

4 Episodic Volunteering and Teens

Het onderzoek van Harriett Edwards gaat over de relatie tussen de ontwikkeling in het vrijwilligerswerk van een steeds groter aanbod aan tijdelijke of flexibele klussen, en de vraag hoe dit met name door jongere vrijwilligers wordt ontvangen. Welke factoren zijn hierop positief van invloed? Van groot belang voor iedere organisatie die betrokken is (of gaat) met maatschappelijke stages, of wanneer je als organisatie jongeren wilt werven of behouden als vrijwilliger. Nuttig is, lijkt mij, dat het artikel in vogelvlucht diverse onderzoeksuitkomsten verwerkt naar de actuele kenmerken van jongeren. De opeenvolgende generaties jongeren vanaf de Millennials (geboren tussen 1979-2000) komen langs. De huidige tieners, ook wel generatie Y of Generatie Einstein genoemd, zijn gemakkelijk enthousiast te krijgen voor vrijwilligerswerk waar ze snel mee kunnen beginnen en dat zinvol, uitdagend en leuk is. Het vraagt echter wel een specifieke aanpak deze groep jongeren te interesseren en te betrekken, maar ook hierover biedt het artikel handvatten.

Wat ik zelf het meest relevant vind aan het artikel is de vraag naar de risico's die de eenzijdige focus op het aanbieden van kortdurende vrijwilligersklussen aan jongeren op langere termijn met zich mee zou kunnen brengen. In een samenleving waarin de individuele belangen voorop lijken te staan, past het aanbieden van kortdurende vrijwilligersklussen bij de korte-termijnbehoeften. Het is onvoldoende duidelijk of, en zo ja, in welke mate dit bijdraagt aan de duurzame ontwikkeling van sociale structuren en netwerken. De vooronderstelling is dat als je jongeren kennis laat maken met vrijwillige inzet, ze de weg verder weten te vinden en dit in hun verdere leven blijven doen. De vraag is of dit in alle gevallen aan de orde is. Zeker als ik naar het verplichte karakter kijk van bijvoorbeeld de maatschappelijke stage, dan is het nog maar de vraag of dit daadwerkelijk gaat bijdragen aan een vanzelfsprekende vrijwillige inzet van de huidige generatie jongeren in de toekomst. Meer aandacht voor succesfactoren lijkt mij hierin onmisbaar. Zeker als er al een aantal factoren bekend zijn, zoals bijvoorbeeld het aanbieden van klussen waarin jongeren zelf beslissingen kunnen nemen, er een positieve relatie en betrokkenheid van volwassenen is, er gebruik wordt gemaakt van een voorbeeldfunctie door ouders (of leerkrachten!) en het ook helpt als jongeren dit kunnen ervaren bij een organisatie waar vrijwillige inzet een onderdeel is van de activiteiten met leeftijdgenoten bij een organisatie zoals Scouting.

In die zin heeft Harriett Edwards niet alle antwoorden in huis, maar stelt ze, mijns inziens, belangrijke vragen en geeft ze een overzicht van uitkomsten van relevante onderzoeken naar de toenemende inzet van jongeren als vrijwilliger.

plaatsbepaling

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Episodic Volunteering and Teens: What Message Are We Sending?

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For administrators of volunteer programs, the movement of episodic volunteering from "trend" in the 1980's to the reality of the new millennium (Safrit & Merrill, 2000) has long been a topic of conversation and an adjustment away from traditional processes. Episodic volunteering is defined as service for short, specified terms, or for single events or projects (Macduff, 1991). In further considering the concept of episodic volunteering, Macduff (2005) categorized volunteers into three types of episodic service. The first is temporary service, which is typically a few hours or a day, but rarely more than that. These volunteers are most likely not engaged with the organization in any other way. Second, episodic volunteers may be interim volunteers who participate regularly for up to six months. This includes interns serving for a semester or those working on special projects. Finally, the third type of episodic service is occasional. This includes those volunteers who return each year to help with a specific event with short terms of service each time.

