



Canadian Heritage
Patrimoine canadien

WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

Volunteer Centre
Ottawa-Carleton

A report to the
Voluntary Action Directorate
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa
1992

© Volunteer Centre Ottawa-Carleton
256 King Edward Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 7M1

New edition published by
Voluntary Action Directorate
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1K5

Researcher: Indra S. Ancans
Editor: Sue Pike
Cover design: Douglas M^cKercher

Cover illustration: Volunteer recruiting poster depicting Lord Kitchener, painted by Alfred Leete, 1914. (*Imperial War Museum*)

This was one of the most effective and widely imitated volunteer recruitment posters ever.

ISBN 0-662-20105-1

Cette publication est également disponible en français sous le titre de Pourquoi les gens font du bénévolat.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	2
Research Goals and Methods	4
Why People Volunteer	6
Incentives for Volunteering	6
Turnoffs	10
Getting Started in Volunteer Work	13
Finding the Right Niche	15
The Volunteer Image	16
Board and Committee Issues	18
Conclusions	19
Participants in the Study	20

Introduction

Why *People Volunteer* is an anecdotal study that takes a new look at volunteer motivation, satisfactions and dissatisfactions. It seeks to link findings from recent North American surveys about volunteerism with actual volunteer work experiences. It was an experiment of sorts, meant to increase our understanding of what motivates people to volunteer and what keeps them coming back. We hope that it will promote discussion, offer some new approaches to recruitment and management and perhaps point the way to further research.

The study was funded by the Voluntary Action Directorate of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. It involved group interviews with 45 volunteers from a cross-section of organizations in the Ottawa-Carleton region.

Special thanks to Marion Porter for her help and support.

Background

Over the last few years many social and health service agencies have found it increasingly difficult to find enough volunteers to carry out their many programs, especially during daytime hours. Economic pressures and changes in lifestyle and family composition have meant there are fewer volunteers available from traditional sources. At the same time, as governments reduce funding to social, health, recreation and other services, more and more organizations must rely on more and more volunteer assistance.

Competition for volunteers

In recent years, increased efforts and more sophisticated methods of recruitment have resulted in more people applying to centralized recruiting services such as Volunteer Centre Ottawa-Carleton. But even successful recruitment efforts are unable to satisfy the increased need for volunteers that organizations are experiencing today. Increased need has meant increased competition among organizations for those people willing to volunteer.

Managing a scarce resource

It has become more important than ever to improve the way we manage this scarce and valuable resource. Organizations depending on volunteers must make sure that those people already working with them want to stay. They must also find ways of making assignments interesting enough to attract and involve others.

A satisfied volunteer is the best recruiter

Ensuring that volunteer assignments are satisfying and fulfilling has a payback beyond volunteers remaining with the organization. According to several surveys, the best agents for recruitment are volunteers who share their positive experiences with others.

Recent surveys have shown that most individuals who volunteer learn about the opportunity from personal contact. About 40% become involved because someone asks them and over 25% learn about the work from a relative or friend involved in the activity. Less than 20% seek out the activity on their own.

Every satisfied volunteer can thus be seen as a potential recruiter.

The question is — how do we get the full benefit of this resource? How do we turn satisfied volunteers into recruiters?

Most volunteers are satisfied

We know from the 1987 survey of volunteers carried out by Statistics Canada and the Department of the Secretary of State that, overall, Canadian volunteers are satisfied with their involvement. Other research over

the years has identified a long list of motivating factors for volunteers, ranging from a wish to do something useful to the acquisition of skills and the achievement of personal goals.

Finding what attracts volunteers and keeps them involved

Most previous research on volunteer management issues deals with motivation and satisfaction in survey form. This means that results are confined to specific, predetermined questions and limited by questionnaire design.

This research method gives good statistical data but doesn't provide that vital link to reality. What actually happens to volunteers as they go through the process of recruitment, orientation and working on an assignment? What feelings and reactions emerge? What must happen on the assignment to make the volunteer enjoy the experience, want to repeat it and share it with others, thereby attracting more volunteers?

