

**The Impact of Participation
in the Community Service Component
of the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP)
on Students' Continuing Involvement
in the Voluntary, Community-Based Sector**

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WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US ABOUT SWASP

"I saw a group of people working on a common goal. This type of work is very productive and it left me with a desire to do more."

"It made me think about how many people are involved and the effort it takes to run an organization."

"It made me realize how many people rely on various organizations for help."

"Volunteer work is good for the community and there is not a whole lot of work in that community and volunteering gets the young people on the go."

"It made me realize how under-appreciated and under-funded many groups are."

"It was my first introduction to boards."

"I learned to respect disabled people and their abilities."

"I did volunteer before SWASP but being there everyday enables you to see how the organization works, giving a clearer picture."

"Volunteering is an important part of growing up and learning before you enter the work force. Helping others is beneficial."

"The community became aware of its history and the opportunity to further develop it."

"It showed me the grassroots level of the community where we should start helping."

"SWASP may have strengthened my desire to continue. I felt like I was recognized for my volunteerism because they paid my tuition."

"I got to know members of my community."

"I now know how hard it is to get volunteers and the importance of volunteering. Our community festival wouldn't exist without volunteers and it is a huge economic boost to our community."

"I got over my shyness and continue to help people."

"It opened up a new area of work possibilities for me."

"I got the chance to see what kinds of jobs are out in the community."

"Volunteering with an organization could lead to a job if a position became available."

"It brought me to my career today. It developed my interest in this area."

"It helped me get started. I now act and produce theatre."

"I originally wanted to be a journalist but my SWASP placement was with a library. I realized how much I hated books and words so I changed my career path."

"It's the main reason I went into therapeutic recreation."

"I learned a lot. I did website development and now I'm studying programming."

"Because of my SWASP work I'm now doing my masters in counselling."

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Abstract

This study explores the perceived influence of 8-week summer community service placements on participants' continuing involvement in the voluntary sector. A random sample of students who took part in the Community Service Component of the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) between 1997 and 2000 in Newfoundland and Labrador were interviewed to examine their perceptions about the effects of the program on their attitudes towards community service and civic responsibility. The vast majority said SWASP had helped them develop an interest in community activities and that they intended to volunteer or participate in community groups in the future. The results support the thesis that early positive experiences help develop and reinforce the very attributes required for sustained involvement and foster the growth of new leaders. The researchers conclude that it is possible to cultivate among young people a climate of volunteerism, civic engagement and awareness of the non-profit sector as a potential employer. SWASP is put forward as a model to meet multiple objectives. As well, implications for the design of service learning programs are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Among the pressing challenges for the voluntary, community-based (non-profit) sector are human resource issues. Whether articulated as the need for more volunteers and a new leadership base or under-recognition as a potential employer, there is increasing awareness that the sector's ability to address human resource issues requires an understanding of what influences engagement, especially at an early age. There is a growing body of research exploring a variety of contributing factors. Our study draws on information from a unique student placement program that combines several noteworthy elements and public policy priorities. The program, a three-way partnership amongst the federal and provincial governments and a community organization², focuses directly on human resource development for the benefit of hundreds of

¹ With thanks to the Values Added Community University Research Alliance (CURA) team, especially Dr. Larry Felt, Dr. Abe Ross, Dr. Sandra MacDonald and Kenny Curlew.

² SWASP is funded by Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSD) Canada and the provincial Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE), and delivered by the Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC).

students, organizations and communities. The Community Service Component of the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) presents a novel way to meet governments' desire to support the non-profit sector while encouraging interest in, and access to, post-secondary education. It provides strong evidence that voluntary community service placements afford a multitude of personal and career-related development opportunities for students while providing organizations, especially in rural areas, with much needed human resources at no cost to the organization and low cost for governments. The results of our study indicate a strong correlation between youth involvement with voluntary organizations and continuing engagement, and in particular, a tendency for early involvement to foster a willingness to assume leadership. The program is a hybrid between volunteer work and paid employment that offers remuneration in the form of a tuition credit voucher.

In 1995, Robert Putnam wrote about the declining vibrancy of American civil society, as evidenced by reduced participation in community-based groups. According to Putnam and other writers, successful outcomes on social issues, which are more likely in civically engaged communities, rest “on the concept of social capital... features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”.ⁱ Putnam claims that it is this community-based “associational membership” that makes democracy work. The 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating in Canada (NSGVP) showed that people who volunteer are more likely to participate in society in many other ways such as voting, attending events, keeping up on news and public affairs, and contributing financially to charitiesⁱⁱ, corroborating Putnam's claim.

