

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

ASSETS INVENTORY: *FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH*

Prepared by
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October, 1998

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Project

In April, 1997, several local agencies came together to discuss the need for a supported volunteering program in Waterloo Region. The group of involved agencies that emerged has been named THE RESOURCE GROUP FOR SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING (R.G.S.V.). A list of R.G.S.V. member agencies is located in Appendix `A.` All member agencies of the R.G.S.V. offer programs that support people with physical and health disabilities, learning disabilities, developmental challenges, mental health concerns or any combination of the above.

Supported Volunteering Defined

For the purposes of this project, "Supported Volunteering" means ensuring full participation by people who are marginalized in our community and enabling their integration into volunteerism. Supported volunteering can entail a range of functions, including: helping prospective volunteer placement agencies know how to work with people with disabilities; providing a coach for the volunteer; and/or a centralized placement agency that both helps volunteers identify their interests and abilities, and refers those volunteers to potential placements in not-for-profit organizations in the community.

Supported volunteering can be understood to include interventions on three levels:

- ◆ GROUP - providing training for agencies to enable them to be more inclusive
- ◆ INDIVIDUAL - support for the volunteer including providing a coach for a period of time and/or a partner either initially or on an ongoing basis
- ◆ SYSTEMIC - assisting agencies with the development of appropriate infrastructure to manage such a program

Community Issues Identified

Three major issues related to supported volunteering have been identified by R.G.S.V.:

- a) There is a lack of comprehensive integrated strategy that allows for the inclusion of all volunteers in the larger voluntary sector in our community.
- b) Anecdotal and statistical evidence indicates that more and more prospective volunteers require some kind of support.
- c) Charitable organizations are less and less able to accommodate volunteers who may require additional support, unless the support accompanies the volunteer.

Purpose

Responding to the community issues identified above, the project will seek funding to *build our community's capacity for supported volunteering services* by assessing current resources and gaps. Key components of the project include: *development of a program model to support and provide training for agencies wishing to offer volunteer opportunities*. Investigation of how the private sector might participate in the project will be a key activity.

The central purpose of OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL can be stated as follows:

To increase the community's capacity to open up new opportunities for all persons to exercise more control over their own lives and make a contribution to this community through volunteer work.

Philosophy Statement

The activities of the R.G.S.V. will be guided by the following statement of philosophy:

The RESOURCE GROUP FOR SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING is committed to assisting *all persons* to participate in satisfying, productive volunteer experiences. Our purpose is to remove barriers to full participation by educating and supporting community members, identifying and developing resources that promote accessibility and supporting individuals to cultivate their potential.

We believe that *all persons* have the right to informed choice and equal access to fully participate in the opportunities they choose for themselves. We believe in encouraging independence, individual growth, mutual respect, cooperative relationships, and partnerships within an understanding and welcoming community.

First Phase Goals

The R.G.S.V. will approach its work in two phases, with first phase goals as follows:

ASSESS the extent to which the community is already accommodating volunteers with special needs

IDENTIFY barriers and difficulties which volunteers are experiencing

INVOLVE volunteers in all aspects of the supported volunteering model development

BUILD awareness in the community about the need to include *all persons* in volunteer opportunities because we know that with awareness comes greater understanding, greater acceptance and greater accommodation

BREAK down attitudinal barriers about the perceived difficulty in accommodating *all persons* in volunteer settings

EXPLORE innovative partnerships with the private sector

DEVELOP a supported volunteering model that would facilitate community involvement

Assets Inventory

The assets inventory component of this project represents efforts to assess the current state of supported volunteering in not-for-profit organizations throughout Waterloo Region. It addresses four of the phase one goals listed above:

ASSESS the extent to which the community is already accommodating volunteers with special needs

IDENTIFY barriers and difficulties which volunteers are experiencing

BUILD awareness in the community about the need to include *all persons* in volunteer opportunities because we know that with awareness comes greater understanding, greater acceptance and greater accommodation

BREAK down attitudinal barriers about the perceived difficulty in accommodating *all persons* in volunteer settings

Two distinct methods will be deployed to complete the assets inventory. The first method involves a brief survey of a large number of community agencies in the Waterloo Region; the second method involves conducting focus groups with volunteers, prospective volunteers, and agency representatives. It is the second component - the focus group research - which is the substance of this report.

Focus Group Research

The focus group research component of the assets inventory will give the R.G.S.V. a more detailed look at the supported volunteering currently taking place in agencies in Waterloo Region. While intended to be neither extensive nor exhaustive, this research will nonetheless serve as a base line for further research as well as provide specific recommendations regarding the enhancement of supported volunteering through subsequent phases of the Opportunities For All project.

2. METHODOLOGY

The focus group research was conducted using the following process:

Focus Group Construction

Based on information from the community agency survey and questions arising therein, it was determined that this component needed to collect more detailed information from the following populations:

- ▶ agencies that currently (or have recently) involve(d) persons with disabilities as volunteers
- ▶ agencies that have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers
- ▶ individuals with disabilities who are currently volunteering (or have recently volunteered)
- ▶ individuals with disabilities who have never volunteered

It was further decided that interaction in the focus group setting among representatives of the first two populations, and among representatives of the last two populations would be instructive.

Six focus group sessions were scheduled as follows:

1. agencies that currently (or have recently) involve(d) persons with disabilities as volunteers
2. agencies that have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers
3. a combination of agencies that currently (or have recently) involve(d) persons with disabilities as volunteers *and* agencies that have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers
4. individuals with disabilities who are currently volunteering (or have recently volunteered)
5. individuals with disabilities who have never volunteered
6. a combination of individuals with disabilities who are currently volunteering (or have recently volunteered) *and* individuals with disabilities who have never volunteered

Research Questions

A separate set of questions was created for each of the focus groups. These are found in Appendix “A.”

