

Volunteers Training Volunteers: A Model For Human Service Organizations

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Human service organizations are supposed to train their volunteers. Some provide this training and do it well, while others provide little or no training. A major reason for this is that in recent years the number of volunteers has increased faster than the training capabilities of staff and facilities.¹ Volunteers do not and will not come "ready made." They need appropriate training before they begin their volunteer work, a fact this author learned quite well from past association with many human service organizations. I also learned that education, experience, employment background, and a high level of motivation are not sufficient. Volunteer programs are, however, successful only if volunteers are trained to carry out assigned activities, have a clear understanding of the agency's expectations and also have confidence in accomplishing the entrusted duties. Managers of many human service organizations have come to recognize that they can fulfill training needs of potential volunteers only if they involve seasoned volunteers in training them. The purpose of this paper is to present a model for doing this. The model is an outgrowth of my personal training and work experience at RAFT, a nonprofit crisis intervention center in Blacksburg, Virginia, in which trained volunteers help people in the community resolve their problems and crises through hotlines and walk-in shelter services. These services are available to all people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. RAFT handles approximately 4000 calls and 200 walk-ins per year.

THE MODEL

The term "model" is defined here as the simplified, step-by-step procedures

and methods associated with training people for volunteer services, and also to involve them in training other volunteers as well. Accordingly, the model will demonstrate the existence of a systematic relationship between volunteer trainers and the procedures and methods involved in training of new volunteers. The model considers the following five steps implemented by RAFT:

1. Recruitment
2. Orientation
3. Specific knowledge and skill training
4. Placement
5. On-the-job training

In the RAFT organization volunteers are involved at each step of the model.

RECRUITMENT

RAFT has a high turnover rate as one might expect in an agency that depends largely on student volunteers. Blacksburg, the town in which RAFT is located, is a college town and many students join RAFT for various reasons. Chief among the reasons is the three academic credits they gain to satisfy their internship requirements in social sciences. It might be reasonable to say that the organization has a recruitment problem, in that it is not actively recruiting community citizens who might be willing to stay long enough to provide the program continuity that only seasoned volunteers can provide. Only thirty percent of all volunteers can be considered seasoned volunteers, having worked at RAFT more than one year.

I learned about the RAFT volunteer training program through news media. Because I knew little about the organization at the beginning, I contacted the organiza-

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tion to get more information. Promptly, a volunteer competently explained about the training programs and the conditions and procedures for pre-registration. In fact, the volunteer emphasized the policy of time commitment, with at least two hours per week of volunteer work at RAFT for a minimum of six months expected. The volunteer also explained about the training fee which helps RAFT recover the costs of the training manual and workbook given to each trainee on the day of orientation. The fee is \$10 for an individual who eventually completes the training session. However, the fee is \$25 for those who register and attend only a portion of the training session. Since I completed the entire training, I became a volunteer at the end of the training process.

Volunteer recruitment often takes a lot of staff time. At RAFT, this time is reduced by involving seasoned volunteers who help prepare a recruitment plan and also implement it. Volunteers make personal contacts, prepare news for both print and electronic media, and even talk to groups (e.g., churches and local civic organizations) about the RAFT organization and its need for more volunteers. Thus the recruitment effort depends on the cooperation of a lot of dedicated people, both volunteers and staff.

ORIENTATION

Orientation begins for those who are committed to volunteer work at RAFT according to a previously planned schedule. The process clarifies the need for volunteers, their job descriptions, rewards, and other benefits. At the orientation, information about the agency and its training programs are handed out to the trainees, and the staff are introduced by the director of the agency. The director's introductory talk to the trainees embraces the history and development of RAFT. The director pays attention to explaining the benefits of volunteering, such as the opportunity to help others, learn new skills, gain a broader understanding of problems faced by individuals in the community, have an up-to-date resume, gain professional development, and share training and skills in program development for volunteering at RAFT. The objectives and goals of training, duties of volunteers,

qualification of volunteers, and time commitment are explained by the staff and provided in information leaflets.

As a part of orientation, staff and volunteer trainers demonstrate telephone listening in crisis situations as well as how to handle a walk-in at RAFT. During the demonstration, the importance of confidentiality in volunteer work at RAFT is emphasized.

The trainees are informed at the start that there will not be any make-up training sessions for those who fail to attend any section of the training program in that quarter. In that event, they have to wait for the training session scheduled for next quarter of the year.