As well, the Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador (SSP), a deliberate policy experiment and framework for social development, recognizes the necessity of citizen participation in the development of healthy communities and acknowledges the voluntary, community-based sector's role in community capacity building and as a channel for citizen engagement. “Effective solutions arise from a shared sense of responsibility and a capacity to act which only comes from involving people”.ⁱⁱⁱ There is also an explicit recognition that leadership skills must be strengthened in localities where the voluntary sector is underdeveloped.

Studies such as the NSGVP, the Federal Work-Study Program evaluation^{iv}, the Independent Sector^v and Melchior^{vi} indicate that the probability of volunteering is higher among individuals who did some form of volunteer work as youth. Youniss, McLellan and Yates^{vii} suggest that a civic identity can be engendered by introducing youth to organizational practices (roles and processes) required for adult civic engagement. Participation in student councils or community service projects, they say, give opportunities to practice democratic governance and teach youth that individual and collective actions make a difference. They hypothesize that civic identity is the link across time and the factor that differentiates adults in degree of civic engagement. Studies, such as Meinhard and Foster,^{viii} Raskoff and Sundeen,^{ix} Astin, Sax and Avalos,^x and Metz and Youniss,^{xi} although varied in design, sampling and type of program examined, also suggest links between positive early community service experiences and continuing involvement in the voluntary, community-based sector or intention to participate in the future.

The Current Study

Our research examines a distinctive type of community service exposure, thus contributing to the debate around the long-term impact of youth volunteerism and community service activity, and helping to clarify whether it is the *positive* nature of the affiliation with the sector, not the type of affiliation (i.e., mandatory, voluntary, paid, volunteer) that is influential. We explore perceived impact of participation in SWASP, which provides 8-week summer placements in the non-profit sector throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. SWASP is an alternative to paid work. Participants must be planning to enter or return to post-secondary studies in the coming academic year. The vast majority are between 18 and 21 years of age. Participation in SWASP is *voluntary*, but it is not *volunteerism*. There is a competition for placements through a public application process, and approved participants receive a \$400 stipend and a \$1400 tuition voucher, redeemable at any recognized post-secondary institution.

SWASP monitoring is carried out each summer through onsite and telephone interviews as well as mail-out of questionnaires. The results are overwhelmingly positive. However, this study is the first longer-term follow-up of SWASP participants. Through interviews with former

participants 3 – 6 years after their placements, and key informant interviews with repeat SWASP sponsors, the research investigated the following questions:

- Did participation in SWASP help students gain a better understanding of voluntary, community-based organizations and the role these organizations play in the community?
- Did participation have an impact on participants' attitudes towards community service and civic responsibility?
- Did students volunteer or otherwise participate with community organizations before and / or after their SWASP placements?
- Were their parents and friends involved with community groups?
- Did participation in SWASP influence students' later decision to become involved with community groups?
- Did participation influence students' view of the voluntary, community-based sector as a potential place of employment?
- Did SWASP contribute to students' development of specific skills?
- What did sponsors view as long-term benefits of SWASP to their organization?

Additionally, demographic information was collected on former participants, including gender, age, education, current place of residence, and current occupation.

Our study adds a new dimension to the body of existing research exploring the impact of youth community service, which has focused largely on adolescent participants in high school initiated programs. SWASP is not a service-learning program³. It therefore provides a different kind of vehicle to explore these kinds of questions. We believe there could be implications for the design of student placement programs generally, and for youth volunteer recruitment strategies, as the research shows a perceived influence on participants' understanding, views, attitudes, interests, skills, and continuing involvement. The Community Service Component of SWASP may provide an adaptable youth engagement model.

³ These are programs developed for high school students through the education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

Recent years have brought seemingly increased government commitment to support and expand the voluntary sector, both nationally through the Voluntary Sector Initiative, and in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador through implementation of the Strategic Social Plan. Meanwhile, statistics reveal a decline in the number of people active in formal volunteering⁴, with many organizations struggling to provide services with insufficient and fluctuating resources. In addition, 73% of volunteer hours come from 25% of volunteers, each contributing 188+ hours per year (206 in Newfoundland and Labrador). The NSGVP report cautions that this reliance on the dedicated minority “may be a source of vulnerability for charitable and non-profit organizations and the people they serve. Any decline... could have dramatic repercussions.”^{xii}

A perception that in Newfoundland communities the volunteer pool and leadership base are declining was confirmed by a series of consultations in 2002 conducted by the Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC).^{xiii} In a subsequent survey of 872 non-profit groups around the province, 59% said they needed more volunteers and 38% had problems recruiting board members.^{xiv} Given the diminishing pool of active volunteers, an ageing population, and increasing demands on the non-profit sector, it is vital that voluntary, community-based organizations enlarge their volunteer base. To do this effectively, it is important to understand the factors that influence people’s willingness to become involved in volunteer activities and assume leadership roles, as well as the organizational dynamics of efforts to recruit and retain volunteers.

