26)	Age 20 - 29 (n=30)	Age 30 - 34 (n=19)
Personal satisfaction	85%	87%	84%
Fun	58%	37%	53%
Personal benefits	23%	40%	16%
Something to do	15%	17%	11%
Influence of others	0%	3%	16%

20 Few people said they volunteered *because* of friends and family, but it is through friends and family that most people find out about volunteer opportunities, and it has been well-documented that people are more likely to volunteer if their friends and family volunteer (Hall et al., 2001; Locke et al., 2004).

21 The percentages do not add up to 100% as many people mentioned more than one reason.

Table 5 reports the benefits of volunteering identified by the different cohorts. By comparing reported benefits to young people's reasons for volunteering (Table 4), we can say that generally the expectations of young people are being met.

The oldest age group (30-34) was more likely to report personal satisfaction as a benefit, whereas the two younger age groups (15-19 and 20-29) were more likely to emphasize career development, and the youngest age group (15-19) was more likely to report personal development as a benefit. We may conclude the following:

- Teenagers (age 15-19) have a greater need to develop self-esteem and interpersonal skills.
- The two younger age groups (15-19 and 20-29) have a greater need for career-related skills and experience. This is consistent with the Hall et al. (2001) finding that the 15-24 year age cohort was far more likely than any other to give 'improving job opportunities' as a reason for volunteering.
- The oldest age group (30-34) needs less personal and career development and has a greater

need for the satisfaction of helping others, being involved, making a difference, and giving back.

Non-volunteers
Twenty-one young non-volunteers (11 former volunteers and 10 young people who had never volunteered) were asked what might motivate them to volunteer. They answered:

- a cause or activity of interest (8 respondents of 21, i.e. 38%);
- a feeling that they could make a difference, see results, or benefit the community or themselves (6 of 21, i.e. 28%);
- being asked (5 of 21, i.e. 24%); and,
- awareness of volunteer opportunities (2 of 21, i.e. 1%).

In summary, young people want to enjoy their volunteer activities, feel satisfied with the results, and gain benefits for themselves. They need to be aware of opportunities and will often say yes if asked to volunteer.

Table 5: Benefits of volunteering

	Age 15 - 19 (n=26)	Age 20 - 29 (n=30)	Age 30 - 34 (n=19)
Personal satisfaction	62%	60%	89%
Career development	50%	53%	37%
Personal development	42%	13%	21%
Fun[22]	27%	30%	26%
Incentives	8%	3%	0%

[22] We should keep in mind that just because someone did not mention 'fun' as a benefit, this does not mean that they did not have fun while they volunteered. Fun can overlap with other benefits. Many people may simply not think of 'fun' as a benefit.

Leadership

Organization Scan

Of the 117 organizations interviewed during the telephone scan, 42 (35%) reported that they had volunteers under the age of 19, and six (5%) had young people under 19 on their board. Twice as many organizations (85, or 71%) had volunteers between the ages of 19 and 34, and 42 (36%) had people aged 19 to 34 on their board. A few organizations (6) had volunteers and/or board members both between the ages of 15 and 19 and over the age of 19, and 28 organizations had neither. Almost all of these organizations (106) in the survey were interested in recruiting more young people as volunteers and in getting young people into more responsible positions. Of the 89 organizations that had young volunteers, 49 (55%) said young people took on the following leadership roles:

- organizing and implementing events and activities;
- serving on committees and boards; and
- coaching, tutoring, or supervising children.

Young Volunteers Survey (Central and Online)

Of the 74 young volunteers who answered the question about leadership roles, 57 (77%) said that they had had opportunities to assume leadership (76% - 79% for the various age groups). This high percentage was not surprising to the researchers as we supposed that young leaders were more likely to come out to a discussion group or fill in an online survey than was the general population of young volunteers. Young volunteers demonstrated leadership by:

- coaching, tutoring, and supervising children and youth (e.g., in sports, youth, and children's groups, in school, or in church);

- serving on committees and boards with different types of organizations; and,
- organizing a wide range of events and activities with diverse groups.

