

Criminal Justice Volunteerism: A Comparison of Adult and Juvenile Agency Volunteers

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ABSTRACT. This study compared the personal characteristics, motivations for entering volunteer work, activities, problem situations encountered, and rewarding experiences of volunteers in adult and juvenile justice agencies. Five hundred forty-five volunteers from twenty-six agencies across the United States were represented. Volunteers with juveniles were likely to be female, 21 to 30 years old, white, well-educated, professional, and married. Among volunteers with adults, males and females were almost equally represented, but the other characteristics were identical to those of the juvenile justice volunteers. Both types of volunteers found their greatest satisfaction in the opportunity to help others and their community. The volunteers' chief activities included offering friendship, counseling, and providing transportation for clients. Poor communication between volunteers and agency personnel was highlighted as the greatest problem area. The volunteers experienced their greatest satisfaction from knowing they had helped others and were wanted and needed. Although levels of satisfaction and strength of motivations varied somewhat between the adult and juvenile justice agency volunteers, they were remarkably similar in their general outlooks toward volunteer work and their assessments of its problems and rewards.

Volunteerism has always been an important activity in this country and the contributions volunteers have made to the temporal well-being and emotional well-being of those they have served over the

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Journal of Offender Counseling, Services & Rehabilitation, Vol. 7(2), Winter 1982

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years are enormous. Volunteerism has been formally defined as:

Those activities of individuals and agencies arising out of a spontaneous, private (as contrasted with governmental) effort to promote or advance some aspect of the common good, as this good is perceived by the persons participating in it. (Manser & Cass, 1976, p. 8)

In simpler terms, volunteers are people working without pay, who derive a certain satisfaction from engaging in some sort of activity.

In recent years there has been a tremendous growth in the number of volunteers who have sought involvement with criminal justice related agencies and institutions. Estimates of the number of volunteers so involved range as high as one million, and they have provided assistance in juvenile court activities, adult probation and parole work, employment agencies which serve ex-offenders, educational programs for justice system clients, halfway houses, community treatment centers, and many other types of agencies and institutions. The impact of this tremendous outpouring of volunteer activity has yet to be measured, and the research available which examines the characteristics of criminal justice volunteers, their motivations for entering volunteer work, the personal benefits they experience from volunteering, the types of activities in which they are involved, or the effectiveness of their efforts is quite limited. In addition, reactions of justice system professionals and their readiness to allow volunteers to become involved in a meaningful way in client management, counseling, or treatment are areas of concern which have not been systematically examined.

The study described here attempted to explore these matters. By means of questionnaires completed by volunteers currently working in criminal justice agencies, the researchers sought to develop a general profile of a criminal justice volunteer, and to compare the characteristics of volunteers involved in adult and juvenile justice work. The material gathered included information on the personal characteristics of volunteers, their motivations for entering such work, actual activities, problem situations encountered, and rewarding experiences. On the basis of this information, the researchers reached a number of conclusions regarding measures that would make criminal justice volunteerism an even more appealing, worthwhile, and productive activity for both the volunteers and the agencies involved.

The Study

All agencies asked to participate in this study were selected from a nationwide master list of juvenile justice, probation, parole, or community treatment agencies compiled by the Volunteers in Probation (VIP/NCCD) Association. In order to obtain a reasonably representative sample, a modified form of stratified sampling was employed. Since the states with large populations had numerous volunteer agencies listed, more agencies were selected for study from these states than from states with smaller populations. Several states had no agencies listed.

Thirty-five agencies were selected for study. The directors of these agencies were contacted and asked to send the researchers a list of volunteers and their addresses. Some agencies contacted did not respond, while other directors of agencies indicated they had few volunteers or did not have updated lists. Twenty-six agencies provided the researchers with lists of volunteers and their addresses. Eight hundred forty volunteers' names were received. Each volunteer was mailed a questionnaire, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, and a return envelope. The results reported here are based on 545 returned questionnaires. Since the results are based on a limited number of volunteers, no generalization to the total criminal justice volunteer population can be made. However, the population of this study is varied enough to provide useful information and define differences in the characteristics, motivations, and sources of satisfactions of many volunteers.