Cultivating a Climate of Engagement

The 2000 NSGVP found that 42% of volunteers first became involved because they were asked personally.^{xv} CSC research indicates that many people in Newfoundland and Labrador are interested in volunteering but are either not aware of existing opportunities or have simply not

⁴ The 2000 NSGVP indicated that the percentage of Canadians engaged as volunteers with organizations dropped from 31% in 1997 to 27% in 2000 (from 33% to 31% in Newfoundland and Labrador, where the 15-24 age cohort had the highest participation rate at 40%). The total number of hours volunteered dropped by 5% nationally.

been asked.⁵ How to connect organizations with potential volunteers is a question CSC is actively trying to address. We postulate that one of the most effective ways is to cultivate a climate of engagement and participation through strategies and programs that attract young people and provide them with positive early experiences. An American Independent Sector study (1996) found that, when asked, 93% of teens volunteered their time, compared to 24% of those who were not asked.^{xvi} Studies by Metz and Youniss, and Raskoff and Sundeen,^{xvii} produced similar results. A study conducted for the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy in 2003 indicated that young people (age 15-34) are struggling to find suitable activities and organizations to accommodate their interests and life styles.^{xviii} It is important, therefore, to understand the nature of positive youth engagement experiences, as well as processes and practices that voluntary organizations have embraced to attract and support youth involvement. SWASP is a process that facilitates the development of short-term experiences with potential long-term effects.

Public Policy Priorities

The Government of Canada has a formalized accord with the voluntary, community-based sector, and through the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) is supporting broad sector programs and projects. This is in addition to support given directly to individual organizations. The Government of Newfoundland Labrador as well is looking at broad sector issues through consultation with sector representatives, in addition to long-standing relationships with individual groups.

Concurrent with this heightened recognition of the voluntary sector's role in building healthy communities and engaging citizens, governments are also encouraging young people to pursue higher education. Both levels of government fund student employment programs, enabling employers, through wage subsidies, to provide opportunities for students to gain experience, develop skills and contacts, and build a resume. The Community Service Component of SWASP is one such program. Now in its 11th year, SWASP was established to provide meaningful summer opportunities for students in areas where they probably could not find employment.

⁵ In 2002-2003, 1554 community residents were interviewed in Newfoundland and Labrador, and 35% said they were interested in becoming active or more involved in volunteering. The 15-34 year-olds were most likely to express this interest.

Students acquire valuable experience, skills and knowledge, learn about voluntary organizations, build networks in the voluntary sector and make a contribution to their community. SWASP promotes the pursuit of post-secondary studies and helps reduce student debt load through the issuance of tuition vouchers.⁶

In addition, SWASP provides huge benefits to non-profit groups and the communities they serve. Every year, more than 500 organizations in about 200 communities province-wide eagerly take on the coordination and supervision of full-time SWASP placements, although the sponsor itself receives no compensation. Government funding covers the voucher and stipend. Through SWASP, sponsors run summer programs, keep facilities open, get extra work done and give their regular volunteers a much-needed break.^{xix} SWASP was designed to meet multiple objectives and is unique in several ways:

- Joint applications, i.e., a student matched with an organization, are required.
- Only non-profit organizations can apply as sponsors. This includes unincorporated grassroots, community-based groups, as well as larger, incorporated entities.
- Students receive compensation almost entirely in the form of a tuition voucher.
- Payroll deductions do not apply. The student voucher and stipend are simply disbursed by the sponsor to the student at the appropriate times.

Ideally, students and sponsors develop the placement description together. Approvals are made according to a regional allocation model, weighted towards rural areas with due consideration given to career-relatedness and a fair distribution of placements across communities and among organizations.

Benefits of Community Service Placements for Participants

Most studies exploring the impact of community service activities point out benefits for the participants themselves, and examine selected factors that appear to influence volunteerism.

⁶ In 2004, 47% of 335 students submitting written comments said they had actually chosen SWASP over other summer employment options. The tuition voucher and career-related experience were the main reasons cited.

These benefits and influencing factors provide support for the thesis that a climate of civic engagement can be cultivated in the teenage years. Benefits of particular relevance for youth are:

Skills and Personal Development

The previously cited NSGVP, Meinhard and Foster, and 2002 Independent Sector studies reported that as a result of community service activities, participants developed interpersonal, communication, organizational, managerial and leadership skills; self-esteem, patience, respect for others, helpfulness, kindness, and tolerance; and increased knowledge in a variety of issues.

Development of Civic Attitudes

Youth have said community service helped them be aware of community needs and programs, develop and implement service projects, understand about good citizenship, learn how government and voluntary organizations work, believe people can make a difference and should be involved, accept cultural diversity and personal and social responsibility, and be committed to community service now and later in life.^{xx, xxi, xxii} These outcomes build leadership.