Trained volunteers are effectively involved in the orientation of new volunteers by providing them the opportunity to talk about their activities at RAFT, interests and abilities needed for volunteering, and possible benefits from participation. Volunteers also explain the policies and procedures of the agency as they relate to volunteer activities. Experience has shown that providing an opportunity for veteran volunteers to share their experiences in the process of orientation has a motivating influence on them to get their continued support for the training programs at RAFT. Involvement of volunteers in orientation not only makes the program more meaningful to newcomers, but also alleviates the problem associated with lack of available staff time for training. However, the time spent by the staff in orientation is more than that of the volunteer trainers.

At the end of the orientation, each trainee is expected to sign a volunteer-agency agreement form. By signing this form, s/he agrees to abide by RAFT hotline policies and regulations. Descriptions of the training session and sign-up for special knowledge and skills training are part of orientation. Finally, a manual on policies and procedures and a workbook are given to each trainee, outlining volunteer duties, program policies, record keeping, and resources and referrals related to crisis handling at RAFT.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TRAINING

Every volunteer who works in a human

service organization should have training for the specific knowledge and skills required by his or her assigned job, in addition to more general training for other activities s/he might be called on to perform.² Each volunteer must know what is expected of him or her. Development of specific knowledge and skills requires more training time than is needed for a general orientation. It may also require more tutoring time, special instructional materials, and special attention to individuals.

Trained volunteers, directed and guided by staff, train new volunteers and share with them a wide range of experience essential to begin voluntary work at RAFT. Training of trainers (T.O.T.) is an important part of the volunteers-training-volunteers process. Active, knowledgeable, and talented seasoned volunteers are selected from a "volunteer pool" and given an opportunity to participate in a trainer training program. The selection and training of trainers is one of the primary responsibilities of the staff, and they spend a substantial amount of their time and effort to instill the desired knowledge and training skills in volunteer trainers.

Discussion with staff and observation of the trainer training process at RAFT reveal that planning and conducting the T.O.T. sessions need a considerable amount of continuous staff time. This high level of staff involvement in T.O.T. is necessary for two reasons. The first is volunteer turnover. RAFT loses some experienced volunteer trainers from time to time. This volunteer trainers dropout must be replaced by new volunteer trainers.

Second is the career ladder effect. RAFT provides opportunities for volunteers to advance from one job to another within the organization. For example, direct service volunteers may wish to advance their volunteer career by becoming volunteer trainers, and volunteer trainers may advance to management and administration of volunteer activities. So, again, new volunteer trainers are needed.

During the selection of volunteer trainers, staff evaluate each candidate's ability to be a good volunteer trainer. Staff select volunteer trainers who have completed a minimum of 150 hours of volunteer work

at hotline service and who demonstrate interest in training new volunteers. Qualified and interested volunteers will be requested to take part in an eight-hour workshop on training of trainers. As a part of training, special guidelines and instructions will be given to each volunteer trainer on how to conduct empathy training for new volunteers. In fact, the purpose of the guidelines is to maintain uniformity in the training of various empathy groups.

Empathy training is completely entrusted to volunteer trainers at RAFT. The empathy training is an intensive activity which progresses over four, three-hour group sessions. Each empathy group consists of three to four trainees and two volunteer trainers. The goal is to identify the feelings and responses of another person and communicate them to him/her. The basic idea of the empathy training is to develop listening and responding skills, and good communication ability.

There were five empathy training groups during the summer of 1985. During the empathy training, tape-recorded crisis situations were presented by volunteer trainers to increase the understanding and knowledge of using empathy to handle such problems. Each trainee was expected to react to the taped empathy simulations to demonstrate his/her skills in understanding various crisis situations. This was a way of accustoming trainees to the hotline environment.

An interesting and effective part of this special skills and knowledge training is that both trainees and trainers practice empathy with each other. In such a situation, one trainee will present a real, deeply-felt problem to his/her partner while others listen and watch their conversation. Each trainee has an opportunity to be both subject and empathetic listener. At the end of each simulation, the pair in the crisis conversation describe the real feelings of their experiences. This is followed by comments and suggestions from others in the group.

The special skills and knowledge training is conducted very professionally with a pre-planned agenda and concepts outlined on flip charts. Staff evaluate the performance of the volunteer trainers during a session in which potential volunteer

trainees criticize the performances of trainers. When this is done in non-threatening ways, it is a very useful technique to evaluate and select volunteer trainers.

During the first few occasions when a trainer is in a real training session, a staff member is present to lend support, as well as to observe the new trainer's performance. After the session, the staff member usually discusses the performance with the trainer, pointing out the good points as well as areas where improvements could be made.

The use of seasoned volunteers as trainers not only helps the staff, but also provides an opportunity for potential volunteers to acquire necessary knowledge and skills through their peers. It has been estimated that the involvement of volunteer trainers helps in saving 15 person-days for the agency staff.