Sample Selection

To recruit agency representative participants to the focus groups, invitations were sent to the same mailing list that was used to conduct the community agency survey. To recruit individual participants to the focus groups, agencies were asked to pass along our invitation to any persons with disabilities that they worked with whom they thought might be interested in assisting us with our research.

Schedule

All six focus groups were conducted in mid-September, 1998 and were held in a relatively central, physically acceptable location in Waterloo.

Reminder Notice

Reminder notices and or phone calls were sent/made to all focus group participants to ensure their attendance.

The Sessions

The sessions were planned to run not longer than 1.5 hours and this is the commitment made to participants. All ran within a few minutes of that target.

Each session was attended by a member of the R.G.S.V. who acted as host for the meeting. This committee member welcomed participants, provided an outline of the project, and introduced the Consultant. The Consultant provided an introduction to the focus group format and its purpose, and helped participants to understand that their comments and thoughts were welcomed at any point throughout the session. She indicated that this was a research project and notified participants of the intent to tape each session. After obtaining participants' permission (none declined), the tape was started.

The Consultant ran each session, asking the questions scheduled for each session, and moderating conversations among participants. From time to time the R.G.S.V. member asked supplementary and clarifying questions as well.

3. THE SAMPLE

Respondents

The sample included a total of 26 agencies, 24 (92%) of which were currently (or had recently) involved persons with disabilities as volunteers, and two (8%) of which were not currently involving persons with disabilities as volunteers. Of the latter two, one agency had never involved a person with a disability as a volunteer, and the other had had what they considered to be only limited success in doing so in the past.

A wide range of agencies was represented among focus group participants, including representation from the following sectors:

- arts/culture
- disability service
- fundraising
- multiculturalism
- seniors
- recreation
- local government
- nutrition and food services
- health
- social services

The sample also included 16 individual representatives, 13 (81%) of whom had recently or were currently volunteering, two of whom (13%) had tried to locate volunteer work but had met with only limited success, and one person (6%) who had not yet volunteered and who had not thought seriously of doing so.

There was a wide variety of disability types and severities represented among the focus group participants including the following disabilities:

- mobility
- vision
- speech
- developmental
- cognitive
- mental health

The ideal focus group size was set at eight to ten participants, and respondents were scheduled into sessions as much as possible to create that group size. We had originally wanted to connect with a larger number of agencies that had not involved persons who had disabilities as volunteers, but no others came forward to participate. Similarly, we had wanted to connect with a larger number of individuals with disabilities who had not yet volunteered, but we were unable to reach others who were willing to participate.

When the focus groups were complete, the audio tapes were transcribed verbatim by the Consultant's staff. A thematic analysis has been performed on the data collected from all six focus group sessions.

Every attempt has been made to protect the anonymity of the participants and of the agencies that they represent, volunteer for, or have come into contact with while pursuing volunteering. All quotations excerpted from the transcriptions of the focus group sessions are verbatim with two exceptions:

- ▶ Anything in [square brackets] has been added by the researcher either to provide clarity of meaning, or to substitute for words or phrases that would have made the speaker or the subject identifiable.
- ▶ Three dots (...) indicates that a segment of a passage has been omitted. Typically this was done to omit extraneous verbiage that did not add substance to the text.
- ▶ A blank line always separates quotes from different respondents. If a quote begins a new line without a separating blank line, it means it is the same participant continuing to speak. Such an instance looks like this:

... the two people that I've recruited in the last six months: one has had, due to an accident, an injury, not really brain damage, but just slow in getting recovering and getting back to wanting to get back into the work force. The second person, chronic pain and disabled because of that ... definitely I have had to give extra attention to these people to place them in an appropriate placement.

...But there is that extra work to go through and I think we need to identify that because it's important for agencies to be aware of that. I mean, I haven't had a problem with it. I've really enjoyed and the people I've worked with ... to find placements for them have been incredibly supportive as well in trying to work things through for both of them.

4. THE RESULTS

While conversations in each focus group were guided in a general way by the pre-designed questions (see Appendix `A'), the discussions in each group took on a life of their own since questions did not always get addressed in the order intended, and participants offered other comments and questioned and responded to each other. Hence, the results of the focus group sessions include plenty of unexpected and even unsolicited material, all of which adds a valuable richness and depth to the knowledge gleaned through this project.

Results are reported below, not in a rigid format that follows the sequence of pre-planned questions, but rather, in a format that has been dictated by what participants actually told us, clustered under the topic headings that emerged from the data themselves. Most of what follows are quotes taken directly from the transcriptions of the focus group sessions.

Quotes are always indented like this and appear in italics to set them apart from the text and connecting commentary.

Data gathered from the three focus groups held with agency representatives are outlined below, followed by the data gathered from the three focus groups held with individuals.

A.) Agencies

Successes and Difficulties In Supported Volunteering

The experience of supported volunteering from the perspective of agencies was mixed among participants in our focus groups. Some agencies had had good success, others said their experience was “mixed” while still others indicated that their experience to date had been “not good.”

Here is a story to illustrate the kinds of positive experiences that can happen in supported volunteering.

I have a lady that started volunteering for us four and a half years ago. She actually came as a client and had recently become a widow. She was seeming fairly clinically depressed and was saddened that she could find nowhere that she could volunteer and I said I'm sure we could find something she could do. She was an old army nurse and in our volunteering we have someone who does paper work type of thing and someone who does scrubbing of instruments and I thought even though she can't see, I'm sure she knows how to do this. So I convinced [my supervisor] that we could use her and it's been an absolutely marvellous experience for her. She has felt so useful and has really, really enjoyed the camaraderie and the company of all the seniors coming in for treatments. Since that time she has actually become a recipient of [our services] as well.

... she felt that no one really wanted her. She seemed down - it was like she was just to the point where she was giving up. She wanted to give back; she had time now and now she had this problem with her vision and nobody wanted her.