Career Development

Career considerations are a strong influence on youth. The 2000 NSGVP reported that 55% of youth volunteers did so to improve their job opportunities, compared to 16% of non-youth volunteers. Close to 80% of youth volunteers looking for work thought that volunteering would help them get a job.^{xxiii} Teens in the 2002 Independent Sector study said that through their volunteer efforts they developed new career goals and learned about career options.

Improved School Performance

The previously cited Independent Sector study, Melchior and the Federal Work-Study evaluation demonstrated positive effects on participants' school performance and educational attitudes during program participation.

Reduced Risk Behaviours

Some studies, such as Melchior, and Zaff and Michelsen^{xxiv}, suggest that positive community service experiences may have an impact on high-risk behaviours and reduce the likelihood of teenage pregnancies, drug use and arrests.

Annual SWASP monitoring results clearly show that students feel they have, as a result of their placements, developed personal and career-related skills as well as civic awareness.

Predictors of Volunteer Behaviour

A number of factors have been correlated with volunteer behaviour or intention to volunteer, in studies such as Gilles and Eyler,^{xxv} Youniess, McLellan and Yates, Verba, Schlozman and Brady,^{xxvi} and Zaff and Michelsen. Comparing these predictors and the reported benefits of

volunteerism, it appears that experience helps to develop and reinforce some valuable attributes necessary for sustained involvement.

Specific Skill Sets and Sense of Efficacy

Strong organizational skills, communication skills, high self-esteem, and interpersonal skills are associated with higher levels of involvement. The 1996 Independent Sector study^{xxvii} and Metz and Youniss also found that people who believe they can make a difference and feel moral obligation and empathy are more likely to volunteer. Community service itself helps develop these characteristics. Volunteer involvements help develop skills and attitudes, which in turn encourage a continuation of volunteering and facilitate the taking on of greater leadership roles.

Parental Behaviour

People who as youth had parents involved in volunteer activities are more likely to volunteer.^{xxviii, xxix}

Friends' Behaviour

Youth are more likely to volunteer if their friends are also active.^{xxx}

Gender

The studies cited earlier of O'Brien, Zaff, Metz and Youniss, Raskoff, and the NSGVP indicate that females are more likely to volunteer.

Religious Affiliation

People who attend weekly religious services or meetings are more likely to volunteer than those who do not.^{xxxi, xxxii, xxxiii}

Socio-Economic Background

Higher levels of income are associated with greater likelihood to volunteer.^{xxxiv, xxxv, xxxvi, xxxvii} However, this may be due to lack of opportunity and resources among people with low incomes. Zaff and Michelsen described the Quantum Opportunity Program, which provided a supervised location for disadvantaged youth to do homework and participate in volunteer and other activities. Six months later, participants gave significantly more time to school or community groups than did a control group. There were also positive impacts on academic performance and attitudes.^{xxxviii}

These findings lend further support to the thesis that social responsibility and civic-mindedness can be nurtured. The SWASP study set out to see what the personal impacts might have been for student participants. Positive results would both strengthen the above hypothesis and verify the SWASP paradigm as one that amalgamates and meets multiple broad objectives.

METHODOLOGY

The Project Team worked under the advice of a committee consisting of representatives from the CSC-led Values Added Community University Research Alliance (CURA), together with the provincial and federal funding agencies. Committee members reviewed the questionnaires and made suggestions. The CURA team also made recommendations regarding sampling and data analysis and submitted an application to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) for approval.

Participant Survey

The primary research tool was a Participant Survey, consisting of 15 questions, including quantitative and qualitative components. This instrument was used to conduct telephone interviews of 315 former student participants, randomly selected from a population of 1745 from the years 1997 to 2000.^{7, 8, 9} The sample was 68% female and 32% male. Their SWASP placements had been 80% rural¹⁰ and 20% urban. Approximately 40% of respondents had placements in 1997, 17% in 1998, 27% in 1999, and 28% in 2000.¹¹ The average age of the respondents was 24; ergo, their average age while participating in SWASP was 18-21. The distribution across age, gender, location and year is fairly consistent with the distribution of the total database of SWASP applications. Contacts were made across Canada and in the United States. Approximately 19% of respondents were residing outside the province of Newfoundland and Labrador at the time of the survey.

Interviewers recorded answers to the questions on paper copies of the questionnaire, then entered these responses into online forms, making the information available to the researchers in Access database format. The Project Researcher also entered quantitative data into SPSS for analysis.

⁷ Information prior to 1997 could not be easily accessed; after 2000 was deemed too recent.

⁸ This sample provides a 95% confidence level and is accurate within 5 percentage points.