Key Informant Interviews with Senior Staff and Board Members

When key informants were asked how they thought they could help young people develop leadership skills, they answered that they could:

- give more responsibility, trust, hands-on experience, mentoring, and guidance to young people;
- provide training;
- explain roles and expectations;
- help young people develop confidence and identify skills and strengths;
- serve as role models;
- provide rewards and show appreciation; and
- get schools involved in volunteering.

We heard that young volunteers want respect, responsibility, and trust, all of which contribute to the development of leadership skills. Lacking these, some volunteers will quit and potential new leaders may be lost to organizations. Our conclusion is that many young people are ready and willing to take on leadership roles. Some organizations provide the necessary supports for this to occur and some do not. Organizations themselves may need help to make this happen. There is an opportunity here for training for both organizations and young volunteers.

Stress and burnout of core volunteers

Young Volunteers Discussion Groups

The young volunteers who participated in the group discussions (and subsequently completed the written questionnaire) were obviously keen volunteers who held an average of more than three volunteer positions each. They said that once a person was known to volunteer for one organization, other organizations would ask that person to volunteer. They found it hard to say no and consequently became overextended and were often torn between their volunteer commitments and other responsibilities and interests. The fact that most of these young people were involved with several organizations is consistent with the national finding that 23% of volunteers carry out 75% of all volunteer activity (Hall et al., 2001).

Young volunteers sometimes found it frustrating to put in so much effort and then be criticized by non-volunteers in the community. When asked during the group discussions if there was anything they disliked about volunteering, young volunteers most frequently named the following six items, which can be categorized as recruitment, recognition, burnout, and succession issues:

- criticism, lack of respect, and lack of awareness of role of volunteers (recognition);
- too much responsibility (burnout);
- time expectations, time constraints, and other responsibilities (burnout);
- not enough volunteers (succession, burnout);
- stress (burnout); and,
- not enough responsibility (recognition, succession).

The following issues were raised at least once as negative features of volunteering:

- lack of community response to an organized activity;
- the generation gap;
- legal responsibility;
- fundraising and insufficient funding;
- negative experiences;
- personality clashes;
- reality of target population suffering;
- having to enforce rules (with kids or youth);
- membership drives;
- procedures and policies;
- screening (needed by organization but not in place); and,
- unions (some union members think volunteers may take away jobs).

The young people were quick to say they loved volunteering in spite of some negative aspects.

Time constraints

Time constraints and other life responsibilities was the top reason all groups of respondents gave for not volunteering or for deciding to stop volunteering. This, together with the demands being made on current volunteers and the feeling in some organizations that young people are more interested in short-term volunteering, would suggest that organizations would be wise to develop and promote short-term volunteer opportunities.

Appreciation and respect

Young volunteers want to be recognized for their efforts not only by the organizations with which they volunteer (all respondents said they had received gestures of appreciation from organizations), but also by non-volunteers and the community-at-large. The thing they disliked the most was criticism from non-volunteers and lack of general respect, awareness, and participation in the community.

Transportation and financial constraints

Transportation was mentioned by a number of respondents (young people and organization representatives) as a barrier to volunteering. In small rural communities, people may have to travel from one community to another for school, to be involved in extra-curricular activities such as sports or a youth club, or to volunteer for an organization. This places additional time and financial burdens on young people and their families.

Exclusion and the generation gap

Another issue mentioned less frequently but raised both by young people and representatives of organizations was the generation gap. Sometimes this was expressed as older volunteers not treating young volunteers with respect, not trusting them, not wanting them, or not believing that young people can take on responsibility. It was also said that some positions are more suited to adults. At one community meeting, some people said that volunteering (mixing) with different age groups was a problem, e.g., a 15-year-old would not want to volunteer with a 60-year-old.

Retention

Of the 41 staff and board member key informants, 24 (58%) said that their organizations had young volunteers who had stopped volunteering. The main reasons these volunteers had stopped volunteering (and the number of organizations that mentioned each reason) were:

- time constraints or other responsibilities (11, 45%); and
- relocation to a different community (6, 25%).

Mentioned less often were:

- short-term commitments or placements that had ended (4, 17%);
- lack of interest or commitment (4, 17%);
- peer pressure (3, 12%);
- not having been given enough responsibility or respect (2, 1%);
- transportation issues (1, 0.5%);
- the generation gap (1, 0.5%); and,
- a feeling of discomfort (1, 0.5%).

