

# Recruiting Volunteers in Schools: An Inservice Program for School Counselors

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While the professional concerns of volunteer administrators and school counselors may not be identical, there is one area in which they can work together to meet their respective needs: namely the recruitment and preparation of student volunteers. Volunteer administrators are continually searching for sources of qualified volunteers. School counselors, on the other hand, are always looking for ways to acquaint students with the realities of the world of work. It seems natural enough, then, that volunteer administrators and counselors should join forces to meet one another's needs, plus provide students with significant career learning experiences. This article describes how administrators may reach out and develop more constructive working arrangements with middle and high school counselors.

## MAKING CONTACT WITH COUNSELORS

Not only do career theorists recommend it (Holland, 1973; Hoppock, 1976; Super, 1969), but virtually all career education models include career exploration as a central theme in their programs (Herr & Cramer, 1984). Counselors know that students need exploratory experiences that will lead to a better understanding of the realities of the work world. What many counselors do not understand, however, is the role that volunteerism can play in allowing students to explore the contemporary work place. Articles focusing on the positive aspects of volunteerism have been conspicuously absent from career counseling literature. So, if you have not been overwhelmed with requests from counselors to help provide students with career-relevant volunteer experiences, it is probably because counselors, and educators in general, have tended to overlook the contributions that volunteerism can make to the career development of students.

More than any other person in the school, including teachers and principals, counselors are charged with the responsibility of working with community representatives to emphasize and facilitate the contributions these persons can make to the career development of students (Herr & Cramer, 1984). Counselors are expected to work with persons outside the schools in effecting placements that will enable students to explore work-related areas.

From a purely practical standpoint, counselors are the logical ones to coordinate volunteer activities in the schools. First off, counselors understand the career development process and the specific career needs of students. Secondly, counselors enjoy relatively more freedom than do teachers in scheduling time with all students and community representatives. And, finally, counselors have the training, experience, and role responsibilities for coordinating and conducting programs for students relative to the career advantages that accrue from volunteering.

Counselors need to be reminded that the knowledge, skills, and perspectives gained by volunteers do not differ greatly from those gained by persons in paid positions (Driscoll, 1978). While paid work opportunities may be relatively limited because of school attendance laws and labor laws, especially for middle school and younger high school students, volunteerism has the advantage of making an array of work opportunities available to students.

It is equally true, however, that not all volunteer activities are career specific in the sense that students actually perform the tasks that genuinely reflect a particular career. But through volunteering students can learn a great deal about the setting in which related careers are found, plus it enables them to talk with other workers about specific careers, and this

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is important. In terms of their personal career development, adolescents are at the exploratory stage. They are still developing and refining skills, interests, attitudes, and values. Guided opportunities to explore career fields equip students with general skills and help develop an appreciation of the realities of the work world that later can be refined into specific job skills and worker attitudes. Exploring career fields provides students with information they need in order to make good decisions about the direction they want to go in their life work. It can also give them some idea of what is probable, possible, and desirable in selecting and preparing for a career.

But how can a director of volunteers better inform counselors of the pluses of volunteerism? If you want to pursue this possible source of more student volunteers, here are some practical tips.

A letter or telephone call to the supervisor of guidance in your local school system will put you in contact with the person who coordinates the work of all the counselors in your area. Or you may wish to contact the director of guidance of a particular school in your vicinity to explore the feasibility of meeting together to discuss the career implications of volunteerism for students. Another approach to contacting counselors is to go through their professional organization. Many school counselors belong to the American School Counselor Association, a Division of the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD). Each state has its own AACD branch with local chapters located throughout the state. A letter to AACD headquarters (5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304) will secure the name and address of the local AACD chapter president in your area. Since school systems, as well as professional associations, regularly schedule professional development sessions for counselors, you might request permission to attend such a session and present your proposal for enabling students to explore careers through volunteerism.