⁹ 1144 contacts attempted for 315 interviews (success rate = 27.5%). Unsuccessful efforts: “no answer / not home” (35.4%), “wrong number / out of service” (19.5%), “moved, no forwarding number” (13.6%), and “refusal” (3.6%).

¹⁰ Rural is defined by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador as outside metropolitan St. John’s and Mount Pearl.

¹¹ The total is greater than 100% because some had placements in more than one year.

Sponsor Survey

A second questionnaire was developed for key informant interviews with sponsor organizations. This was not a random sample. A variety of organizations (festival and recreation committees, historic societies, tourism associations, libraries and museums) from communities province-wide) were selected from a list of repeat sponsors generated from the SWASP database. Twenty-nine contacts with sponsors were attempted, resulting in 21 completed surveys.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Participants

Most respondents thought that their SWASP community service placement had helped them develop transferable skills and influenced their interest in community activities, their attitudes towards community service and civic responsibility, and their understanding of voluntary, community-based organizations. Many also felt an effect on their subsequent decision to remain involved with community groups or their intention to continue involvement in the future. Those who thought SWASP had not influenced them often stated that they had already been involved with and knowledgeable about community groups before SWASP.

Tables I (p. 11) and II (p. 15) provide a summary of the quantitative data from the participant interviews, followed by qualitative comments associated with these issues.

Table I. Perceived Influence of SWASP on Participants

Issue	Yes	No	Unsure
SWASP helped gain understanding of VCBOs and their community role	83%	15%	2%
SWASP influenced attitudes re community service / civic responsibility	69%	17%	14%
SWASP influenced view of VCB sector as potential place of employment	51% ¹²	35%	14%
SWASP influenced career or education path in some way	44%	51%	5%

N = 315

Understanding of Voluntary, Community-based Organizations

Many participants indicated that through their SWASP placement they had learned about the benefits of volunteering and gained a greater appreciation for volunteers. Numerous participants commented that they became more involved with and knowledgeable about their community. Some typical comments:

“I went to municipal meetings and became more aware of what happens in the community and how volunteers play a big role.”

“SWASP helped me see exactly how donating your time helps others.”

“I got the feeling that without volunteering nothing can be done in the community.”

“I learned that community service can also help my personal life.”

¹² 42% of respondents who had not volunteered or participated before SWASP noted this influence.

Civic Attitudes

SWASP community service placements appear to assist in the development and reinforcement of positive attitudes towards civic involvement. Respondents indicated they became more aware of the importance and benefits of volunteering and of being involved in and giving back to their community. Representative comments included:

“It opened my eyes: without volunteering there would be hardly any events in the community. This is especially important in rural communities.”

“It helps community spirit, builds a better sense of community.”

“If there were not organizations like these, children would have nowhere to go during summer vacation.”

“I’m a lot more proactive regarding volunteerism. I even mention to others the importance of volunteering.”

“It gave me a better understanding of the needs of the community and I realized that many of the needs are filled by volunteers.”

“It was about helping my community.”

Employment in the Voluntary, Community-based Sector / Career Path

Many respondents said they became aware of employment opportunities through SWASP and that SWASP provided them with the opportunity to network and make contacts, as well as gain relevant experience, knowledge, and / or skills.

Those who thought SWASP had influenced their career or education path said their placement had provided them with direction. Others said they did not see the voluntary sector as a place of employment because they felt their career path didn’t coincide with employment in that sector. (In fact, examples given – computer programmer, teacher, engineer – are not necessarily lacking opportunities in the sector). Some 17% had actually been employed in the sector in some way other than student placements. Typical remarks relating to employment:

“After SWASP I continued volunteering with the organization and I work there now. It led to my career.”

“I saw that there are places for people to work in the voluntary sector, and that the sector creates jobs.”

“You meet a lot of people in the theatre community. It’s networking.”

“I realized that I didn’t want to work in health care regardless of the opportunities.”

“I was undecided, but I realized how much I enjoyed working with kids and now I’m doing education.”

Influence on Volunteering

The participants were asked about their volunteering experiences and other participation with community organizations before their SWASP placement. The respondents reported a higher than average rate of volunteering for their age group, with 63% saying they had been volunteers prior to SWASP participation¹³, and 82% that they had participated as members in youth, school, church or sports groups. They also reported high rates of parental involvement (71%) and friends' involvement (80%) with community groups. This corresponds with data from other studies indicating that prior experience, friends' involvement and parental involvement are correlated with continuing community service. Annual SWASP monitoring shows that most students find out about SWASP from friends, family, previous participants, or the sponsoring organization itself. Many had already volunteered with their potential sponsor.