Research Goals and Methods

- T**he goals of this study were:
- To record the feelings and personal experiences of volunteers in order to increase our understanding of what is important to them about their volunteer work;
 - To discover the initial attractions of volunteer work;
 - To identify factors which tend to keep volunteers involved (*satisfiers*) and those which tend to alienate them (*turnoffs*).

Our study took an anecdotal approach, asking volunteers to describe their experiences and their feelings about volunteering in a series of six group interviews.

We have included some direct quotes from participants' recorded statements.

The volunteers taking part in this study represented a broad range of voluntary organizations, ages, functions, and skill or training levels.

The six groups were:

- drivers and escorts;
- phone volunteers;
- people working one-to-one with others;
- people teaching life skills and literacy;
- fund-raisers and canvassers; and
- board and committee members.

The organizations were in the general category of health and social service agencies, all of whom need to recruit large numbers of volunteers. They typically experience shortfalls in recruitment and use many daytime volunteers. Most of the 45 study participants donate about 20 hours a month to various causes.

Why People Volunteer

The formula for successful volunteering that emerges from this study appears to go something like this: Provide opportunities for personal achievement, allow volunteers to make new discoveries about themselves and others, and enable them to feel they are forming social bonds and strengthening their community. Mix with appropriate training, feedback and recognition and you have volunteers who feel energized by the assignment, see it as fun to do and complete it feeling better than when they started.

INCENTIVES FOR VOLUNTEERING

The participants identified a number of incentives that had either influenced their decisions to become involved in volunteer work, or that they thought might encourage others to join:

- Achievement
- Recognition and feedback
- Personal growth
- Giving something back
- Bringing about social change
- Family ties
- Friendship, support, bonding and a feeling of belonging

1 The importance of achievement

A strong and common thread throughout the six discussion groups was the need to achieve and the recognition that many kinds of achievement could result in satisfaction. Accomplishing an intended result, discovering new capabilities in oneself and making something bad turn into something good, were only some of the compensations identified by the group.

Although it was not recognized as a motivation for getting involved in the first place, the opportunity to accomplish something — to see direct results from one's personal effort — was what kept them coming back to volunteer tasks that were sometimes stressful, depressing, or otherwise difficult.

Achievements do not have to be enormous to be satisfying. Frequently, a sense of achievement can be felt simply by evoking a positive reaction from someone a volunteer is trying to help. One volunteer driver for the Cancer Society, for instance, reminisced about the joy it gave him to see a patient through a bad episode and leave him feeling more relaxed after the visit:

I feel as if I've done something that warrants being alive...

A volunteer at a seniors' residence commented:

...They can go a whole week and never hear anyone call them by name... you see their eyes light up to hear their first name, particularly.

In other cases, achievement was felt when the volunteer dealt successfully with awkward or unusual situations while on assignment:

At the drop-in centre, when you go as a new volunteer... the wall is up and you have to show them that you understand their frustration about their poverty and their addiction. It takes about six months before the ice begins to melt...

Informal recruiting also leads to satisfaction when it works. One Cancer Society volunteer who knits, passes out patterns to friends, relatives and people she meets at the clinic. She has persuaded nurses to knit hats for chemotherapy and radiation patients and tends to intrigue people in waiting rooms:

I was knitting a pair of socks, but they don't look like socks. They're expandable, so that when someone's ankles swell they'll still go on. One woman was looking at me and asked what I was knitting. 'Oh', she says, 'I could do that while I'm waiting for my husband'... and so I gave her a pattern. She brought in 27 pairs!

Another volunteer recruited a helper to paint a group home:

I approached this lad from work about painting. I like him, but he's very self-serving... 'What's in it for me?' is his motto. I said, 'One day! Is it going to kill you?' So he showed up, did a super job and he says, 'When are we doing the other house?' And he admitted he'd never felt better doing anything in his life.