Another participant offered this positive illustration.

We had a call from the [Volunteer Action Centre] about a lady who speaks minimal English but she was a resident doctor in China, she was incredibly intelligent, gynaecology; you name it, she did it, and very interested in medicine. She asked if she could come in and help with nursing. She's been a very positive asset. When she came in for the initial interview with me her husband came too and he's so interested he's working in the kitchen now as well. They come in at the same time. They love it there, they stay for 3-4 hours. We have a resident from China and they're friends.

And a third story about what volunteers can get out of volunteering:

We did have one volunteer who was actually sent to us by her therapist. She was pathologically shy. She asked to be at that front desk and we asked her "are you sure? you don't have to do this if you don't want to" and she did and we helped her, we supported her. If she was getting into trouble there was always one of us there ... and she went from looking down, and she looked down for a year, she is now assistant manager of [one of our key programs] on a volunteer basis. She went from being unemployable ...she now works at [a local store]. But it took two years of us saying "it's okay..if you don't want to do that, say...we're not going to make you do anything you don't want to do."

Agency representatives in the focus groups occasionally mentioned difficulties they had experienced in their supported volunteering activities. For example, one participant talked about not knowing how to approach volunteers with special needs or limitations. She spoke of an issue that other agency representatives also voiced concerning feelings of embarrassment in broaching uncomfortable topics with volunteers.

We have had from time to time, among our older volunteers, people with hearing impairments and we haven't really known how to address that situation. ...I'm thinking of one lady in particular who we knew did use hearing aids who would not bring her hearing aid and we did not know how to politely ask "you're answering the phone, could you please bring your hearing aid and turn it on."

This same participant talked about how a failure to deal directly with the disability resulted in an unsuccessful placement and a consequent loss for both the volunteer and the agency.

But it was how to do that...to politely and considerately acknowledge we're alright with a hearing loss, there is a way to cope with this, could you please do that. I think as a result when we have had people with hearing disorders, which seems to be the most common thing we have, they get frustrated. We get frustrated and we lose the volunteer which is not the ideal situation because obviously they can contribute. It's just we don't know how to adapt it their needs, they don't know how to adapt to our needs and we get caught in we don't want to offend you and you don't want to offend us and things fall apart.

A few agency representatives noted that the initial investment in orienting and placing supported volunteers can turn out to be a loss if the volunteer leaves after only a short time.

... it's like with anyone, you invest a lot of time and energy around a project or task and it's short term - its only three months - and it doesn't matter whether you have a disability or not, but of the people we've had with disabilities they've not been there in the long haul. Not because they felt they didn't have a good experience. They've got five or six other experiences on the go, or they've fallen ill or moved.

[For us, supported volunteering has been a] mixed bag. The one who has a support person it's worked out well. Some that have more mental health problems they don't seem to last long. They need a lot of one on one and if they don't have that close support person it doesn't always work out as well.

Mixed bag for us, some worked well and some haven't. Hasn't scared us off. Some of it's been in the area of mental health where we work with most of our programs. You win some, you lose some.

Speaking from another perspective on this same matter, one participant acknowledged the successes, even in placements that lasted only a short term.

I want to share the frustration that comes in hand with having to provide as much support and yet it only be for the short term and yet in that short term it's fantastic - very friendly situations, keeping in touch, got a beautiful thank you card from someone going back to school saying thank you for the experience and that's the reward in itself. It's good to know you can be of support to them and they've helped you out with tasks.

Participants spoke of the struggle to meet the needs of volunteers **and** the needs of clients, and as the following quote illustrates, this struggle can sometimes be just too much.

The dilemma sometimes is the clients ... and ... clients who we serve and some of the volunteers who want to volunteer are sort of the same grouping and so if your value ... we have a value statement and one of our values is, you accept people for who they are so you have to ... if that's your value in terms of who you work with, you accept them as people, as human beings for who they are, then you should do the same thing for your volunteers. That's where it gets dicey sometimes.

Is Supported Volunteering Worth The Extra Effort?

Given that supported volunteering can absorb more time and resources, do agencies feel that it is worth the effort? Several said clearly that they believed that it is, but many said their experience was mixed - neither overwhelmingly positive or negative.

Yes and I've had 3 different special needs people who do volunteer work too who are still with me and I find that it takes extra time. Somebody comes in and gives them some training. You have to really be concise in what you tell them. You know, give them lots of steps. But it's worth it, because once it's done ... these volunteers do some of the jobs that the [staff] would have to do if the volunteers weren't there. Washing the dishes, cleaning the bathrooms, doing some laundry, things like that, and that takes the [staff] away from the children. So, yeah, in the long run it's really worth it.

Getting “The Right Fit”

Agency representatives spoke often of the importance of achieving the “right fit” between the volunteer’s gifts and limitations on one hand, and the requirements and benefits of the volunteer position on the other.

One of our frustrations is that it is often the volunteers who have more barriers, poor English, less skill, that want more of the opportunity or responsibility that don't reflect their skill level. That's dangerous ... could leave our organization vulnerable. We haven't directly turned people away. When we don't have a proper match between what we need and what they can give we just don't call back and that's not professional, I know.

Flexibility In Job Design And Position Modification

Finding the right “fit” between a volunteer and his or her volunteer placement is critical to the success of any volunteer’s volunteer experience. For people with disabilities who might need some accommodation (remember not all do), flexibility in job design and the willingness of organizations to modify positions is paramount. A small number of participants mentioned their willingness to be flexible in this regard.

There are lots of ways to contribute in [our organization]. We only have four staff people. We need help with outreach, we need help with managing volunteers, we need help with administrative stuff, archives, filing, dealing with the public, leading tours. There are lots of things you can do where you're not [creating any kind of risk] if that's not what you're comfortable with. And with it being just me at this point managing the volunteers I can build a job to fit anybody and I'm more than happy to do it.