The former SWASP participants were then asked about their volunteer experiences after SWASP, and whether they intended to volunteer in the future. Of those who had volunteered prior to SWASP, 73% had already been involved with community organizations since SWASP. Taking into consideration other commitments like new careers, continuing post-secondary studies, and / or moving away from home communities, this rate seems high. Moreover, 97% of these respondents thought they would volunteer or participate in the future. No one said they had had a negative SWASP experience or that they had been discouraged from volunteering as a result of their SWASP participation, but there were comments about lack of time.

It is perhaps most interesting that of those who had no history of volunteering before SWASP, 43% had continued to be involved with community groups after SWASP and 89% said they would volunteer or participate in the future. Of these, 67% said SWASP had influenced their decision or intent. The positive community service experience resulting from participation in SWASP appears to be quite effective in drawing people in to the sector who have never volunteered before. Below are representative comments from those who had not volunteered before their SWASP placement:

"It was my first experience with a volunteer organization. It showed me how important volunteering is."

¹³ For the overall population of 15-24 year-olds in Newfoundland and Labrador, the volunteer rate is 40%, according to the 2000 National Study of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. CSC 2003 province-wide research in the sector suggests the rate for that age group may be as high as 45%-50%.

“Until my SWASP placement, I didn’t think about community service. I took for granted how things actually get done, what goes on behind the scenes.”

“It started me teaching and coaching sports.”

“Before SWASP I didn’t think that volunteering could be fun.”

“It gave me the experience to know how to become involved with community groups in the future.”

“I took an interest in volunteering. It brings fulfillment to help the community.”

“I realized how much work there is to be done.”

Leadership Development

Detailed information on respondents’ volunteering and participation (organization, activities and respondent’s role) was collected from all those who had prior and past involvements. A subset of 194 had volunteered or participated both before and since SWASP. Their involvements were examined to explore leadership development. Indications were that 27% had taken on greater leadership roles since SWASP, e.g., had become a Board member of an organization, President of a Board, an instructor, a coordinator, a coach, a supervisor, etc. Another 15% had become more active, i.e., were involved with more groups or activities, and 58% had maintained about the same level of activity. So, not only is there a continuing high level of involvement and intention to participate in the future, there also appears to be a willingness and capability to assume volunteer leadership roles. This is a notable result, considering the perceived leadership gap that has been reported in earlier CSC research.

In addition, when asked if their SWASP placement had helped them to develop leadership skills, an interest in community activities, and other skills associated with continuing involvement in community service, more than 90% of respondents answered ‘Yes’ or ‘Somewhat’ to each of these questions.

Table II. Development of Skills and Community Interest

Issue	Yes	Somewhat	No	Unsure
SWASP helped develop interpersonal skills	88%	8%	3%	1%
SWASP helped develop leadership skills	78%	13%	8%	1%
SWASP helped develop self confidence	83%	11%	5%	1%
SWASP helped develop employment skills	78%	13%	8%	1%
SWASP helped develop interest in community activities	76%	15%	7%	2%

N = 315

Demographic Differences

Our research looked at various demographic factors for any interesting differences. The only noteworthy observation is one related to gender and three points stand out. Females were more likely to view the voluntary sector as a potential place of employment (58% compared to 40% of male respondents), more likely to say that SWASP influenced their career or education path (50% compared to 33%), and more likely to feel that SWASP had influenced their attitudes towards the concept of community service and civic responsibility (75% compared with 57%).

Sponsor Interviews

The 21 organizations had sponsored SWASP placements several times. Of those, 20 thought that participation in SWASP had a positive impact on students' understanding of community groups and how they operate, likewise on their attitude towards community service. Fourteen said that some of their SWASP students had volunteered with their organization since SWASP, whereas only 7 stated that they had volunteered prior to SWASP. Half the sponsors knew of students who had gone on to take a leadership role in their community or with an organization. As for spin-off benefits, 19 sponsors said they were more aware of the importance of developing job descriptions and 10 indicated that SWASP students have helped the organization develop other skills (e.g., computer or marketing skills). Students also bring enthusiasm, and many summer programs would not be able to continue or operate at capacity without SWASP.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that placements under the Community Service Component of SWASP have a number of perceived impacts on student participants:

- There was a positive influence reported on the civic attitudes of many students as well as contribution to their knowledge of and interest in the voluntary sector. Respondents who had volunteered or participated before SWASP more often perceived an influence on attitudes and decisions than those who had not.
- Many of those without prior experience volunteering also perceived that SWASP had had an influence on their attitudes and decisions, and nearly half had gone on to volunteer for community groups.
- There was evidence of participants assuming greater leadership roles as well as a definite perceived enhancement of skill sets related to continuing involvement in the sector and important for future employment. Respondents felt they had developed leadership skills, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, general employment skills, and an interest in community activities.
- There was an impact reported on the career / education path of many students, including many of those who had not done any volunteering prior to SWASP.
- Many participants reported an influence on their view of the voluntary, community-based sector as a potential place of employment, including many who had no prior involvements.