Profile of the Volunteers

The stereotyped image of a person who is likely to offer services as a volunteer has often been characterized as a white, middle-class, middle aged female. Although the findings of this study revealed that the majority of the criminal justice volunteers were white and middle class, wide variations occurred in age, levels of education, occupations, religion, and marital status. Particularly interesting is the high proportion (44%) of male volunteers. A summary of the volunteers' characteristics is given in Table 1, on the following pages.

It is interesting to note that although minorities make up a disproportionate amount of clients involved in the criminal justice system, only eighteen percent of volunteers were minority group members. It is evident that minorities need to become more active in the crim-

Table 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEERS

Characteristic	Percent
Sex:	
Male	44%
Female	56%
No Information	Less than 1%
Age:	
16-20	7%
21-30	32%
31-40	25%
41-50	16%
51-60	13%
Over 60	7%
Race:	
White	82%
Black	15%
Other	3%
Religion:	
Protestant	27%
Catholic	29%
Jewish	4%
Other	34%
No Information	6%
Occupation:	
Unskilled/semi-skilled	11%
Skilled/technical	8%
Small business	5%
Management	6%
Professional	33%
Student	17%
Housewife	11%
Retired	5%
Unemployed	1%
No information	3%
Marital Status:	
Single	29%
Married	59%
Widowed	2%
Divorced	8%
Separated	2%
Education:	
Grade School only	Less than 1%
Some High School	1%
High School Graduate	13%
Some college or technical school	32%
College Graduate	22%
Graduate or Professional School	30%
No information	2%

inal justice volunteer movement and that volunteer agencies should make an effort to recruit and attract volunteers from minority groups. Unless this happens, the white, middle-class value system will continue to dominate the volunteer movement. Volunteers from other classes and the minority cultures could certainly add to an effective and more meaningful delivery of services to clients.

Comparisons of Volunteers in Adult and Juvenile Agencies

The volunteers in the study were next divided into categories of volunteers in adult agencies (268) and those working with juveniles (277). Volunteers with adults were almost equally distributed among males and females. They were predominantly white, and were concentrated in the 21-30 age bracket. The juvenile justice volunteers had a majority of females, were predominantly white, and also tended to be in the 21-30 age bracket. The educational levels of both types of volunteers were in the range of some college education through graduate school. Both types of volunteers also included high percentages of professionals. Students made up 13% of the adult volunteer population, and 21% of the juvenile volunteers. Volunteers in both groups were similar in regard to religious preference. Over 30% in each group regarded themselves as belonging to a religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. Sixty-four percent of the volunteers with adults were married, compared to 55% of the juvenile volunteers. The majority of both groups of volunteers had been working two years or less in the criminal justice area, while one-third had been criminal justice volunteers more than two years. This shows that many of the volunteers had managed to survive the "burn out" syndrome often associated with volunteer work. In summary, the juvenile justice and adult justice volunteers were similar in most characteristics, with the major variation being a higher percentage of male involvement in adult volunteer work.

Motivations for Entering Volunteer Work

To assess the strength of motivational factors among volunteers in this study, the respondents were asked to rate factors as being "very important," "of some importance," or "of no importance" in their decisions to become involved in criminal justice volunteer work.

The strongest motivational factor for both adult and juvenile agency volunteers was the opportunity to help other people, fol-

lowed by the hope of making the community a better place to live. Religious beliefs which stressed helping others ranked third as a motivational factor for both groups. Table 2, reports the five strongest motivations for volunteer work as they were ranked by adult and juvenile agency volunteers.