In my opinion we need to at least make the effort. Our adopted philosophy is that every volunteer is given at least three times to try it out. We together decide if it's working out. There's a host of opportunities that have come our way in the last year where it's worked out much to my surprise, where people have found their way. We haven't actively gone out and recruited. As people approach us we go through a volunteer process that everybody goes through and we try and find a fit, a match. Sometimes it's at an entry level but there are fewer of these. We have computer support for people with disabilities.

When the “fit” isn’t quite right, the position can be changed:

The first Board member who had a developmental disability was considered a full voting member until other members realized he doesn't understand a lot of what we're talking about - couldn't understand implications of things. He became an associate Board member. ... It didn't start out that way but the Board said whoa, we understand what we're getting into but he's not capable of understanding that. He served on the Board for two years, added a lot in terms of Board understanding the issues from a different perspective.

Flexibility is important when problems arise in the placement.

It's dealing with issues that may arise. ... we found a way to [change a volunteer's placement in a way] that she doesn't frighten people anymore. [The volunteer] thought it was a promotion. We took her off the front desk. She actually spells in from time to time and it's great to know that we can rely on her when we're in a pinch she can spell off on the front desk but we've got her doing administrative work doing typing. She's delighted. We're delighted. We didn't lose the volunteer. And she did that all on her own. It was trying to find something to do with her ... because we didn't want to ask her to leave but we had to do something.

In contrast, one participant talked about a reluctance to involve persons with disabilities for the very reason that flexibility and adaptation is difficult in a changing environment:

I think in our agency one big key is flexibility in positions. We have things that crop up all the time that need to be done so we can initially [make accommodations] for a job, but what if that job changes? Then it would be that ongoing support [that we would have to provide to the volunteer] and then how can we accommodate the new thing that's come up and what will we do about that because we do tend to change a lot?

Supported Volunteering Requires Resources

Participants acknowledged that operating a supported volunteer program requires resources.

That's what we're hoping this project may end up that we can say to somebody - "God, if you want [the Volunteer Action Centre] to be finding the right niche for different volunteers, we gotta have more money here."

One of the frustrations for [our organization is that] our funders have vigorously promoted volunteerism but promote it only in terms of being a cost savings to the organization. I certainly have not seen volunteerism or experienced it in the last eleven years as a cost saver. You certainly get a lot out of the volunteers. We've benefited in many ways from the skills they bring to the organization but you need resources to keep good volunteers. So now, when you're talking about supported volunteering, I'm thinking, oh my goodness, yes, the resources just have to be put into volunteering because it's a cost savings if you're lucky to have a volunteer for months and months and months. The life span of a volunteer in our organization is probably about three months and we're lucky. ... When we talk about volunteering, especially when our funders bring these great ideas to us, hopefully they can get the message that it isn't a cost savings to the organization. I sympathize with the staff that I have when I say, guess who's responsible for the 12 new volunteers and they look at me almost in horror as if to say, gosh, you're not going to give that to us are you?

Because of our frail senior population we really have to watch because staff are stretched to the limit. How many resources is this person going to take. We do have one person who has a developmental disability who is portering people for hairdressing but he goes along with another volunteer so there's a supported role. We have some others who have some kind of mental disabilities who are visiting who require more one on one. Because of our population we have to really screen them well.

... the board can only handle one person with a disability at a time because it takes some extra work for the board, this person doesn't read very well. She requires audio tapes of Board meetings.

They also pointed out that policy makers and funders need to know that supported volunteering requires resources:

But maybe agencies shouldn't be the necessary target. Maybe policy makers, funders, government. Maybe it's a step beyond the question but agencies can only do what they can do with the resources allotted to them. Sometimes when we are told to support volunteerism and when our funders tell us that we are told to do so only as a cost saving method not because we have a moral obligation to do so. There's a dollar figure that must be attached to any obligation that any organization around this table has.

Because special needs volunteers can require more time and resources, organizations need to limit their numbers to match agency resources:

When we accept our clientele we accept some with high needs, some with low needs, some in chairs and we look for a balance so we can accommodate staff-wise so we are representing everybody and certainly in volunteers that can be true too. We don't have a balance. We have all able bodied university students which is a very small part of the population. We have ten volunteers right now so that balance is one person with a disability. They may take a bit more time but it's all in that picture. If we had ten people, all with disabilities, all who needed accommodation that may be difficult to sell but if we can balance it that's quite appropriate to do so.

The agency needs to be organized properly to accept special needs volunteers:

We've turned away volunteer requests for that reason; the person would require one to one or essentially coach and often those persons work in our ... program which has lots of hands on kinds of things but there's only so many people we can absorb ... sometimes we say no even if there's a coach willing to come along because we can't even guarantee enough work sometimes. We don't want to be stuck with a coach and volunteer who are there to work and that day the [work] you plan on being there isn't.

Another participant noted the limitations they have experienced because of the absence of a designated manager of volunteers position:

... We've had lots of students come in and that's worked beautifully. Even though that's worked really well, our board has not necessarily supported volunteers in our agency because they don't want it to detract from the well, you know, are you spending too much time managing the volunteers and not enough time in doing ... [the real work]? I try to argue but if I can get all these volunteers doing this stuff, then, then that frees me to do this [other work]. So it works out. I think there's probably some areas where we could create opportunities. Certainly we are an agency that has a lot to do.

Administrative Support For Inclusivity

Some agency representatives spoke of the struggles they had experienced in attempting to obtain approval from their respective administrations (boards and executive directors) for the notion of supported volunteering. It hasn't always been easy:

We've recently gone through a change of management and there is now a will to do it. A will to accommodate more need, to be more accessible to the community where before, there was a much more closed and elitist attitude, sort of, it was for the beautiful people. That's gone, thank God. And there's now a collective will to make the [organization] accessible to everyone.