The supporting comments at the front of this paper further illustrate the kinds of influences the program has had on many hundreds of young people over the past eleven years. It is these personal comments that really demonstrate the impact of the experience.

All of these effects have implications for human resource development in the voluntary, community-based sector. Clearly, a well-designed student placement program has the potential

to attract individuals to the sector as volunteers, employees and leaders. Leadership growth, development of the volunteer base and increased awareness of non-profit organizations as potential employers are essential elements of building the sector.

Knowledge Mobilization and Best Practices

These issues are all the more topical since many governments have recently initiated or are considering a required community service component in the high school curriculum. Although SWASP is not a service-learning program¹⁴, our research suggests that SWASP might provide important guidance in program planning. SWASP is designed to facilitate all of the requirements for a successful service-learning program – structure, supervision, student input and reflection, relevance, skills development and tangible results.^{xxxix} The emphasis on career-relatedness and transferable skills development forces sponsors to consider these aspects and helps facilitate a practical learning experience.

It appears that the Community Service Component of SWASP meets many more objectives than its original purpose (i.e., career-related experience and an opportunity for students to obtain a substitute for paid work, especially in rural communities). SWASP promotes post-secondary education, supports the voluntary, community-based sector, builds valuable career-related skills and knowledge, encourages continuing involvement in the non-profit sector, and helps to develop new leaders. Through this program, hundreds of non-profits throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are working with students to create interesting and beneficial experiences. The well-documented benefits of such community service activities can be incorporated into youth volunteer recruitment campaigns. Young people have ideas, talents, skills and enthusiasm, and when programs are designed to use and develop these, the results are positive and have cascading effects – benefiting participants and service users, assisting organizations in fulfilling their mandates and helping develop awareness and involvement among citizens and thereby contributing to a less fragmented and more democratic society.

¹⁴ These are programs developed for high school students through the education system.

Through 11 years of successful program delivery, the Community Service Component of SWASP has developed its application, monitoring and reporting procedures to a smooth and efficient working level. Some facets of this process may be adapted for broader use, particularly for the development of service learning placements as part of the high school curriculum in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The following suggestions are based on the research combined with annual SWASP monitoring. CSC resources could be contracted to supply some of the services.

Program Development and Oversight

The Community Service Component of SWASP brings together federal and provincial government officials with the community sector to serve as a Working Group in the development, promotion and oversight of the program, in coordination with the Paid Employment Component of SWASP and the Summer Career Placements program. This collaboration works to the benefit of all.

Program Promotion

SWASP is promoted in a variety of ways, including newspaper and radio ads and the weekly enVision e-newsletter to the 2000+ members of www.enVision.ca, CSC's Virtual Resource Centre for the voluntary sector. The e-newsletter and enVision's home page both have a direct link to the SWASP online program guidelines and application form. SWASP is also promoted, along with the other two student summer employment programs mentioned above, through the mail-out of information and application packages to potential sponsors province-wide. The Community Services Council has, over the years, built a database of nearly 5000 non-profit groups in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is used for various purposes, including this mail out. Additions and updates to the database are ongoing. The database can be broken down by community, economic zone or SSP region, and would make a fantastic resource for the Department of Education to promote, community by community, the service-learning component of its Career Development course (2211).

Placement Development

Any information package sent to potential sponsors should be concise and easy to understand. An expression of interest (EOI) from organizations wishing to be considered for a placement could be requested. This should be simple to complete, and include basic placement descriptions, with the understanding that details of student responsibilities would be worked out with the successful student. Preferably, the organization would submit the placement description and their contact information electronically. Those without access to the Internet could submit by phone, fax or regular mail. Perhaps a special sub-site of *Volunteer Connections* at www.volunteer.enVision.ca could be developed for this purpose. With teacher guidance, students could explore the placement opportunities and submit a letter and / or resume to an organization of their choice. They would go through an informal interview process with the organization, and once the opportunity was filled, this would be noted online.

Program Monitoring

Onsite and telephone interviews, as well as written questionnaires, give SWASP students and sponsors an opportunity to provide feedback on both the placement and the program. Contracting monitors in different areas of the province enables face-to-face interaction with the majority of sponsors and students and focuses each monitor's attention on areas closest to their community of residence. Sponsors and students have expressed pleasure with this contact.

Tracking and Reporting

CSC has developed a comprehensive user-friendly software tool to record all information related to SWASP applications and approved placements, including feedback from students and sponsors obtained through the monitoring process. The Windows-based, Microsoft Access format enables both quantitative and qualitative data to be efficiently analysed, thus facilitating program evaluation and report writing. This template, though probably more complex than required for service learning placements, could be adapted. In addition, an online 'school community' could be set up through which students and sponsors could share their experiences.