As shown in Table 2, volunteers working with adults emphasized religious beliefs as being of greater importance than did volunteers working with juveniles. Fifty-two percent of the adult agency volunteers regarded this as very important, while only 38% of the juvenile justice volunteers felt their religious beliefs were a very important factor in motivating them to volunteer. The adult justice volunteers also had a higher percentage who regarded volunteer work as the duty of a citizen. However, the juvenile agency volunteers had a higher percentage (36%) who viewed volunteering as a chance for a new experience than did the adult volunteers (24%). Other factors which were rated very important by some volunteers with juveniles were having friends who influenced them to get involved in this type of activity, volunteering as a chance to get a paid position in the field, or being persuaded by the staff of the agency to become involved.

When the factors which were considered of no importance by adult and juvenile agency volunteers were compared, the same four factors were unimportant to adult and juvenile volunteers. Both

Table 2

A COMPARISON OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS REGARDED AS VERY IMPORTANT
BY ADULT AND JUVENILE JUSTICE VOLUNTEERS
(N=545)

Factor Regarded Very Important	Adult Volunteers (N=268)	Juvenile Volunteers (N=277)
I wanted an opportunity to help other people	80%	83%
I felt I could help in making the community a better place to live	53%	49%
My religious beliefs stress the importance of helping others	52%	38%
I felt it was my duty as a citizen	27%	18%
It was a chance for a new experience	24%	36%

groups appeared to be motivated more strongly by their altruistic feelings than by outside factors. The juvenile justice volunteers did not value personal contacts with friends or relatives as a motivation for volunteers as strongly as did adult volunteers. One explanation of this finding is that adult volunteers probably know more people who are or were defendants in the criminal justice system and they tend to become involved in the process due to the possible frustration that are jointly shared with their friends, relatives, or spouses. Using volunteer work as an opportunity to gain a new experience was viewed as being less important to the volunteers working with adults than the juvenile agency volunteers. Only 24% of those working with adults viewed this as very important, while over one-third (36%) of those working with juveniles attached strong importance to it.

The responses revealed that neither adult or juvenile justice volunteers were influenced by factors such as looking for some constructive way to use their free time, being swayed by the mass media to become involved, or being required to volunteer as part of an educational program. Most volunteers were not recruited by the agency, but volunteered out of their own need to feel that they were contributing to the betterment of society. Although a liaison agency or office was a possible beginning, it is important to note that volunteers initiated the contacts, rather than being asked by the staff of the agency or persuaded by friends or relatives.

Activities of Criminal Justice Volunteers

Volunteers are often discouraged from working in a setting where they might constitute security risks or in agencies where they may be perceived as troublemakers, or nuisances. Thus the volunteer must be very selective when the decision is made to contact an agency and offer their services. In a study by Parker and LaCour, the following was observed:

There are many areas of corrections where volunteers are not welcome and, in fact, have not proven themselves to be of value. One might say that it is the practice of volunteerism in a hostile environment. The source of hostility, however, is not from anger or contempt for the volunteers, but is from concern over the tremendous responsibility we place on our wardens

and superintendents. Volunteers add to this responsibility. (Parker and LaCour, 1978, p. 45)

In this study, the volunteers were asked to report the frequency with which they performed certain types of activities. It was discovered that volunteers working with juvenile and adult offenders became involved as friends and advisors. This finding underlines one of the strengths of volunteer use in criminal justice. Professionals, such as probation officers or youth counselors, often must serve as authority figures rather than friends. Volunteers, in contrast, may be able to establish a friendly relationship with clients more easily, since the volunteer is not viewed as a threatening or sanctioning person. The combined efforts of professionals and volunteers with a client may compliment each other and meet a variety of client needs.

The data showed that volunteers are very frequently assigned such routine tasks as providing transportation and accompanying clients to recreational activities. This may provide opportunities to interact with clients in a more personal way. Eighteen percent of those working with adults assisted in finding jobs for their clients, compared with six percent of those involved in juvenile work.