At this point in time I think as an agency we need to investigate ways that we can open up opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer with us. We're building a new project right now, and certainly over there we won't have admin support so maybe we can get somebody to help with the admin stuff, photocopying copying, paper shredding, those kinds of things. It would be a matter of selling that to my boss ... that it's not taking too much of my time because I feel that that's probably the biggest barrier is that our E.D and Board has been continually concerned about sticking to what we're supposed to be doing here. It's clear there's a priority to do what we're mandated to do. I'm a little more broad minded because a little time spent now will yield a lot in future is my philosophy but it's somewhat hard to sell.

Sometimes accessibility and inclusivity result when the board is simply looking to appear to be doing the right thing.

Our building before was not accessible. It would have been an eighty to one hundred thousand dollar expenditure to put a lift or elevator to have the luxury of having someone on our Board or having someone employed there [who had a disability] ... and part of the pressure was to look like we were sympathetic to that of having disabled [people] or people who need support, that we could be open or inclusive.

With respect to this kind of administrative reluctance to welcome persons with disabilities as volunteers, two agency representatives acknowledged an inherent irony: sometimes the very organizations that resist deploying persons with disabilities as volunteers are organizations that try to find volunteer (and paid work) placements in other agencies for their own clients who are persons with disabilities.

I know [what some organizations have gone] through even to get our [clients] in there sort of on a volunteer basis. And all of you, that's what I meant before, seemed to be so positive and willing to try this and do this. And I don't think that's the scenario everywhere. ... I know [in our organization], it took us awhile - we pretty well had the whole gamut [of resistance] - we were quite firm in saying - if we're out there asking people to do it, we sure as well better be doing it in our own central office.

Another participant offered these comments:

I work in an agency that specializes in serving people with disabilities so it's rather embarrassing for me to come and say none of our volunteers have disabilities ... but I think maybe in the types of volunteer opportunities that we've had available we are not attracting people with disabilities. And, I guess it's funny to me because certainly ... I manage [a] program [in which] we certainly want our clients to volunteer in the community. We see that as being very important. We go and try to network with other people so we can get our clients to volunteer.

... I find it personally embarrassing ... I felt ... I didn't even know if I could come [to this focus group] because I use the Voluntary Action Centre to get volunteers and I use them to place our clients [as volunteers in the community] and yet we're giving nothing back. It should be more of a team work kind of approach. There's got to be some give and take. We certainly take and we don't think we ourselves should be making accommodations.

The Nature of The Work Of The Agency

The extent to which an organization is willing, or able, to be open to supported volunteering may depend on the nature of the mission of the agency, and on the work in which it is engaged.

For example, some participants indicated that they felt it difficult to accept as volunteers any persons who had a disability or limitation that resembled the disabilities or limitations of the agencies' client group.

Any type of cognitive disability would probably be a problem because we are working with people with cognitive disabilities.

Staff would say, okay I'm giving this volunteer just as much support as what I would a member so where do we stop, where do we say they're no longer a volunteer, or, it becomes too overwhelming for staff because they're giving them the same type of service that they would to a member. In some situations we've had to say it isn't working out and find something else for them to do. In about 50% of situations where we've recruited a volunteer with a mental health disability, it hasn't worked out. If we recruited someone with another disability, physically challenged or language barrier for e.g. it has worked out

....

Sometimes the nature of the work of the organization, or the nature of the client population and their specific vulnerabilities pose limits on the type or extent to which volunteers with special needs can be involved. The following comment illustrates this point.

We find it hard. People are coming in with very serious emotional needs and a lot of our volunteer positions are based on supporting our seniors who are very vulnerable or could be confused. In our matching program the residents usually that are referred have high emotional needs themselves at that time.

Another participant raised the same point this way:

... it is challenging as well when, we have our nursing home so there's a lot of confusion [among our residents]. Another major barrier has been [volunteers] need to have the perceptual level to understand when residents are saying things like "I'm going to go home, or can you take me home" that you can't take someone out the doors, that they're confused. Judgement is important.

The converse can also be true. Where the work of the organization lends itself, people of all sorts, capacities and limitations can be integrated as volunteers.

... we have volunteers of every description, every disability. There isn't one that I can think of that [we don't have]. ... [The work at our organization is not] real complicated one-on-one stuff. We do some one-on-one stuff, but we do a whole range of activities so we're able to be inclusive.

Clients As Volunteers

An increasing proportion of organizations are seeking to involve their clients as volunteers, in particular, in board and advisory capacities so that the organization is assured of incorporating clients' input into decision-making. Other organizations also allow, or even encourage, clients and ex-clients to become involved as volunteers in service delivery, and sometimes this is done as a way of extending the client's recovery, healing, rehabilitation, therapy, etc. For these organizations, the transition from exclusively client, through sometimes-volunteer, all the way to "full-fledged" volunteer is a strategic part of client service.

For volunteers whose recovery/healing (etc.) does not take place in a strictly linear manner, individuals are clients, then pseudo-volunteers, then clients again, then volunteers, and so on, following their own individual paths toward wellness. Organizations in the field of mental health have done much to pioneer volunteering as part of the recovery process. There are different approaches and rules from agency to agency about how these transitions should take place. For example, one organization represented in the focus groups spoke of two conditions around the involvement of their own clients as volunteers.

On the flip side of that, we might have had a member that has progressed so far in the program or the organization that they really don't want to be a member anymore but would like to continue being in the organization so they would say, can I become a volunteer now? The issue then comes up for other members who used to see that person as a member and now they're a volunteer so we have to say, okay, yes you can volunteer but it wouldn't be in the program, or , if you're really set on volunteering in the program, you'd have to leave the program for at least six months to a year.

A participant who works in an organization that serves people with disabilities noted the importance of volunteering for their clients, but added that it is better if their own clients volunteer in some other agency.