To aid in all these processes, CSC has developed guidelines, forms, questionnaires, and information sheets, all of which may be adapted to assist in efforts to construct a workable service learning component in the high school curriculum. Foresight, partnership, and planning can facilitate the evolution of many types of positive community service experiences. The long-term result will be more informed, more active, more engaged and healthier citizens and communities.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, V. 6 (1), 1995, p. 2.
- ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, (Catalogue no. 71-542-XIE), pp. 47, 49.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*, (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998), p.17.
- ^{iv} U.S. Department of Education, *The National Study of the Operation of the Federal Work-Study Program: Summary Findings From the Student and Institutional Surveys*, (Washington, 2000).
- ^v Independent Sector, *Engaging Youth In Lifelong Service: Findings and Recommendations for Encouraging a Tradition of Voluntary Action Among America's Youth*, (2002).
- ^{vi} Alan Melchior, *National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America School and Community-Based Programs: Final Report, Executive Summary*, (Prepared for the Corporation for National Service, July 1998).
- ^{vii} James Youniss, Jeffrey A. McLellan and Miranda Yates, "What We Know About Engendering Civic Identity," *American Behavioral Scientist* V. 40 (5), March/April 1997.
- ^{viii} Agnes Meinhard and Mary Foster, "The Impact of Volunteer Community Service Programs on Students in Toronto's Secondary Schools," (Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies, Working Paper Series, No. 12, November 1999).
- ^{ix} Sally A. Raskoff and Richard A. Sudeen, "Community Service Programs in High Schools," *Law and Contemporary Problems* V. 62 (4), 2000.
- ^x Alexander W. Astin J. Sax, and Juan Avalos, "Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years," *The Review of Higher Education*, V. 22 (2), Winter 1999.
- ^{xi} Edward Metz and James Youniss, "A Demonstration That School-Based Required Service Does Not Deter—But Heightens—Volunteerism," *American Political Science Association* V. 36 (2), April 2003.
- ^{xii} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 9.
- ^{xiii} Community Services Council, *The Leadership Gap: Perception or Reality*, Volume II, (CSC 2003). The CSC is a social development, policy, research, planning and service organization, dedicated to citizen engagement and the promotion of volunteerism.
- ^{xiv} Community Services Council, *Volunteering in Newfoundland and Labrador*, (Fact Sheet Summary from provincial research project in the VCB sector, CSC 2003), <http://www.envision.ca/pdf/FactSheetJan2004.pdf>.
- ^{xv} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 38.
- ^{xvi} Independent Sector, *America's Teenage Volunteers: Civic Participation Begins Early in Life*, (1996).
- ^{xvii} Sally A. Raskoff and Richard A. Sudeen, "Community Service Programs in High Schools," *Law and Contemporary Problems* V. 62 (4), 2000, p. 94.
- ^{xviii} Robert Barnard, Denise Andrea Campbell and Shelley Smith, *Citizen Re-Generation: Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations*, (Toronto: D-Code, 2003), p. 31.
- ^{xix} Community Services Council, *Community Service Component, Student Work and Service Program (SWASP)*, (Fact Sheet Summary, CSC 2003), <http://www.envision.ca/pdf/SwaspFactsheet2004.pdf>.
- ^{xx} Independent Sector, *Engaging Youth In Lifelong Service: Findings and Recommendations for Encouraging a Tradition of Voluntary Action Among America's Youth*, (2002).
- ^{xxi} Dwight E. Giles Jr. and Janet Eyler, "The impact of a college community service laboratory on students' personal, social, and cognitive outcomes," *Journal of Adolescence* V. 17, 1994.
- ^{xxii} Melchior.
- ^{xxiii} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 35.
- ^{xxiv} Jonathan F. Zaff and Erik Michelsen, "Background for Community-Level Work on Positive Citizenship in Adolescence: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors," (Prepared for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, December 2001).
- ^{xxv} Giles and Eyler.
- ^{xxvi} Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
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- ^{xxviii} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 39.
- ^{xxix} Metz and Youniss.
- ^{xxx} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 43.
- ^{xxxi} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 31.

^{xxxii} Independent Sector, 1996.

^{xxxiii} Metz and Youniss.

^{xxxiv} Eileen M. O'Brien, "Outside the Classroom: Students as Employees, Volunteers, and Interns," *Research Briefs* V. 4 (1), 1993, p. 8.

^{xxxv} Zaff and Michelsen, p. 13.

^{xxxvi} *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 34.

^{xxxvii} Will Paxton and Victoria Nash, eds., *Any Volunteers for the good society?* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2002), p. iv.

^{xxxviii} Zaff and Michelsen, p. 14.

^{xxxix} Zaff and Michelsen, p. 11.

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