Taken individually, each of these less frequently mentioned reasons may seem insignificant, but taken cumulatively, they account for a significant loss of volunteers (perhaps as many as 16) in a relatively small number of organizations (24).

Current and former volunteers also said why, in some cases, they had stopped volunteering. The reasons cited by these 36 respondents (with number of respondents who mentioned each reason) were:

- time constraints or other responsibilities (21, 58%);
- relocation to a different community (8, 22%);
- loss of interest (6, 17%);

- short-term positions or placements that had ended (4, 11%);
- lack of respect, responsibility, or appreciation (3);
- a feeling of discomfort (1, 0.3%);
- they were no longer needed (1, 0.3%); and,
- stress in the position (1, 0.3%).

There is likely some overlap of issues. For example, some organization representatives said they couldn't trust young people to show up or follow through. If young people feel a lack of trust or respect from older volunteers, or if they are only given boring 'grunt' work, they may lose interest, feel uncomfortable, and/or perceive a generation gap.

These findings show that people may fall through the cracks and quit volunteering for reasons that could be avoided by respecting and taking into consideration the specific needs of individual volunteers. It is important not to dismiss at first glance seemingly minor issues concerning volunteers' needs.

Competition and potential for cooperation among organizations

Key informants were asked if they thought there was competition for volunteers among organizations in the community. Of 40 organizations responding to this question, 31 (78%) definitely thought there was competition. They were also asked if there might be more room for cooperation and coordination among organizations; 34 (85%) responded positively to this idea.

At two community meetings, there was discussion about how organizations could collaborate on recruitment efforts. Ideas included a volunteer forum or fair, a booth at a career fair, a newsletter, or through the town hall. There was a discussion

at one meeting about the upcoming mandatory community service component of the high school Career Development curriculum and agreement that a constructive process is needed to inform and involve organizations. The point was made that it made no sense for all of the individual organizations to try to go into the school but that a collaborative effort promoting various opportunities could be effective.

Unmet community needs

Everyone was asked what the community needed that young people and organizations might be able to organize or help with, and how the community could be improved from the point of view of young people. These questions tended to elicit the same answers from both organization representatives and young people. Both thought that what was most needed were more activities, programs, facilities, events, and organizations for youth and children, particularly a youth centre or network. Also high on the list were more awareness of volunteer opportunities, organizations, and community issues, and more appreciation, respect, responsibility, and training for young people. There were numerous suggestions for programs and organizations that people wanted to see in their communities and/or wanted more young people involved. A few key informants and young volunteers had collaboration ideas, e.g., a central base for organizations that do not have their own office, a volunteer coordinator, discussion forums, and partnering.

8. Conclusion

Corroboration of previous research

The results of this research carried out in several rural Newfoundland communities corroborate earlier research by Hall et al. (2001), Community Services Council (2003), and McClintock (2004). In summary:

1. There is a lack of awareness about volunteer opportunities and the work of voluntary organizations, even in small communities.
2. Word of mouth through various channels is the most effective means of volunteer recruitment.
3. Many people are not being asked to volunteer.
4. Young people support causes they believe in.
5. Young people want to explore their interests and strengths.
6. Young people want the satisfaction of seeing the results of their actions.
7. Young people want to build résumés, learn skills, and increase their employment opportunities.
8. Friends and family can influence young people to volunteer or not volunteer.

The evidence cited throughout this report, along with much anecdotal information, indicates that most of these issues are not unique to young volunteers. However, young people appear to give more weight than older people to personal and career development through volunteering, and young people need encouragement, trust, and appropriate training and supervision if they are to assume positions of responsibility that will build their leadership skills.

Transferability of learning

The researchers postulate that young people and nonprofit organizations in other areas of the country experience most of the same issues and that similar research carried out in other regions would give rise to similar results. We suggest, therefore, that other regions looking at young people and volunteerism consider an approach that uses existing research as a tool to confirm, disprove, or add to these findings. Research results could be used as the focal point of group discussions with representatives of nonprofit organizations and young people to identify volunteer activities and organizational practices that would attract youth volunteers.

