



volonteuropa

WORKSHOP 25

VOLUNTEERING IN HOSPITALS

Sunday 11.30 Room 5

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WORKSHOP 25: VOLUNTEERING IN HOSPITALS

In the Netherlands there are some 800 volunteer coordinators in the health sector. This is a rough estimate. Intramural, in hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatric care and institutions for the mentally handicapped, some 300 to 400 paid volunteer coordinators are at work. In home care work roughly 60 to 70 nonpaid coordinators and dozens of paid coordinators. A large growth in numbers can be seen in homes for the elderly, from just a few some years ago to 200 or 300 paid volunteer coordinators now.

All this is a rough estimate made by the LVCV, the National Association for Coordinators of Volunteer Work in the health sector.

The association now counts 250 members from the 56 members at the founding meeting in the end of 1989. The origins of the LVCV lies at a regional group of coordinators. A joint course in 1975 formed the base for a regional association to exchange ideas and experiences.

In 1987 the regional group grew too large to still have efficient consultations, and the question arose if there were more of those groups in existence in the rest of the Netherlands. Through a national volunteer centre, which is now the National Centre for Volunteers, a survey was held in nursing homes in 1988. Amongst the hundred who reacted many were interested in exchanging experiences and refresher courses.

After the founding meeting of the LVCV the number of members grew slowly. When the growth stagnated a big recruiting campaign was set up, subsidized by the ministry of Welfare, culture and health. Then the membership doubled.

The association is for volunteer coordinators in the health sector, the largest part of the members works in nursing homes, the others in hospitals, for the mentally handicapped, in psychiatric care, homes for the elderly, home care and home nursing, reactivating and youth care.

In percentages: 36 % in nursing homes, almost a quarter in homes for the elderly, 10 % in hospitals, and other categories 5 % or less. (tabel)

The LVCV wants to work on the recognition of the profession of

volunteer coordinator. Being a coordinator is mostly a one-man or one-woman's job. That is why it is important that s/he can consult colleagues outside the institution on their function and on its content. Other volunteer coordinators are in fact the real colleagues: the professional brothers and sisters.

But there is a lot of diversity in this profession: from eight-hour jobs to fulltime. Sometimes it is an additional job for the management secretary, sometimes an extra task for the people who organise activities for the residents in homes, or sometimes an independent staff member.

Also the previous training of volunteer coordinators shows a lot of variety: vocational schools to university, from supervised activities, to personnel management, social sciences, social work in institutions, etc..

The LVCV wants to set up a more unified professional profile for volunteer coordinators through collecting and combining experience, mutual consultation, applied training and a joint development of a point of view.

Finally maybe there will be a solid and definite job description for volunteer coordinators and the same requirements will be applicable nationally for all candidates. Maybe there will be explicit attention in education for the specific skills needed for coordinators, who knows there will ever be consensus on the traing best suited for volunteer coordinators and the most favourable place within the organisation to work in.

Before consensus is achieved on these points within the association there will be many discussions between board and members.

So now I can only tell you about my view on our profession.

For me the source behind the right of existence of our profession is: the large significance of volunteers for Dutch society. I speak of a 'right of existence' on purpose because I still have to clarify and defend my job to people inside and outside the organisation. The importance of our job, the importance of a well done coordination of volunteer work in an organisation where unpaid work is highly necessary, is still underestimated. In my opinion because it is so complicated.

The importance of volunteer work for society has two sides:

1. the volunteer, or the unpaid staff
2. the client: person or organisation which uses volunteer offer.

1. The importance seen from this view is immense: the volunteer has an opportunity to make him or herself useful, to feel useful. Volunteers are people who are not able or do not want to do paid work, or put themselves forward out of idealistic or altruist motives. For them it is important there is a place to work where they can work voluntarily. For them it fulfills a need, they can develop themselves and it reduces the chance of individual problems. In addition a place to work is created for people who do not have any other place to go, so they are less isolated, from a social point of view.

2. For the client volunteer work is very important too: the volunteers do work that can not be paid, in both meanings of the expression. It is work on which society has agreed to not spend money. And this kind of work, certainly in the health

sector in the Netherlands, reflects those aspects of human care and attention, which are truly priceless. Ordinary attention, small deeds without pompous words, a listening ear especially for someone alone, human strength to push a wheelchair into the wood and so on.

Because the importance of volunteer work is so immense on two sides, the organisation of volunteer work should be taken very seriously. Volunteer coordinators do just that. And in their job this versatility/complexity shows.

What does a volunteer coordinator really do?

Of course the main task is clear:

- assure enough volunteers are available for the tasks that are open to them,
- ascertain that volunteers feel at home in their job, that their job matches their need,
- take care of the paid staff to develop a good relationship with volunteers and that they give counsel and support where needed,
- and assure that the organisation and its clients (residents/patients) really benefit from the dedication of the volunteers.

Of course this main task is clear to everyone, I can say with a smile, because do you see its complexity?

1. Recruitment of volunteers: a true PR-job. Knowledge of marketing is necessary, certainly when one looks at the latest developments here in the Netherlands: volunteers are wanted in more areas than before and the competition between the different sectors is heavy. If there is no cooperation between coordinators from the same sector, competition can lead to destructive consequences.
2. Selection of volunteers: a sound judgement of human nature is necessary to find out the true motives of people interested, a good conversation technique is wanted.
3. Job descriptions: writing skills are in order. To position yourself as a coordinator: take stock of what is going on among the paid staff, where the limits are for the professionals, where the largest holes are in the care services.
4. Acceptance of volunteers by professionals: continuously taking action regarding paid staff, remove resistance, foster goodwill for the other view of 'outside' volunteer staff.
5. Create cooperation: clarify to the paid staff how to structure the work of volunteers and how to support them.
6. Organise work meetings for volunteers and participation: be able to use discussion technique.
7. Training volunteers: on their job, on content, on process.
8. Offer personal attention to volunteers: in my view a volunteer coordinator should monitor if the volunteer has really found the right place. Always keep the door open for small talk, superficial or in-depth. Volunteers do not receive material rewards, so they should receive all the more immaterial rewards.
9. Develop a policy: the whole story about incorporating volunteers in a professional organisation.

Theses:

1. There should be one professional profile for volunteer coordinators in the health sector
2. As a coordinator your first priority are the interests of the volunteer
3. People with psychiatric or addiction problems should not be accepted as volunteers in the health sector
4. The most suitable training for a volunteer coordinator is the vocational school for supervised activities
5. The best place in the organisation is a staff position
6. The volunteer coordinator should offer every volunteer the same amount of personal support
7. Because volunteers do not receive material rewards, they should receive all the more immaterial rewards.
8. Some volunteer jobs should be paid
9. Paid staff always looks down on volunteers.