The other side of the coin

The need to achieve has its down side too. When reaching goals is impossible because of circumstances or when the organization for which the volunteer works is seen to put obstacles in the path of achievement through poor planning or improper use of a volunteer's time, the volunteer becomes dissatisfied. Some in our survey group considered quitting, others talked about scaling down involvement with an assignment that shows no progress in favour of one that has more potential for success.

It is important for organizations to provide volunteers with the opportunity to achieve something — however minor — by matching the volunteer with the job that is likely to provide the kind of results the volunteer is looking for.

2 Recognition and feedback

As noted earlier, achievement can be its own reward and study participants did not always need feedback to validate their satisfaction with what they had done. In some cases, though, feedback and recognition were seen as necessary. And volunteers were clear about when and whether it was appropriate.

The more of me I put into it, the more I need feedback, support and recognition. My organization this year put a little thank-you note in their canvassers' package. My reaction was that they could have saved their money. What really mattered was my captain saying, 'What you did was really good,' or enquiring how it went... if I never hear from the organization, it doesn't mean a thing one way or the other.

For the most part, volunteers valued a personal word of thanks or commiseration more than general volunteer recognition events:

The teas are fun, but having her tell me what an important job I'm doing is better.

But in some cases, recognition of a volunteer's efforts is not valued if organizational support is missing. One man who volunteered as a coach got lots of recognition from parents but felt abandoned by the organization.

I felt that I was alone, trying to handle all the things that are well beyond a coach or manager's scope. It finally got so frustrating that it just wasn't worth it. I'm not doing that again this year.

Both personal investment and organizational size seem to have a bearing on feedback expectations:
The smaller the organization, the more personally I hold them accountable...

Too many thank-yous, however, can be embarrassing:
I sometimes think that the man in charge goes out of his way to thank me more than I really deserve.

Whenever possible, feedback needs to be specific and to spell out exactly what the volunteer has achieved:
Although I hardly ever see this person, I have an intimate relationship with her, because she's looking at all my calls and making wise judgments about them, and handing that wisdom back to me...

And feedback from the recipients of a service is sometimes seen as more meaningful than organizational recognition.

There's a young Vietnamese fellow that I've done a fair amount of work with. He's just been accepted into a course, and he came up to me and thanked me very much for the help I'd given him. Makes you feel very good.

3 Personal Growth

Among the major rewards and incentives of volunteering appears to be the opportunity for personal growth. Discovering new skills and capabilities, learning more about yourself and other people or overcoming personal challenges were identified by the people in our groups.

Participants mentioned being pleasantly surprised by discovering they are good at doing unexpected things. There was talk of growing self-esteem and confidence with each new challenge tackled and skill learned. Others found that life developed more intensity, more colour, as they were exposed to new experiences that would not ordinarily have come their way.

I grew up in a very large family and haven't had much formal education. I was always self-conscious about that, but when I retired and got into volunteering, I found that I had lots of potential. I just hadn't been in a place where I could show it before.

Volunteering also provides new situations and new environments that people might not otherwise be exposed to.

I find it overwhelming sometimes. We see people in crisis and they open up. We listen. We don't have to say much, but you learn more about a total stranger in two hours than you do about good friends in ten years, because there's no time for social cover-ups.

The implication for managers of volunteers is that they must know their volunteers and provide the right sort of challenges and experiences. Sometimes these come with the assignments, but in other cases the opportunities have to be created.

4 Giving something back to society

For some participants, a desire to contribute to society underlies their commitment to volunteer work.

If we want a better world to live in, it starts with you and me and our communities.

A related theme is that of making stronger community ties through volunteer involvement:

...One of the unexpected rewards I got from volunteering came because I canvassed a neighbour that I'd known fairly well for about 10 years or so. I hadn't seen him lately and he

wasn't well. We had a wonderful long chat and I wondered why I didn't visit him more often.

About two weeks later he died, and I was so glad that I had more or less been pushed into that experience... This whole business of doing the collection on my street re-establishes for me a sense of community.