The completion of a workbook on policies and procedures is an important and integral part of the training process. It covers attending to hotline crisis situations, clients, first aid, arranging the hotlines rooms, available guide books and sources of information, and drug types and vital symptoms. Completion of the workbook is a challenging activity and an excellent learning opportunity. It needs a minimum of 8 to 10 hours of work for successful completion and must be returned to the staff on or before a specified day and time. The workbook is corrected by staff members who make necessary comments on the performance of a trainee on the workbook.

A week after the end of the total training program, successful trainees are notified of their performance in the training as well as their suitability for placement with the hotlines. If any trainee is not qualified to be placed with the hotline immediately, s/he will be asked to go through a make-up empathy training to increase his/her empathy skill. Both the staff and the volunteer trainers evaluate each trainee to determine his/her suitability to be placed with the hotline.

PLACEMENT

The training process at RAFT provides an opportunity for many trainees to become volunteers. Following the empathy

group training, each successful volunteer trainee is expected to complete 50 hours of on-the-job training in hotline service to become a full volunteer at RAFT. Volunteer trainers assist the staff in matching volunteers with available activities by assessing each trainee's capability, interest, and suitability for certain kinds of volunteer work. Such assistance by volunteer trainers helps the staff to place potential volunteers in hotline services.

As a part of the placement procedure, each volunteer trainee must fill out an availability form which is kept in the phone room. This is to indicate the day and time a volunteer is available for duty (in two-hour blocks) to the staff in charge of scheduling. A change of schedule form must be submitted to the scheduler whenever a volunteer wishes to change his or her duty time. It is the responsibility of each volunteer trainee to fulfill his/her scheduled duty, or find another volunteer to fill his/her duty slot.

A no-show policy is in effect at RAFT. A "no-show" is a volunteer trainee who misses his/her duty slot without prior notification to the staff. A verbal warning, then a written warning, then a summons to appear before the volunteer board and, finally, dismissal are the sequence of actions to take in the no-show policy.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

On-the-job training is an integral part of the training program of volunteers. As a matter of fact, it is essential if the agency is to have well-trained volunteers who understand and know their jobs.³ During on-the-job training, experienced volunteers are paired with potential volunteers to help the newcomers gain experience in real situations.

An orientation to the hotline is given to each trainee by a volunteer on duty. While working on the hotline, different types of calls such as an empathy call, an information and referral call, and a business call are recorded in a specified manner in separate write-up books. The recording of an empathy call consists of the identification of the caller/client, nature of the problem, reaction and response, and identification of the volunteer trainee/trainer. All the write-ups by both volunteer trainees and trainers are re-

viewed by the staff and comments are made wherever appropriate.

Every trainee is expected to complete a minimum of 50 hours of hotline volunteer work to become a volunteer at RAFT. At the end of the 50 hours of volunteer work, volunteer trainees are evaluated by the staff. This includes a personal interview. During this interview, the staff will go through the write-ups and personal files of the trainees to determine the type of calls handled and the number of hours worked. Each trainee is expected to handle a minimum of five empathy calls, three calls related to drugs and alcoholism, and three information and referral calls. If any trainee did not get a chance to handle those specified calls, s/he must wait for an evaluation until after s/he handles such calls.

On-the-job training requires an extended period of time. With limited staff and time, it is difficult—if not impossible—for an agency to conduct an effective on-the-job training program. During this training period, volunteer trainers help volunteer trainees to look in-depth at procedures, policies and mandates of the organization. They also help trainees to study the handbooks and forms, and to observe how others do their jobs. Further, they assist the staff in supervising and evaluating the volunteer trainees.

SUMMARY

The RAFT organization conducts four training sessions in a year for new volunteers. Trained volunteers usually undertake the responsibility of training the trainees. These volunteer trainers spend relatively more time in training than the staff members. This is evident from an analysis of a training session in terms of time spent by both staff and volunteers. As an example, a training program was conducted by RAFT during Summer 1985 to teach volunteers to answer the hotline and to assist with walk-in crisis situations. The major goals of this training were: (1) to explore and analyze human crises and accompanying feelings of individuals; (2) to increase awareness of nonverbal and verbal behavior; (3) to understand different types of responses; (4) to understand and apply reflective responses; and (5) to apply different types of responses

under different types of human crisis situations. There were 16 volunteer trainees who participated in this summer training session.