I always worry about a conflict of interest with that. If we had our clients doing work that wasn't paid that may be perceived as us taking advantage because we have clients who can be considered vulnerable and subject to influence. So I'd prefer to have someone from outside with a disability come in and volunteer. When we've looked at volunteer opportunities for our clients we've always looked elsewhere. Part of that, to be fair, is that we like to see people getting out of where we are and seeing other people.

For another participant, the fact that special needs volunteers are like the clients being served results in a reluctance to accept them, yet the principles of inclusivity that the organization applies to its clients **ought to apply** to special needs volunteers too. A dilemma results.

The dilemma sometimes is the clients ... and ... clients who we serve and some of the volunteers who want to volunteer are sort of the same grouping ... we have a value statement and one of our values is, you accept people for who they are so you have to ... if that's your value in terms of who you work with, you accept them as people, as human beings for who they are, then you should do the same thing for your volunteers. That's where it gets dicey sometimes.

“Value Added” - Volunteering As Therapeutic/Therapy

Since very few organizations exist to give volunteers a place to volunteer, but rather, invite volunteer participation as a human resource directed toward the accomplishment of the organization’s mission, it is generally the case that the “output” of every volunteer must exceed the time, energy, and resources required to achieve and sustain the placement.

Since supported volunteering can sometimes mean that the organization needs to make special accommodations or devote more time and effort to support an individual in his or her volunteer placement, extra care is sometimes in order to ensure that the volunteer’s output warrants the agency’s input. When the balance tips too far in the direction of input to the volunteer without adequate return to the agency, supported volunteering moves from being “therapeutic” (a useful tool in integration, recovery, healing, etc.) to more closely approximate “therapy” - that is, it becomes volunteering for its own sake and for the exclusive return to the individual volunteer, rather than for what the organization and its clients might also receive from the exchange.

One focus group participant spoke about how their organization involves students with special needs and how those students work right along side paid staff. But it was subsequently revealed that the students do a less than adequate job, and because they can’t be seen to be taking work away from unionized staff, they are allowed to continue and (unionized) staff simply redo the work later on. In this scenario, the involvement of students appears to be of exclusive value to the individual student.

Sometimes they don't do good work, it has to be redone, but it's still important that they've got somewhere to go rather than sit at home and watch T.V. They've got somewhere to go, some people to interact with. ... we've got the union to deal with, ... and so when we bring [students] in, we can't give them work that we're taking away from someone else that would be paid to do it. So we use them to enhance the work that is being done. We have cleaning crew that works 12:00 at night until 8:00 in the morning and they clean meeting rooms, tables, windows and so on. You have a meeting like this that's over at 10:30. The tables need to be cleaned and stuff and these kids will come in and clean them up. They may not be one hundred percent the way you'd like to see them and the windows might be streaky. So they get done later in the day - they'd normally get done then anyway.

While the participant justified the practice by pointing to the other benefits the students receive from their work such as socialization, contacts, and so on, other participants in the focus group expressed discomfort, and even anger:

What's the point then? To me that's tokenism. Give them a pat on the head for doing a half-baked job and then ... I would find if my son were in a situation and that was happening, I'd be furious because they're obviously not being trained and counted as a person who's doing a job.

Clearly achieving a proper balance between the resources input required to find or create the right position for the right volunteers and the productivity output from the volunteer in the position can be difficult to achieve.

Right To Volunteer/Obligation To Be Inclusive

Even though it is acknowledged that organizations have a right to expect a “return on investment” - productivity from volunteers that agencies recruit, screen, orient, train, place, supervise, recognize - one might wonder if there might be some additional obligation on the part of organizations to go “above and beyond the call of duty” in order to make it possible for *all* people to volunteer, including those with disabilities or other special needs or limitations.

Is there a general responsibility on the part of organizations in the voluntary sector to expend greater efforts for special needs volunteers? Perhaps as a service to the community? Perhaps by way of making volunteering and its rewards inclusive of all prospective volunteers? Perhaps by way of avoiding being discriminatory, exclusive, or “ableist”?

There has been little discussion of these questions in the literature on supported volunteering, and there is surely no consensus. Even though many would argue in a general way that people with disabilities should be able to access volunteering just like non-disabled persons, that does not necessarily translate into an obligation to accept any person who shows up expressing an interest in volunteering. Agencies must retain the right to say ‘no,’ to prospective volunteers who they deem to be unqualified or inappropriate for any other legitimate reason. But still the question remains, is there some general obligation on the part of the voluntary sector to practice the values they espouse? To demonstrate the principles of equity and justice that so many of its organizations take as their mission?

A few focus group participants spoke to this theme. One participant who coordinates volunteers in a public institution personally felt quite strongly that there she has an obligation to find or create a volunteer position for anyone who wishes to volunteer in the facility, that volunteers have the same rights as the patrons of the facility.

Of course, that's a hard question because she's as much our client as the person walking in from the street. The work that we try to do with the voluntary services since I [began as the manager of volunteers] ... and this is my personal philosophy and [administration] may not agree with it at all ... we are a public institution. We have a moral obligation to serve the public. Part of that obligation includes providing volunteer opportunities, opportunities to contribute to the [facility and its services to the public], and opportunities to participate if they want to. As far as I'm concerned, no one gets turned away because it is a public institution and it's my job to find a way for them to fit in and I mean, that's the way I run that volunteer program. It may not be the best way; sometimes I'm finding that it's really complex but that's the way I feel about it.

When the researcher asked the participant to speak to any difference between obligations to users/patrons of the institution and to volunteers, the response was this:

To me it's the same thing. As a public institution we have an obligation to be open to the public in however they wish to use us and that's part of it. If we are not completely and fully integrated into the community which we serve we will not survive. If the community, especially through volunteering, takes ownership ... they will not allow the facility to be destroyed. ... It belongs to everybody. Everybody must have access. If they choose to take their access through volunteering it is our obligation to provide that to them. And until I drop, that's what we're going to do. I have an E. D. who supports that. She was the one who said, "I don't see why we don't have a supported volunteer sitting at the front desk; go get one."