Others feel they have been fortunate in life, and want to give something back, to balance the scales, in some way:

I just felt an obligation to do something for someone who wasn't as fortunate as me.

Immigrants to Canada, once they were established with jobs and accommodation, talked of wanting to give something back to the country that had welcomed them and become their own.

5 Bringing about social change

Many volunteers appear to get satisfaction from educating people about the causes and organizations they work for. There is a sense of bringing about social change.

I want people to know that women who are in conflict with the law aren't all bad, aren't all drug addicts. I want people to know that women don't ask to get sexually assaulted. I think of myself not so much as a volunteer, but as an activist.

6 Family ties

The family connection in volunteering is an area that seems worthy of further study. A number of the participants mentioned that volunteerism "runs in the family". Many came from a family background of volunteering. They grew up with the notion that this was a normal part of life, something that one did, just as one went to school and had a job.

I grew up with volunteering, with parents who did volunteer work, and so I did volunteer

work — that was what was expected of you as a human being.

Then there is, of course, the ticklish question of the impact on the family when the volunteer spends a lot of time away from the home.

If you're a volunteer, you need someone at home who's supportive. If your spouse objects when you're not home, you're just not going to do it.

Some of the participants started out in volunteer work because a relative needed help, or might in the future. And some even characterized their involvement as selfish because they were working to overcome a disease or condition suffered by a family member.

7 Friendship, support, bonding and a feeling of belonging

For some volunteers, the human factor is paramount in volunteering. Making and meeting friends, having social links and the feeling of belonging gives them the incentive to continue. Those with high-stress volunteer assignments noted that it was important to have the support of staff and other volunteers:

We are dealing with people who are really having a rough time of it, and occasionally there'll be flareups with unintentional hurts... and there are times when I think that maybe I have caused hurt to somebody and that really upsets me, and I never want to go back. But it helps that we are all so supportive of each other.

Some participants chose their organization based on the kind of people they would be working with:

I liked the people. They all wanted to do a good job. It had an energy about it. You had the

sense that someone was relying on you.

A number of participants appreciated knowing that the organization supported and acknowledged them:
I've only been there for six months now, but already I've got cards and personal letters from them.

There was evidence in all the group meetings in this study that volunteers seem to feel a great sense of camaraderie, of something shared, even when they have never met before. At times, during each group discussion, participants gave in to the temptation to get off topic and spend time doing some informal networking and shoptalk. They exchanged experiences, suggested reading material, proposed solutions to each other's problems and discovered acquaintances in common.

Meetings got mixed reviews

Volunteers appear to be caught in a bind. They like the opportunity to exchange experiences with other volunteers but most admitted that they avoid meetings associated with their assignments. They don't want to spend time away from their hands-on volunteer work or put in extra time in an already packed schedule.

TURNOFFS

Although most participants in the study were happy in their volunteer jobs, they could identify factors that had acted as turnoffs for them at one time or another:

- Disorganized management
- Lack of board support
- Staff indifference
- Limited training and orientation
- Lack of contact and support
- Wrong assignment
- Perks that are withdrawn
- Insufficient funding

1 Disorganized management can waste a volunteer's time

Organizational inefficiency, especially when it wastes a volunteer's time or makes the assignment more difficult, made a lot of participants angry. One mentioned the time he came into work and found another volunteer already doing the job that he had been assigned.

Canvassers, particularly, ran into obstacles caused by poor organization. Some of the problems mentioned included insufficient flyers for all the households on their assigned street; short deadlines sprung on the canvasser without notice and lists that contained out-of-date names and addresses.

2 Lack of board support

Participants felt that some organizations pay lip service to the importance of volunteers and the work they do — but do not really appreciate their value.

The job of volunteer coordinator is important. That's where your work force is. So why isn't it given the staff and the equipment to do a good job? Without the volunteer coordinator the organization wouldn't be able to function.