#### MEETING WITH COUNSELORS

Once you have arranged to meet with counselors, there are three main points to impress upon them. First, volunteerism

does count. Even though a recent Gallup Poll (1981) reported that only 20% of teen volunteers believed volunteer activities were meaningful in terms of helping them get jobs, there are significant career payoffs for students who do volunteer. Loeser (1979) identified how to conduct a job search, prepare a resume, handle a job interview, and the establishment of a work history as some of the major career benefits for the volunteer. Plot (1978) reported that more than 130 major U.S. corporations and state governments had revised their employment applications to include volunteer experience as a part of one's employment history. An excerpt from Lobb (1976) graphically illustrates the career-related value of volunteering:

*If you are a personnel manager with two new high school graduate applicants for a clerk typist position, whom would you hire? The person who had faithfully worked three hours a week since ninth grade typing for a children's hospital, or the applicant who had no experience whatsoever? (p. 10)*

A second point to make when meeting with counselors is the diversity of volunteer opportunities available to students in your own organization. If you join forces with other directors of volunteers, or work together with your local Volunteer Center, you can introduce counselors further to the vast array of settings in which students might volunteer. Hospitals, museums, charities, religious organizations, political parties, veteran's groups, health agencies, nursing homes, recreation programs, and social service agencies are just a few of the organizations that utilize the services of younger volunteers. All too often counselors tend to underestimate the availability of significant volunteer opportunities for students. Your job as a volunteer administrator is to introduce counselors to the vistas of volunteering in their own backyards.

If counselors will work with students in identifying areas of career interest, hopefully comparable volunteer activities can be arranged thereby enabling students to gain relevant work experiences that will further their career goals. Such community-based exploratory experiences will go a long way toward helping students

make more realistic career decisions.

Finally, counselors should be encouraged to inform their students of the career implications of volunteering. A systematic, school-wide awareness program should be considered by counselors to ensure that all students are made aware of the pragmatic career benefits of volunteerism. Students who already volunteer should help to convince their peers that volunteering is valuable and fun. Volunteer administrators can play an important role in helping counselors develop and implement such exploratory programs. The volunteer administrator's knowledge and experience in the volunteer community coupled with the counselor's training and interest in career development make for an unbeatable combination when it comes to planning introduction to volunteerism programs.

#### AN ORIENTATION MODEL

One possible model counselors and volunteer administrators might want to consider in helping students explore careers through volunteering is "Volunteer: It Counts!" (Beale, 1984). This counselor-led group guidance program consists of a series of four weekly sessions. The overall goals of the program are: a) to familiarize students with the rewards of volunteerism; b) to assist students in locating and securing volunteer positions; and c) to help students learn how to get the most from their volunteer experiences.

In the first session, the counselor reviews with students what it means to be a volunteer, where volunteers get placed, and what are the personal benefits for the volunteer. The counselor quickly points out that students should not have the idea that volunteering *must* be career oriented. Instead, being a volunteer is viewed as a two-way street; along with serving others, volunteer assignments provide students with invaluable opportunities to develop and refine career skills. It is noted that the principle advantage of volunteering is that its versatility and flexibility allow for the accomplishment of multiple objectives, both altruistic and pragmatic, on a less than full-time basis. Representatives from volunteer organizations are invited to attend this session and discuss specific volunteer op-

portunities with the students.

The second and third sessions are devoted to a review of job search basics. Assessing self, completing placement applications, and interviewing methods are discussed by the counselor. It is also during these sessions that a discussion of how to be a successful volunteer takes place. Among some of the *do's* reviewed are: a) know the goals of the organization for which you volunteer; b) know exactly what will be expected of you; c) be punctual; d) let your supervisor know when you will be absent; and e) document your accomplishments.

The concluding session focuses on documenting volunteer experiences. Since volunteer activities are important in developing a work history, students are encouraged to keep their own volunteer career portfolios, including dates of service, job titles and duties, and letters of acknowledgment. Students are advised to obtain signed statements from their supervisors documenting the nature and scope of their service, thus ensuring the availability of the data, even if the supervisor leaves the agency or if the agency closes.

#### CONCLUSION

Volunteer administrators and school counselors can become allies in recruiting school-age volunteers and providing these volunteers with meaningful career learning experiences. While many students do not appreciate the potential career-related benefits of volunteering, volunteer experiences can be stepping stones to part-time, summer, or even full-time gainful employment. The accumulated evidence is clear that volunteer experience does count when it comes time to enter the work force.

When all is said and done, volunteering makes good career sense for students. Where else can students learn job hunting skills, develop good work habits, make valuable personal contacts, and gain specific skills? Volunteer administrators and counselors working together can make these gains realities for large numbers of students, students who otherwise might never be afforded the opportunity to experience the realities of the work force before it is too late.

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