Developing opportunities for episodic volunteer involvement allows those individuals who might otherwise not participate in service activities to become involved for service projects or very specific timeframes (Safrit & Merrill, 2002). According to Edwards (2003), organizations must become adept at involving episodic volunteers if their programs are to succeed into the future. Volunteers are looking for volunteer opportunities with a definite beginning and a definite end rather than the continuous, ongoing volunteer commitment that has been more traditional in voluntary organizations. Recognizing the need of adults to better

balance family and work situations while still contributing to their communities, volunteer administrators have worked hard to create these episodic, flexible positions, to offer variety in placements, and to involve individuals, while respecting personal preferences.

This movement toward shorter lengths of service is not just an American phenomenon. Researchers in UK report similar trends toward more individuals giving time, but giving time in shorter intervals than in previous years (Kitchen, Michaelson & Wood, 2006). Graff & Reed (2007) indicate that in Canada, volunteering rates have remained reasonably constant, while the number of hours given by each volunteer is dropping.

Paine, Malmersjo & Stubbe (2007) point out that while there has been an increase in episodic volunteer activity, this does not necessarily indicate a decline in long-term commitments. Their assertion is that the new, episodic volunteers are a different audience of volunteers that are becoming involved in ways more appropriate for their lifestyles and interests. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) suggest that the shift toward episodic volunteerism is a reflection of societal shifts in which individuals are more focused on personal interests rather than the larger community or a sense of obligation to the common good. Thus, as an individualized approach to volunteering, such as episodic volunteering, is an attractive option.

Merrill (2005), however, argues that in a time of declining civic engagement and loss of social networks, volunteering is one of the strongest mechanisms for building communities and strengthening social capital. Thinking about volunteer activities that are built

around teams of workers, connecting the community to the classroom through service learning opportunities, offering activities that can engage entire families, and allowing cross-generation team designs all contribute to building connections and engaging individuals in working together for the good of the community. This community, she states, is the ultimate benefit rather than an initial requirement of volunteerism. The implication, then, is that while episodic volunteering is now relatively commonplace in the volunteer community, there are considerations as to just how positive the shift toward short term service is over the long-run. Providing these individualized volunteer opportunities may be a short term solution to helping people manage their options better and remain involved at some level, yet allowing individuals to rotate in and out without connecting with the "community" may become a larger issue in the future when isolation and loss of social capital have become even more real.

Understanding Adolescents

Working with adolescents can bring unique challenges for those managing volunteer organizations or programs. The teen years are marked by dramatic growth, physical maturity, and an increasing interest in friends and long-term relationships (Safrit, Scheer & King, 2001). Emotionally, teens are developing a sense of moral reasoning and are able to think both abstractly and concretely. In fact, teens are developing three unique types of autonomy during the adolescent years (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). The first type of autonomy is emotional autonomy (changes in personal relationships), second is behavioral autonomy (making and following through on individual decisions) and third is moral autonomy (struggling with a personal set of principles about right and wrong). These components of development are strengthened through positive youth development activities and through building social networks to support individual growth.

Developing internal and external assets during this phase of the life cycle can be a key to success in later life (Benson, Galbraith & Espeland, 1998). These 40 assets, identified by the Search Institute, provide a strong foundation and can create positive influences on the decisions made by youth. They provide a sense

of security and offer resources that youth will have available to continue building upon over time. Simply put, these assets make youth better people who are more prepared for life, and volunteer work contributes to the development and enhancement of these assets.

Young people today are interested in global issues and have been exposed to information much more broadly than previous generations (Merrill, 2006). They are interested in understanding the "big picture" and how single activities contribute to the larger whole. Their interest is in collective action and working collaboratively to achieve common goals. Any organization interested in engaging contemporary youth must have a web presence. Young people are comfortable with and excited by technology.

Millennials is the reference name given to those born between 1979 and 2000 by those studying characteristics of the various time periods, and those who are currently in their teen years are included in this era. This generation is characterized by widespread use of technology and these teens are most comfortable when multitasking (United Way of America, 2007). They have been involved with structured play groups and day care settings from early childhood, but unlike Generation X, these children are accustomed to having their parents very involved in their lives. This generation is seen as similar to their World War II aged grandparents of the Traditional Generation in terms of holding conservative values and being socially engaged. This generation, sometimes referred to as Generation Y, is characterized by being individualistic, though group-oriented and by being ambitious, while not entirely focused (Stefaniak & Vetter, 2007). They expect a great deal in the way of assistance and mentoring from their bosses and managers as they work toward established professional and personal goals.