It is important for the board of directors or senior management of an organization to plan carefully how volunteers will be used. If volunteers really are important, it follows that the organization should be willing to invest time and care in developing the kind of support systems that volunteers and volunteer programs really need.

3 Indifferent staff attitudes

Participants reported that occasionally staff of organizations have been less than welcoming to volunteers. This happens if volunteers are introduced into a job before staff have been consulted. Managers of volunteers should get agreement from other staff about the work the volunteers will be doing in order to smooth the way for everyone.

And volunteer coordinators should offer support, but not inflict on volunteers what they don't need.

I would assume that when a volunteer coordinator interviews you, she can pretty well judge if you're an intelligent person or a stupid person. Like when they give you a job to do and turn around and do it for you, or give you a sheet this long to get you to do a job you've been doing all your life... When I retired, I didn't leave my brains at the office...

It also follows that volunteer responsibilities should not be pre-empted or ignored by staff, as happened when the volunteer editor of a newsletter found that staff were bypassing her and putting items in the paper without her knowledge.

Wasting a volunteer's time is bad; equally bad is allowing a volunteer to burn out from overwork. Sometimes you feel like saying the heck with it, and throwing in the towel. We're going to be short \$65,000 through lack of volunteers. We know the money is there. We just don't have the people to get out there and get it.

Volunteers are a scarce and valuable resource — and deserve to be treated as such — with tact, good sense and consideration.

4 Limited training and orientation

Participants praised organizations with effective orientation and training procedures for volunteers. Following up with some supervision or counselling and adequate information for the volunteer about day-to-day operations was also appreciated.

One worker in a one-to-one situation was given training only in “what the agency is about”, and was handed a basic-level booklet:

Nothing about the disease, nothing about medications, nothing about what to do if something untoward happens.

5 Lack of contact and support

Some volunteers complained that once they received their training and assignments, they had to function pretty well on their own. There was little contact either with other volunteers or with staff members, and thus little opportunity to exchange ideas to solve problems or just to feel part of the group.

By the same token, others mentioned positive efforts their organization had made to bring them into the fold. Volunteer teas or other social events were appreciated, mainly for the contact they offered with staff and other volunteers.

Others praised organizations that they saw as being helpful and open-minded and ready to hear suggestions of how to improve things.

6 The wrong assignment

Some participants were suffering from having chosen the wrong organization or the wrong assignment within that organization. These people did not talk about quitting but they weren't enjoying what they were doing or having the fun that seems to characterize a satisfied volunteer.

I would prefer to drive but they wanted me do the visiting. You can become drained, emotionally.

One participant was asked to type envelopes in a back office, when what she really wanted to do was greet people at the reception desk.

I didn't like to say no, but I was disappointed not to be more a part of things.

Coordinators of volunteers should be aware that volunteers might simply fade away from an organization rather than tackle the source of their discontent.

7 Perks — no big deal, unless they're withdrawn

Insufficient supplies or withdrawal of perks gave volunteers the impression that the organization did not value them because it did not allocate sufficient resources to manage them properly.

By and large, volunteers did not make a big issue of getting something in return for their efforts. However, when something has been offered by the organization, like free coffee, and then it is withdrawn, sparks fly.

For the first time, there was a sign up that said 10 cents for a cup of coffee, and I hit the roof. It's the principle of the thing.

8 Insufficient funding

Some of the frustration volunteers experience is not really curable by the organizations they work for — at least, not directly. One volunteer is experiencing frustration because the system doesn't allow for his task to be completed:

Some of the refugees who have finished the six-month language training course are supposed to be ready to go out and get a job. But they're not. Six months isn't nearly enough.

Many volunteers care a lot about the work they do and it bothers them that society doesn't place enough value on it.

There's never enough money... that's what really bugs me. You see so much that could be done at that place, and so much more you could do for those people, if you only had the money. I guess I'm sort of angry at the government, because all they do is cut back.