The staff spent approximately two person-days in the orientation, while volunteers spent 0.5 person-days. A total of 100 person-days were spent by volunteer trainers during the period of on-the-job training. On the whole, except for the recruitment process, the staff spent two person-days, as compared to 116 person-days by the volunteers, in training the potential volunteers. This is equivalent to 58 person-days of volunteered time for every person-day spent by the staff. However, the ratio of staff time to volunteer trainers' time varies with the total number of volunteer trainers involved in the training.

PRACTICAL FEASIBILITY OF THE MODEL TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Volunteer training is the process which provides volunteers with the knowledge and skills they need to perform assigned volunteer activities. It may present new information or reinforce knowledge and skills the individuals already have.⁴ A responsible human service agency will have regular, systematic, and organized methods and procedures for training its volunteers. It will recognize its responsibility to develop the basic skills needed by the volunteers before they actually contribute their talents and time in appropriate activities.⁵ Involving volunteers in training programs not only will allow human service organizations to benefit from the knowledge and skills and other experiences of volunteers, but also will help volunteers to have satisfying and rewarding experiences in their volunteer activities.

Training procedures vary from one agency to another, depending on the availability of staff and facilities. A training and development program for new volunteers should involve trained, experienced volunteers. Such a system makes good use of available expertise as well as helps to overcome the limitations in manpower of staff. Without the involvement of trained volunteers, it is difficult for human service voluntary organizations to adopt a continuous training and development

program.⁶ The model presented in this paper may help service organizations to involve volunteers in their training activities.

My personal experience in the orientation phase of RAFT training gave me a mixture of interest, anxiety, and curiosity. During that period I thought that the volunteers were speaking for the RAFT organization but not for themselves. I also thought that it was inappropriate to use volunteers in training sessions. But it did not take even a week to realize the significant part volunteers play in the training model presented in this paper.

The model primarily considers the intensive involvement of trained and experienced volunteers in the training and development of volunteers in any service organization. The training of volunteer trainers by the staff is one of the important determinant factors in providing quality training for potential volunteers. Thus, the model draws attention to staff responsibilities for assuring quality training through adequate and appropriate supervision. This can be accomplished by a combination of methods such as observing training sessions on an unscheduled basis, followed by a staff-trainer conference.

Obviously, some volunteer trainers will need more supervision than others. Those who are adjudged by the supervisors to be unacceptable trainers should quickly be delegated other responsibilities—ones that are appropriate and acceptable to both parties and that make effective use of the volunteer's knowledge and skills.

My observations of frequent training sessions and personal discussion with staff in RAFT convinced me that using volunteers as trainers was rewarding as well as very successful for the RAFT organization year after year. However, the staff claimed that they did not save time by using volunteer trainers in training activities, but gained time to get involved in other administrative and organizational development activities.

In this training model, I found that there is a three-way relationship among staff, volunteer trainers, and potential volunteers which creates a friendly group atmosphere. The model not only allows po-

tential volunteer trainees to get acquainted with a variety of human crises during the training sessions but also provides them an opportunity for learning as they go through every phase of the training model. Volunteer trainees are informed in advance that they will not be left alone in difficult situations which might arise in their volunteer activities at the RAFT organization. Further, the quality of the training not only motivated many potential volunteers to successfully complete the training course but also helped them to become part of the RAFT organization over the following months.

FOOTNOTES

¹Rick Lynch, "Preparing an Effective Recruitment Campaign," *Voluntary Action Leadership* (Winter, 1984), 23-27.

²Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, *The Volunteer Community: Creative Use of Human Resources* (San Diego, CA: University Associates, Inc., 1975).

³Sue Vineyard, *Finding Your Way through the Maze of Volunteer Management* (Downers Grove, IL: Heritage Arts Publishers, 1981).

⁴Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder, CO: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976).

⁵L. Winecoff, and C. Powell, *Organizing a Volunteer Program* (Midland, MI: Pendell Publishing Company, 1978).

⁶J. M. Stone, *How to Volunteer in Social Service Agencies* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1982).

Dear Editor:

The staff of RAFT is very pleased to learn that *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* is considering publishing the article "Volunteers Training Volunteers: A Model For Human Service Organizations" by Dr. Kathiravelu K. Navaratnam. Dr. Navaratnam completed our training in the Spring of 1985 and has been a dedicated volunteer ever since. He has worked very closely with our training staff in preparing and revising the article which he has submitted to you.

The training model of volunteers training other volunteers is one that has evolved over the last seventeen years

and has been the source of strength in our ever changing program. That is why we are excited that Dr. Navaratnam has been able to document our training model in order to share it with other human service organizations. We are confident that your readership would benefit greatly from the information presented in this article.

I would be happy to answer any questions that your readers may have about our training.

Sincerely,
Tim Rowe
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