Another participant echoed a similar sense of obligation in the following comments:

But I think we're all in providing services to human beings in one way or another in our community and my attitude is we can't shut the door on a member of our community, whether they are disabled or not. Just because we provide food to those in the community, like the food bank does, we're providing to human beings, so we should have our doors open to human beings. Does that make sense?

When asked if she thought integration of all kinds of volunteers was as much a mission as serving all kinds of clients, the participant responded in this way:

It is what they pay me for. To accommodate individuals from the community who want to benefit my agency. And if that means, I mean I personally don't think I make any more effort toward a disabled individual than I do an abled individual. I think we should all go out of our way ...

Another participant voiced a challenge in this way:

It's a personal thing - I shouldn't say it's a mission - I take pride in the fact that we are able to find and research things to match people. But that's certainly not our mission. Our mission is [providing services to our clients].

In another focus group, the same issue was raised, and two participants responded. One offered the belief that the involvement of all persons into volunteering was a “democratic ideal and a justice issue” and therefore something that agencies should strive for. She wouldn’t actually see it as an obligation, however. Another participant echoed the position. He said, “It’s the difference between ‘push’ and ‘encourage’.” He would agree that organizations should be encouraged to be inclusive in their volunteer programs, but not pushed to do so. The former participant concluded with this comment:

I think to exclude people with special needs in the community, for any organization to do that, is not creating the kind of community we are all hoping to be part of.

The Special Value of Supported Volunteering To Volunteers Themselves

It has been claimed that volunteering can bring especially important rewards to persons with disabilities or to persons who are otherwise marginalized from mainstream society. The feelings of productiveness, belonging, self-esteem, and so on that volunteers can reap from their volunteer work can have special meaning to people with special needs. Agency representatives in the focus groups supported this claim from their experiences working with special needs volunteers:

It's a sense that I get that this is a responsibility [for special needs volunteers], but it's different from how some of our other volunteers view it as a responsibility. Sixty percent of my volunteers are over the age of 65. Retired seniors well enough to still drive. Florida in the winter, cottage in the summer, you know, Stratford Festival, blah, blah, blah. And like I can help you out and I really like it, but I'm in Florida the next couple of weeks and then I'm back for 3 weeks and then I'm gone. I have one of the ladies [who has special needs] that labels the bags, she just got married last summer, so she was off for 2 weeks, but [other than that,] she's there every week, day in and day out and no problems.

On this special sense of responsibility, agency representatives said of special needs volunteers that they have a special sense of ownership over their volunteer work; that that sense of ownership is greater when a person does not have paid work.

I think it starts in high school. I think they start in high school and they do their placements, McDonald's or whatever - they have wonderful, wonderful work experiences and then high school ends and not only are they limited in what's available after high school - they lose their peers, because their peers have gone to university, college, another city and they're very, very isolated from the experience. I've had - especially with one guy I've worked with. He sits at home and watches T.V. unless he comes in to volunteer. So it's not - I really don't think with the individuals I've had experience with - that it's volunteering. I have to go into work on Wednesdays from 1 - 4. I think they understand that it's volunteering, but they change it to work - "It is my responsibility". And I think it stems from their work ethics that are drummed in during high school.

They're here to do this work, they take it very seriously, they're very connected. It is their whole life, their world - for many of them - you're right. School was their world before and whatever they can get in terms of volunteer work or paid employment becomes their world after.

Mine are seniors and my best seniors are the ones who are over 75 - they're no longer going south or anything else. And they literally take over - the whole clinic is their's. You know, the nurse comes and "It's nice to see you and here's our clinic and here's the people you're doing and this is our clinic".

The isolation experienced by some people with disabilities and other people who are marginalized from participation in mainstream activities can lend greater significance to the contact with other people that arises through volunteer work:

And for some of them too, I wonder if it isn't to some extent their social life because you're talking about the sort of normal volunteer who can go off to Florida or have the cottage in the summer and all that. Those people don't have those things to go to a great extent. So, like you say, they lose their peers from high school, so they need to connect with people; they need to have that social connection.

Clients Are Vulnerable and Sometimes Unaccepting

Sometimes it's not the nature of the work in the organization that presents a barrier to supported volunteering. Sometimes the clients are discriminatory, unaccepting, or down-right racist. When a client refuses to work with or receive service from a particular volunteer or population of volunteers, the organization is in a difficult position. Participants raised this issue in the focus groups.

We deal with seniors. Some individuals who've come in to play cards with our seniors - a group of brothers who are sort of mentally slower - but one senior had a really big problem ... that they were on welfare and able-bodied and should be working. The seniors didn't understand their disability as a barrier. We've had conflicts also with people of different races. Many seniors don't have a problem but those who do can really hurt that volunteer.

Two other participants echoed similar experiences:

Seniors aren't always as accepting or understanding of ethnic barriers ... In one instance where we had an individual with developmental disabilities, mental and physical challenges as well, he was very accepted by the staff person he worked with and the staff had wonderful things to say and the seniors just simply were not comfortable with him in the building.

I have several young volunteers who are coming in from diverse ethnical backgrounds and I give people a realistic expectation of what they can expect from an organization. I tell them about possible discrimination they could find because they are young people or because of their ethnic background. It's helpful for them so they aren't so shocked or hurt when or if something does happen. The lines of communication are made more open and they have been able to come back and tell me comments that a resident has made versus just quitting. We have found this to work a lot more successfully than the instances we've had in the past. And you don't want to scare people either and have them think it's an unaccepting place but when something happens on a regular basis or is very common it's something you can't overlook telling them.