GETTING STARTED IN VOLUNTEER WORK

Initial attractions not always what keeps volunteers involved

There are almost as many reasons for getting involved in volunteer work as there are volunteers. And the initial impetus may or may not be what keeps new volunteers coming back. Frequently, once people get started, they find that their deepest rewards are ones they didn't expect when they first came looking for a volunteer assignment.

Participants entered the volunteer world through ads in the paper, articles in the media and invitations by friends.

They wanted to get involved in a new community or they overheard someone talking about a need or they just wanted to be active.

Some wanted to repay a perceived debt to society and others took up volunteer work as part of a major reassessment of their lives and priorities.

They came looking for a better balance in their lives, a learning experience, something to do with their time after being laid off work or something to add to their skills and their resumes.

A good number had a vested interest in the organization where they were helping out. This might be a friend or relative with a disability or a disease or the expectation that they themselves might someday need the service.

Fears and anxieties

When they start out, volunteers are frequently unsure about themselves and their abilities and about what the organization will ask of them.

People that I discuss it with have this false notion that volunteering requires hours and hours a week. But for me it's as simple as seeing my *protégée* once a week for an hour and a half. And I talk to her on the phone for four or five minutes every other day, which is nothing...

Some volunteers, particularly drivers, want to be sure they won't be out-of-pocket over their assignments: I just wonder if it holds some people back from volunteering, if the organization isn't giving any financial support. They'd love to do it but they are afraid of the cost.

Some volunteers had trouble getting started

Often volunteers have had to be extraordinarily persistent in order to offer their services to some organizations. One literacy volunteer tried three times to make contact before she finally got through to the organization.

Recruiters should know how the volunteer feels when, after applying, he or she goes into limbo for a matter of weeks or months while background checks are being done, or suitable assignments and matches worked out.

Many volunteers hear nothing back from the organization until this process is completed, and some mentioned feeling unwanted, or worse.

I thought they had found out something terrible about me.

While most participants in these discussions waited it out, they worried that others might become lost to the organization during this period. They suggested there should be a phone call or some other kind of contact and reassurance while the paperwork is being processed.

In some cases, where the screening procedure was handled with sensitivity, volunteers did actually appreciate the care that was taken to ensure that the right people were selected. This was particularly the case in high-pressure positions where participants mentioned "dealing with life-and-death issues" and said that the

rigorous screening increased their feeling of pride and accomplishment when they finally got started.

Volunteers do judge organizations in the early stages of a relationship to see if their own needs will be met. One enthusiastic volunteer found the following factors important:

They are extremely well organized, very efficient, and the people there are very caring. They manage to make everybody feel a part of it... there's a support network there.

FINDING THE RIGHT NICHE

Matching volunteers to the right assignment

It is important, in the initial stages of volunteering, to provide some counselling, training and guidance, even opportunities to experiment, so that the volunteer can find the right niche. Some of the participants did manage to make their place in an organization without much assistance, but most appreciate and want more support from the organization in the early stages and some follow-up afterwards.

Training and orientation

Training and orientation seemed to take the fear out of most volunteer assignments. Some participants had managed to make their place in the organization without much assistance, but most would have appreciated more help in the initial stages of volunteering.

I'm happy doing what I'm doing. I just think a little more education would have helped.

In some cases, the tougher the training, the more some participants seemed to like it. They mentioned with relish such experiences as:

Two full days of crisis training... very draining — excellent training.

Reaping the Rewards

The rewards of finding the right niche are enormous — both for the organization and the volunteer. You know things are going right when a palliative care volunteer talks about not wanting to go home at the end of the shift.

Committed volunteers are ones who have obtained the rewards they expected when they signed up and possibly a few unexpected ones as well. Volunteers who make comments like the one below keep coming back for more:

I often feel tired — I think it's just the stress of thinking I have to go in — but once there, I really am not tired, and I come out rested. I come out much better than when I went in...

THE VOLUNTEER IMAGE

It became clear during these group interviews that volunteering could do with some image building, even among volunteers themselves. Although the participants clearly see that what they do is useful and valuable to society, many seem almost embarrassed about making their contributions known.