Getting people out to meetings and discussion groups

Incentives can encourage young people and organization representatives to participate in meetings and discussion groups. The honorarium for young volunteers helped bring them out to the initial discussion groups. Food and refreshments helped create a relaxed atmosphere. These little gestures show appreciation for people's efforts. As well, the best attendance at community meetings and training workshops was achieved when our project staff made personal contact with community organizations and programs for young people. This generated interest, and the program coordinators made a commitment to attend with their members.

Project staff on the ground

Having project staff in the communities was an essential component of conducting successful multi-faceted community-based research. Making telephone calls, identifying young people, conducting one-on-one interviews, setting up meeting spaces, posting notices – all of these elements of the project went more smoothly and, in some cases, could be carried out simultaneously in several communities because there were project staff on the ground in each location.

Moving from research to action

A question we often ask ourselves is how to move from research to action: how can organizations and young people use research findings to help overcome some of the obstacles to successful recruitment and retention? The final section of this report outlines several recommendations that could be followed by organizations either alone or in collaborative recruitment, training, and management efforts. We hope the research can also be used as a basis for developing funding requests to assist with these efforts.

9. Recommendations

The recommendations for organizations that want to recruit more young volunteers are straightforward but not necessarily easy to implement. Changes in strategy and new ways of doing things require dedicated human resources and some financial investment. Orientation and training of new volunteers is time-consuming in the short-term. Staff and volunteers in community organizations are often overtaxed, and it can seem simpler to keep doing things in the same old way. At one meeting, an organization representative said that he would rather ask an experienced volunteer, hire someone, or do it himself than recruit new volunteers. Another organization representative was very interested in the suggestion that she might ask an experienced volunteer to train new volunteers.

Organizations have to be open to new strategies if they are to implement change. Staff and senior volunteers themselves may need training to develop and carry out new methods. Working together or individually, nonprofit organizations can examine their approaches to recruitment, development, and retention of volunteers and make efforts to do things differently. Taking time in the short-term to build a positive volunteer experience will result in long-term payoffs for everyone involved.

Based on our findings, we offer the following tips on recruiting and managing young volunteers.

Recruitment: How can we recruit young volunteers?

1. Recognize that word of mouth through a variety of avenues works best (e.g., members of organizations actively approaching youth personally, members holding information sessions in schools and youth clubs, and so on).
2. Ask non-volunteers to get involved.
3. Provide clear volunteer job descriptions.
4. Provide a range of types of volunteer positions, including short-term opportunities.
5. Work cooperatively with other community groups.
6. Promote opportunities through a variety of avenues (e.g., newsletters, bulletin posting in schools).
7. Promote the benefits of volunteering.
8. Think inclusively, recognize barriers, and devise and promote solutions.
9. Recognize both the positive and negative influences of friends and family.

Retention: How can we keep our young volunteers?

1. Provide orientation to volunteer positions.
2. Offer training and other incentives.
3. Provide adequate supervision.
4. Respect young volunteers.
5. Appreciate and use the skills, talents, ideas, energy, and enthusiasm of young people.
6. Give young people appropriate responsibility.
7. Acknowledge the accomplishments of young people.
8. Provide learning and leadership opportunities.
9. Make volunteering fun.
10. Consider training for staff and volunteers to develop volunteer management skills.

Shared regional resources

Many organizations in the nonprofit sector share similar problems. There may be advantages, therefore, in seeking joint approaches. The report by Hall et al. on the NSNVO (2005) showed that Canada's big organizations are getting bigger and the small are getting smaller in several respects, including revenues, number of volunteers, and number of paid staff. Individual organizations in small communities often find it difficult to have their own volunteer coordinator or to manage training for their organization alone. A central shared resource might enable a new approach to collaboration on some of the issues groups have in common. A regional facilitator or trainer, for example, could bring together people from many organizations, open their minds to new ways of doing things, and assist with action planning, thus helping take some of the pressure off staff and existing volunteers.

In the broader scheme of things, organizations could work together to persuade funding agencies, such as government departments, foundations, and private business, to support the concept of regional volunteer management resources as a way to help address some of the issues facing voluntary, community-based organizations in rural areas. These organizations are the backbone of the community. Regional resources would benefit organizations, their service users or clientele, staff, volunteers, the community, and the region as a whole.

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Notes

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