

# Volunteerism in Korea

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As in other countries, volunteerism in Korea is not new. From ancient time, Korean communities have developed their own special mutual-help and volunteer programs all across the country. Dure (community cooperatives), hang-yak (rules and regulations for building communities), gye (mutual lending clubs), pumasi (volunteering to help disadvantages neighbors), are some examples of volunteer programs that have been practiced for at least a couple of hundred years.

It is fairly recent that the terms "volunteer" and "volunteer service" have come to be used in Korean society. These terms were widely used for the first time around the time of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics, in which a number of sports volunteers got involved. After these events the term disappeared in general society until 1994 when there was a revival of systematic volunteer movements in schools, companies, and the mass media.

In July 1994, the JoongAng Ilbo, the second largest daily newspaper in Korea, started a huge volunteer program as a major public-interest campaign for the first time in the history of Korean journalism. They established a separate Bureau of Volunteer Service inside the company. The role of this bureau was to write volunteer stories for the paper and initiate various volunteer events such as "Koreans Make a Difference Day" (since renamed "National Volunteer Festival"). Following this lead, Han-Yang University set up a Social Service Corps in September 1994, to promote and assist student volunteer activities, and in October 1994 Samsung, the biggest

business group in Korea, set up the Samsung Social Service Corps to promote volunteerism among employees. By the end of 1994 the government also began to get involved in the promotion of volunteerism. The superintendent of education in Seoul proclaimed that all the students newly entering the middle school from 1995 should earn 40 credit hours in volunteer service every year in order to graduate. That proclamation was more firmly institutionalized in the education reform of May 1995, in which all middle and high school students were required to do volunteer service for a certain number of hours in order to get into college. Thus, 1994 could be called "the watershed of Korean volunteerism."

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has assisted in setting up youth volunteer centers in 16 metropolitan cities and provinces since 1995, and the ministry of Women's Affairs has established volunteer centers for women. The Ministry of Health and Welfare also assisted in setting up clearinghouses for volunteering in all provinces. The Ministry of Government Administration and Local Autonomy has since 1966 given funding for the opening of comprehensive volunteer centers in every self governing body, which amounts to almost 250 centers across the country.

Systematic approaches to the education and training of volunteer leaders and coordinators have also been worked out. Volunteer 21, the sole professional volunteer training institute in Korea, has opened a regular training course for volunteer leaders. Also, the

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Federation of Volunteer Efforts in Korea (FVEK), located in Busan, issues a certificate to volunteer coordinators who have completed a training course of 76 hours under the auspices of Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) of the United States. FVEK has trained and given licenses to more than 350 volunteer coordinators since the program began in September 1999.

The first and only up-to-date, comprehensive survey on volunteering in Korea was done by Volunteer 21 at the end of 2000. According to that survey, the percentage of the adult population who volunteered in 2000 was only 14 percent, which is less than half of the corresponding figure for advanced countries. The average time of their volunteer work was 2.2 hours a week. The money value of their volunteering time was equivalent to 0.58 percent of the total GNP of Korea.

There are many tasks the Korean volunteer community should address in order to ensure a bright future for volunteerism in this country. Following are three of the most important tasks:

- 1) The first and most urgent task to be addressed is quality control for volunteerism. Middle and high school students are required to do volunteer work before graduation, however, their volunteer work tends to be only a formality in many cases. No service learning techniques have been adopted. A social system to do quality control for volunteering, especially for students, is desperately needed.
- 2) To secure as many volunteer coordinators as possible, who are well trained and licensed, is also a desperate need. As mentioned, about 250 municipalities across the country set up their own comprehensive volunteer centers, about half of which are run by voluntary organizations and the other half are run directly by local governments. Both of these two models, however, are lacking well-trained volunteer

coordinators, thus often giving rise to confusion in guidance by lay volunteers.

- 3) There continues to be ongoing effort to seek passage of the Act for Assisting Volunteerism to help build a good infrastructure for a system of volunteer administration. Well-designed volunteer centers and well-trained volunteer coordinators have long been a desire of the Korean volunteer community. To build a national umbrella organization for volunteerism, like the Points of Light Foundation (POLF) in the United States, has also been a long-term quest.

The year 2002 will be the year when the Korean volunteer community opens its doors to the international community of volunteers. International Association for Volunteer Efforts (IAVE) will hold its 17th International Conference in Seoul in November 2002. It is expected that approximately 10,000 scholars, professionals and volunteer coordinators, which include more than 1000 foreign volunteer organizations invited from around the world, will be taking part in the Conference.