There is a self-depreciatory tendency among some volunteers to label their motives as selfish because they have gained personal rewards from volunteering. Some do not like to talk about their volunteer work for fear of being labelled a 'do-gooder', or someone who is seeking praise. It is possible that recruiting new volunteers would be easier if volunteers had a more clearly defined place in the hierarchy of those who make good things happen in our society.

Who? Me a volunteer?

Some participants had done volunteer work for years without ever thinking to apply the label of volunteer to themselves. Others simply dislike the term. Certain stereotypes still exist, that volunteers are all people over 55, with lots of money and leisure time.

I don't really look at it as volunteering. They're my friends. I do my own thing just trying to make them feel good.

. . .

I was doing it for me more than I was doing it for anyone else. I wanted to do something with my skills.

Even among volunteers themselves, the stereotype of the well-to-do lady of leisure or retiree helping the less fortunate still exists:

Volunteers have an image of not knowing what to do with their leisure, so they volunteer. In fact it's kind of hard to fit it into my schedule sometimes...

A number of participants said they rarely discussed their volunteer work with friends or acquaintances as they are afraid of being considered 'holier than thou'.

At work they know, but I make it very off-hand. To me, it's kind of a private part of my life that I don't want to mix with other areas. All my projects are things that have touched my life in one way or another.

People who do talk about their volunteer efforts are often met with incomprehension:

I find people say to me, 'Why aren't you taking it easy and enjoying life? It's funny how some people look at it. I'm enjoying life more than I could if I was sitting at home.

Some comments from others suggested society as a whole undervalues the volunteer contribution:

It seems that if you're not making a large profit in our society, you're not valued.

. . .

My wife said that after she started working full time outside the home, she was accorded a certain respect which she didn't get in all the years she was investing just as much energy into volunteer work.

One person suggested that others might feel guilty about not volunteering if she talked a lot about her experiences. Others seemed to think that a bit of guilt on the part of non-volunteers might not be such a bad idea.

A bargain for society

In their own minds, volunteers do know what their contribution is worth.

Society's getting a bargain. If they had to pay for all the volunteer work that gets done, they'd be paying a huge bill, and this particular government should be thanking their lucky stars!

They ascribe positive traits to themselves: giving, people-oriented, outgoing, busy, active, loving. Surprisingly, some considered themselves selfish, because they derive pleasure or some benefit from their work. It is almost as if they thought volunteering ought to be a sacrifice, doing good for the sake of doing good.

...from a very selfish point of view, I get more out of it than anybody else.

In terms of their own self-image, many volunteers see themselves as one camp in a two-camp world — volunteers versus non-volunteers. Some people simply have the volunteer spirit. There was general agreement when one participant commented:

I wonder if there are people-oriented people and I guess one could say 'things-oriented' people...?

A similar thought developed in other groups:

In my opinion, there are simply two kinds of people in the world. There are givers and there are takers. And volunteers are certainly givers, and the other people are the takers.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE ISSUES

On the whole, participants in our study were not excited by the larger management issues of organizational goals, effectiveness, strategies, structures and facilities.

Most volunteers were content to do their assignments and leave larger organizational issues to others. It is possible that one reason for their reluctance is the sense of freedom that they value about their direct service work.

They set it up a week ahead of time, so if we're going away we don't have to find a substitute or anything. It really is an ideal volunteer job.

Of course, not all participants agreed. Some interpreted 'lack of pressure' to imply 'lack of commitment', others saw no difference between a volunteer job and a paid one.

Board and committee members: a degree of difference

Of all the groups, only the one composed of board and committee members was interested enough in the larger organizational issues to offer comments in that area.

They were likely to take a broader view of the organization. There tended to be more shoptalk in this group than in the others, about how different organizations dealt with various problems, about how there was never enough money to carry out all the work that needed to be done, about goals for volunteer involvement and about gender and age balances.