In contrast to what one might predict, the juvenile justice volunteers were not actively involved in tutoring the youths under their supervision, nor were the adult justice volunteers active in assisting the adult offenders to obtain welfare benefits. Activities in which the volunteers working with juveniles were involved more frequently than those working with adults included sharing social events. Seventy-two percent of the juvenile agency volunteers used these social events as an opportunity to offer friendship. Apparently the juvenile agency volunteers are individuals truly concerned with helping others. They appear to give more of themselves and become more interested in the immediate needs of the clients. The adult agency volunteers devoted more time to family and employment counseling. The adult justice volunteers appeared to spend less time concentrating on the social aspects of the clients' lives and were more interested in acting as stabilizing influences.

Overviewing the activities of the adult and juvenile justice volunteers, it is evident that their work is mostly based on friendship and the maintenance of the support system that is formed. Although their specific activities varied, both groups were most frequently involved in offering opportunities for friendship and offering individual and personal counseling.

Confronting Situations for Volunteers

The volunteer is often faced with situations which provide frustration and dissatisfaction. In order to gain a clear picture of what these situations are, the volunteers were asked to complete a checklist of problem situations they might have faced while volunteering.

Many volunteers were frustrated by being placed in situations where they were not given proper direction and guidance by the agency staff. Often they were not filled in on the goals of the agency or the specific purpose of the activities they were asked to perform. Not being taken seriously by clients was another source of frustration. When the authority of the volunteer is not exactly defined, the clients may perceive this and try to take advantage of the situation. Thirteen percent of those working with juvenile offenders and ten percent of those working with adults were confronted with clients who did not respond to their directions. Communication problems between volunteers and agency staff were noted by 24% of the juvenile agency volunteers and 21% of the adult agency volunteers. Other situations which caused frustration were lack of proper training, being taken for granted, being uninformed about the details of the clients' cases, and animosity from staff members of other agencies.

Job Satisfaction of the Volunteers

An important part of each person's emotional well-being is feeling good about what he or she is doing. Each responding volunteer was asked to note his or her level of satisfaction with volunteer work. Knowing that they had helped and continued to help others was rated as the top source of satisfaction by both types of volunteers. Eighty percent of the volunteers working with juveniles rated knowing that they had helped as a major source of satisfaction, while seventy percent of the adult agency volunteers rated this as rewarding. Having the feeling of being needed and belonging to a good group of people were gratifying experiences for both groups of volunteers. It is evident that very few volunteers wanted any type of stipend or payment for their time. Rather, they regarded having a helping role and being needed as more rewarding than payment or expressions of community approval. Only three percent of the juvenile agency volunteers and four percent of the adult agency volunteers checked receiving recognition by the community as important. Most of the volunteers did not expect their work to lead to a paying job or to a position of importance in the community.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined a sample of criminal justice volunteers who were working with both juvenile and adult justice agencies. Our data revealed that the typical volunteer in our study who was working with juvenile offenders was most frequently a female, 21 to 30 years old, who was white and had a college education or at least some college. She was also likely to be a professional and married.

The volunteers working with adult offenders were almost equally divided between males and females, in the 21 to 30 age range, white, and had some college education. This person was typically a professional and married.

Volunteers for both the adult and juvenile agencies regarded the opportunity to help and the feeling that they would make the community a better place to live as their most important motivations for entering volunteer work. Both categories of volunteers did not consider the influence of friends, the hope of getting a paid position in the field, or the persuasion of the agency staff as strong motivating factors.

Activities in which the volunteers participated included offering friendship, providing counseling on an individual or personal level, and providing transportation. Activities in which many volunteers were seldom involved included tutoring, obtaining welfare benefits and/or obtaining medical or psychological attention for clients.

Both adult and juvenile volunteers regarded poor communication as their biggest problem. Another area of concern for both groups was not being taken seriously by clients because of their limited authority.

Both types of volunteers were rewarded or gratified by the fact that they knew they had helped and were helping others. Their basic need to feel wanted and needed and the return of the feelings was what satisfied both groups. Again, no variation could be found between the adult agency volunteers and the juvenile agency volunteers in this regard.

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