Generation Y is further characterized by an optimistic outlook on the future and a realistic approach to the present (Jopling, 2004). They exhibit a strong work ethic, but it is important for these young people to understand the reasons for the work; they do not like taking blind orders. This group enjoys seeing how they make a difference with their work. They are interested in quick responses, having grown up with instant messaging and e-mail, so concise messages filled with action words will garner better responses.

These teens are more tolerant of differences than any before them, respecting each person's individuality (Merrill, 2005). They are looking for active work that begins instantly and is meaningful, fun and exciting.

American teens report spending an average of more than three waking hours per day "alone," which is more time than they report spending with their families and friends. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) attribute much of this to smaller family sizes, dual-income families, and increased divorce rates. Putnam (2000) suggests that this trend toward spending so much time in social isolation is contributing to increasing suicide and depression among young people.

The challenges of engaging teens in service through voluntary organizations are related to the factors generally inherent in managing volunteer administration tasks, with the added complication of adolescence. Designing age-appropriate, skill-building, and appealing tasks for teens can be more than some volunteer-driven organizations are equipped to manage. Yet, many are successfully reaching youth through volunteer service opportunities.

Youth Engaged in Service

More than 55% of America's population between the ages of 12 and 18 reported participating in volunteer activities, according to 2005 survey data (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2005). This is twice the rate of volunteer activity reported by the adult population (29%). It is noteworthy that while adults reported volunteering an average of 52 hours per year, teens reported an average of 29 hours of volunteer activity per year.

Involving teens in service is sometimes intimidating for administrators of volunteer programs (Safrit, 2002). The social stereotype of teens as rebellious and nonconforming, and a subconscious expectation that teens lack the needed knowledge and skills to succeed, both contribute to a hesitation to engaging youth in meaningful roles in voluntary organizations.

Evidence indicates that youth participation in service projects and service-learning activities fosters an ethic of service that contributes to participation in volunteer activities throughout the lifespan (Golombek, 2006). Engaging teens in meaningful service also results in positive behavior outcomes, connecting their contribution of skills to an increased sense of

belonging and self-esteem, better academic performance, and a reduced rate of participation in harmful activities (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2004). To be considered a quality service learning experience, Toppe (2005) discusses the concept as service that lasts for a minimum of one semester and involves the student in all aspects, from planning to evaluating the experience. This, according to Handy and Brudney (2007), creates a situation in which the cost for service learning is high, with inexperienced students requiring closer supervision as they build skills through this learning opportunity. With this reality, many volunteer organizations focus on the episodic support provided through days of service and shorter term commitments rather than invest the resources required to build strong, quality service learning programs.

Youth who are engaged in service gain experience in communicating with others, develop social networks, and begin to see themselves as contributing members of society (Kenny & Gallagher, 2003). Volunteer activities allow youth to explore career paths, to observe behaviors of key leaders and to learn from adults in the community. Participating in service also provides an opportunity for youth to build relationships with caring adults outside their families.

Teens are more interested in volunteer activities in which they have some decision-making authority (Safrit, Scheer & King, 2001). Such activities as canned food drives, delivering meals or groceries to families in need, or tutoring children in after-school programs are all age-appropriate examples of service projects for teens. According to Junck (2004), successful service learning programs that connect youth to volunteer opportunities and then to the larger community include a focus on an identified community need rather than service for the sake of service. Other factors for success included being student-driven, utilizing teamwork for accomplishing the task, and involving adults as mentors and advisors available to assist the students with their work.

Research indicates a strong correlation between youth engagement in service and parents who volunteer. Johnson-Coffey (1997) states that creating opportunities for family volunteering leads to children who grow into adult volunteers. Her conclusion is that it becomes a cycle of involvement and interest that con-

tinues and is passed from one generation to the next. In fact, a 2002 Independent Sector study (Toppe & Michel) reveals that, "Americans who began giving and volunteering as youth are more giving of their time and money as adults. This pattern holds regardless of income or age group" (p.7). Young people typically are involved in partnership with adults as advisors, supervisors, and in other support roles as they engage in community service activities. The research supports that this adult involvement, whether a parent or other adult role model, plays a crucial role in building a lifelong commitment to volunteerism for teens.