Life at the top — a touch of nostalgia

It is interesting to note one significant factor. When talking about what they found most satisfying about volunteer work, most participants in this group reminisced about the past, when they were in direct-service positions.

Assignments on boards and committees usually give intellectual gratification, but not the more intense satisfaction of one-to-one tasks. And the larger the organization, the less contact there is at the board level with what the organization is really about. Some have retained hands-on volunteer assignments in the same or other organizations.

Of course, working on boards of directors does provide its own gratification. Participants appreciated staff support and larger organizational gatherings such as 'honours' nights and volunteer appreciation events. There was some satisfaction in helping to solve organizational problems.

One participant had the opportunity to speak about her organization to a group of 300 people.

How often do you get the chance to tell that many people about the important work that the organization does and its impact on the community?

Conclusions

Two discoveries of particular interest emerged from this study. The *first* is that *volunteers do make good recruiters*. There were a number of stories of informal recruitment of friends, family and even strangers.

There were only a few stories, however, of volunteers being asked to take part in formal recruitment campaigns. And this seems a shame. Nobody knows the job better than the person doing it, and most would like the opportunity to tell of the work they do. In some cases a reticence holds them back. They are afraid people might consider them boastful. They feel that society is a little baffled by them, and a little condescending.

They know the value of the work they do, however, and their stories are compelling and ought to be heard. The *second* discovery is that *volunteers are the children of volunteers*.

I grew up with volunteering... that was what was expected of you as a human being.

Recruiting new volunteers doesn't just fill a present need, it's an investment in our future communities.

Although the participants' experiences were mainly happy ones, they were able to identify some things that made them frustrated and angry.

They felt *some organizations fail to give enough funds and support to their volunteer programs*. They saved their real anger, however, for a recessionary economy and *government cut-backs that allowed good programs to be cut*.

Participants were aware of the competitive nature of volunteer recruitment and support. Programs that offered achievement and room for personal growth and a caring support system were clearly the winners in their eyes. Other organizations, they advised, would simply have to try harder.

Participants in the Study

Group 1 Canvassers and fundraisers

Ottawa Valley Autistic Homes	Walter Hill
United Way of Ottawa-Carleton	James Fydell
Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario	Tony Pollard
Multiple Sclerosis Society	Martha Costello

Group 2 One-to-One

Canadian Mental Health Association	Hans Koster
	Jennifer Holley
	Sue Clarke
Canadian National Institute for the Blind	Gerry Brown
	Philomena Park
Citizen Advocacy	Catherine Frey
	Mary Castonguay
	Kris Bhojwani
Glebe Centre	John W. Beveridge
ODAMR	John Fisher
Elizabeth Fry Society	Laura Wood

Group 3 Life Skills and Literacy

Catholic Immigration Centre	Lyndell Hughes Nan Doe
Ottawa Board of Education	Till Heyde Muriel Hansen
Phoenix House — Rochdale	Marjory N. Briggs Nancy Schruder
Social Network for Youth	Ken McDonell Don Harrel
Foster Farm Family Tutoring Program	Dion McGrath

Phone Volunteers

Ottawa Distress Centre	Alex McPhail Stella Ross
Seniors' Council of Ottawa-Carleton	Jane Breen Kathleen Cosgrove
Women's Place	Terri Harper

Drivers and Escorts

King's Daughters Dinner Wagon (Meals on Wheels)	Gina Smart
Canadian Cancer Society	Elizabeth Wheat
	Jim Wheat
	Mitch Horricks
Glebe Centre Inc	Marjorie Lang
	Fred Warner
	Ken MacLymont
Children's Aid Society	Frank Bender
	Mary Layton
Abbotsford House Senior Centre	Carmen Cumming

Board and Committee Members

Canadian Cancer Society	Marilyn Moffatt
Good Companions Seniors' Centre	Mady Evans
	Charlotte Birchard
Odyssey Theatre	Barbara Dransch
Elizabeth Fry Society	Susan McClelland
Volunteer Centre Ottawa-Carleton	Sue Rogers