Scannell and Roberts (1994) report that effective teen-adult partnerships in community service programs are characterized by: 1) reciprocity (balanced relationships between young and old); 2) common, valued contributions (working together on something of value in their community); 3) reflection (time to examine the service and the relationships); 4) partnerships (shared vision and collaboration); and 5) preparation and support (value of involving young and old from design, implementation all the way through to evaluation). Data reported from a three-year study by Christensen, Perry and Littlepage (2005), confirm that when teens are involved in single days of service, the most successful projects and experiences were those in which the teens were involved throughout the process and where true partnerships between youth and adults were developed.

Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loiselle (2002) state that youth engagement relates to the young person's connection to the larger community through "enjoyed absorption" (p.48) in activities that are sustained over time. This engagement results in youth who develop healthy connections or relationships to others, who show a reduction in risk behaviors and who show an increase in positive activity. At the same time, the authors report, the community benefits from the energy, creativity and values that teens infuse into their activities.

Independent Sector (1996) indicates that youth self-reported the following benefits about what teens gain from participating in volunteer service. Teens indicated that they learned to respect others, to be respectful and kind, to get along with others, to understand people who are different, how to relate to younger children, new skills and to be more patient with

others. They also indicated gaining satisfaction from helping others and said that they developed leadership skills through participating in service activities.

Involvement of youth in service contributes to at least three developmental areas for youth (Sherman, 2002). First, the individual young person grows, develops and changes by learning new skills, meeting new people to create new social networks, and by addressing issues of concern to create change. Next, organizations change as young people become involved in governance structures and take on leadership roles in partnership with adults involved in the activities of the organization. Finally the community can be dramatically changed as new policies are created, new projects are accomplished, and new leaders step into key roles to impact the larger community.

Millennials are volunteering at astonishing rates in America. Howe & Strauss (2005) report that 30 percent of students in Grades 6-12 (ages 12-18) indicate that they volunteer more than 80 hours per year, with 93 percent indicating that they anticipate being volunteers as adults. Additionally, 76 percent indicate that their parents volunteer. The authors indicated that these 'junior citizens' would be a very strong political force in the very near future.

Teen motivations to serve are as varied as adult motivations. They are seeking opportunities to apply newly learned skills to help in building a resume for future employment (Morgan, 2001). Youth are looking for social opportunities with community groups, and they are looking for challenging activities to help alleviate boredom (Digeronimo, 1995). Teens are excited about sharing personal interests with others and want to meet people with similar interests, in addition to fulfilling school requirements for service.

Helping teens to become involved as volunteers may contribute to a more involved citizenry of adults as these youth mature into adults who are more actively engaged in their communities through voluntary efforts. Meijs, Ten Hoorn and Brudney (2006) argue that exposing youth to volunteer service, regardless of the motivation, can contribute positively to building a cadre of skilled, interested, passionate volunteers for the future. Their suggestion is to create a variety of service opportunities and some flexibility into volunteer program designs to help entice individuals to become involved. They indicate that creating these

episodic service opportunities will have a long term impact of increasing the supply of volunteers to fill service needs, both now and in the future.

Conclusions, Recommendations & Implications for Research

Understanding that teens need meaningful engagement in voluntary activities to develop both internal and external assets, and looking at the existing research about volunteer engagement in community organizations, there are some obvious dichotomies to consider. Research on adolescents reveals that youth need sustained involvement and strong relationships with adults outside their families to develop some of these assets, yet in working to design episodic volunteer opportunities, volunteer administrators are limiting the teens' opportunities to develop these relationships and not connecting the young people to the organization through these experiences. In situations where youth are participating in service activities through other formalized organizations, like 4-H clubs, scouts, or faith-based groups, these relationships exist prior to the service activity and will continue long after the "day of service" is completed. Otherwise, the youth are not involved through these singularly focused volunteer activities to build the kinds of relationships that contribute to connectedness.

Involving youth in the planning phase of the service design can be one solution to helping foster the relationship building and the leadership focus that could contribute to a more meaningful volunteer experience in these settings. Incorporating a process for youth to serve on an advisory or planning committee to develop multiple "days of service" so that it becomes a more continuous opportunity may also help to strengthen the experience.

Christensen, Perry and Littlepage (2005) conclude from their research concerning single days of service and increased participation in fraternal service organizations, that such days of service contribute to the youth ethic of service and also raise the visibility and positive attitudes toward the service organizations. Logically, then, it seems that in order to insure continued participation in service organizations, partnering with these organizations to plan, implement and evaluate

the days of service may contribute to a renewal of interest in the organization. Further longitudinal research to ascertain whether the partnership with fraternal service or civic organizations in these youth days of service events actually results in increased participation would provide some support for continuing this approach to youth engagement. At a time when "joining" is considered something that the elderly and the retired do in their leisure, if indeed fostering the ethic of service and helping young people be more aware of the benefits to belonging to the social network created by these organizations, then there would be proven value in making this approach a "best practice" for voluntary agencies.

Helping administrators of volunteer programs work through the stereotypes about teens serving as volunteers continues to be a challenge (Safrit, Edwards & Flood, 2005). Recognizing the energy and creativity of teens, and creating a balance with their needs for social interaction and skill-building opportunities can be overwhelming when added to the other demands of the administrative job of managing volunteers. Teens remain largely untapped as a source for volunteer involvement. Research indicates that only five percent of youth volunteer because of school requirements, thus indicating that many more are involved because they desire the opportunity (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2005). Better understanding the real motives that drive teens to serve their communities can only enhance their engagement in voluntary organizations.

With research supporting the concept of youth engagement leading to an ethic of service, particularly when supported by adults with whom the youth have close relationships (Independent Sector, 2002), there are additional research questions about the degree to which the types of service in which they are engaged is relevant. While the research reveals that involving youth in service translates into adults who are engaged in service, there were no specifics to help answer the question of how many "single day of service" activities needed to be connected to create positive outcomes. Is it reasonable to think that involving youth in just one or two such experiences will equate to adults who have a lifelong ethic of service? Does it take five such experiences to create results, or will two expe-

periences be enough to create a habit of volunteering? Does this service ideally occur with a fixed group of peers or does it affect the outcome if the group changes from one activity to the next? Answers to these and other similar questions could help volunteer administrators create service opportunities that are more meaningful to the participants, and that create greater impact for the long-run.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) points to a decline in civic engagement and volunteerism as a consequence of moving away from community, and research shows that a young person with at least one parent who volunteers is nearly three times more likely to engage in volunteer activity regularly (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2005). Recognizing this conundrum, are young people seeing their role models volunteer so that they learn about the value, or some might say the responsibility, of voluntary service? Or are volunteer administrators creating "easier" options so that citizens can continue to find even more time to be alone and isolated from their communities?

As administrators of volunteer programs, are we contributing to the erosion of community by completely redesigning volunteer opportunities so that individuals can move into and out of our organizations without ever connecting to others or to our causes? In providing meaningful, short-term engagement as the primary opportunity for volunteer engagement for teens, are we unintentionally sending a message that long-term commitment is not important? Will teens beco-

me adults who are not engaged in the larger community because we have not helped them realize the criticality of personal involvement in social networks? Will exposure to days of service and episodic volunteer activity be enough to foster an ethic of service for teens as they grow into adulthood and make decisions about engaging (or not engaging) in communities through service? What specific types of service, during the teen years, most contributes to active engagement in voluntary work as an adult? What adjustments must voluntary organizations make to create longer-term, ongoing volunteer opportunities more attractive to teens and young adults?

What it comes to in the final analysis is whether we are doing our teens a disservice by making episodic volunteering too attractive. Weber (2005) challenges voluntary organizations to pay attention to trends and changes in society. These changes, he argues, will affect the community's expectations, will alter the way in which individuals serve, and may ultimately impact the goals of the organization. Are we too quickly accepting episodic volunteering as the best way to involve youth volunteers and setting an example of instant gratification that may prevent their participation in long-term assignments in the future?

The implications for creating the ideal mix of traditional, ongoing volunteer opportunities with the availability of episodic volunteer activities will be critical for the continued success of volunteer programs around the world.

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