In response to this comment, participants discussed among themselves the ethics involved. Does an organization have an obligation to protect or shield its volunteers from discrimination, and if so, how should that be done? Many organizations faced with this issue will say it is not part of the agency's mission to change the attitudes of its clients, even if those attitudes are racist. Other organizations that have justice, equity, or social advocacy as part of their mission will often feel differently and refuse to collude with oppression, even when that is found within their own clients or constituencies.

One participant suggested that the oppressive attitudes found inside agencies simply reflect the discrimination experienced in most parts of the real world:

Doesn't that give it a real world sense to it? About the question of whether it's ethical, well, we're all confronted with situations where there is discrimination and I'm sure people with special needs face it even more so, but it's part of the real world too. We can't always be super protective but we need to be open and honest and communicate that to people in all fairness to them.

Staff "Resistance"

Clients are not the only source of resistance or discrimination that special needs volunteers might expect to encounter in some settings. Staff can sometimes be just as discriminatory.

We had staff that discriminated. We had a middle aged lady who emigrated here, ESL; she enjoyed working in the kitchen. There was one nurse who felt she needed to find some excuse that her work was more trouble than an asset. When I talked to the majority of people about her, they were great. There was one individual who came up to me and said you have to do something about this. I talked to others and they said she was great, wonderful.

Staff might resist volunteers and/or volunteers with special needs for reasons having nothing to do with discrimination:

See, I think it totally depends on staffing. And you touched on union. I'm very, very strong union where I work, so everything's negotiated through the union - that's the top of it. The bottom of it is, I actually don't place with some of staff members because I know the reception for volunteers will not be as it should be. So I think within our agencies, we all know what's going on in what department, but we have to ensure that where those volunteers are going, whether they're disabled or not, that those programs are receptive of volunteers and willing to give 100%.

We're trying to get [staff] to see volunteers as a help, they are not a burden. There are times when you think, no, the police will come and arrest me if I wring your neck, won't they? If I hear one more time, "they're so much work!"; they are but they do so much work! We finally started tracking. We get over 300 volunteer hours a month. You take those 300 hours out of the system, the place collapses. Sometimes I think if they would just treat the volunteer as staff they'd get over it. I get so tired of "I can't give that to a volunteer, they won't understand". Well, did you explain it to them? Oh, I don't have time to do that, well, duh, they don't understand. (big sigh!). There's only four of us. We cannot keep up with the volume of work. And there's no way we should be even trying because there are volunteers ... In case they all forgot, we all started as volunteers.

With able bodied volunteers, they're saying I don't have time to deal with the volunteer. I don't have time to train the volunteer. What are they going to do with someone where they have to slow down? I think they're being unreasonable now, so I have to cope with that issue.

Staff resistance to supported volunteering more often emerges because of the extra burden of work volunteers, and in particular, some volunteers with special needs might mean:

Our other [special needs] volunteer comes in when we do mailouts. We do a lot of mailouts - newsletters, requests for donations, all this kind of thing. I have a real problem with getting the office staff to call the people. Because she says I haven't got the time to sit and supervise ... it's supervision - who has the time to supervise, to sit with this person, to train the new people, because I no longer do.

We deal with individual cases; people who come forward and say I'd like to volunteer and we'd think about which staff person they would be liaising with and whether it'd be a suitable match. Unfortunately, some staff are very receptive and others aren't and see it as eating into their valuable time that we all have so little of these days.

Some volunteers very much enjoy the social contacts and opportunities to socialize that volunteering can provide. Unfortunately, many staff simply do not have the time, these days, to socialize back.

Once again it comes back to their social needs. And staff, I know, have said this on numerous occasions: "Volunteers drive me nuts; I can't get my job done." ... You know - the social is just on-going. But for some volunteers it's just 100 miles an hour because they're out and it's their social time.

Tension can arise between the manager of volunteers and staff who resist volunteer involvement. The following excerpt illustrates the point.

There's one [volunteer], she's actually doing fine but there is obviously a problem there. But she can do the job. It's an emotional problem. But the reaction [from staff] was instant: "Well, there's something wrong, move her somewhere else, get rid of her." I listened while she worked a shift yesterday. There's nothing wrong with the girl. Yes, she has to force herself to talk to people but she's prepared to do that. She's prepared to make the effort and she does reasonably well. I was quite impressed. She'd worked one shift. The Supervisor came up and said she's not working out, get rid of her. I said no. She can sit there for three months until I'm satisfied she's not working out.

It would be incorrect, however, to think that all staff, or staff in all organizations are resistant to the involvement of volunteers, or volunteers who have disabilities:

In our agency I don't think it would be the staff that would be a problem. We have volunteers come to our team meetings, meet with our [staff]. We consider them part of the agency that way, like they're the professional coming in and providing a service to us, like a consultant would. We have our life skills facilitators who do the overseeing of volunteers. Attendant workers go to the volunteers to ask questions because they're doing programs and will rely on them for advice and support. The volunteers in our program are very highly regarded amongst the staff. We've had good consistency. We've been really lucky with volunteers we've had, that they show up and do a good job. Staff are not an issue.

Undeniably, the support and cooperation of staff is critical to the success of a supported volunteering program, and to the success of volunteer placements in general.

It has almost been one hundred percent a good experience. Only when the staff have gone above and beyond their call of duty. When paid staff have taken a real interest in seeing a volunteer placement succeed, it has been successful almost one hundred percent of the time. When volunteers become more part of the background of the organization, and, yes, they are given their orientation and schedule, but staff remain on the periphery, that's when we spend a lot of time putting out fires, and sometimes just making sure we have the volunteer doing the right work. When staff become actively involved with the interaction of the volunteers, that's where placements are almost always successful.

What Would Be Helpful?

Participants offered plenty of information on what they would find helpful in their development and operation of supported volunteering programs. The details are clustered into a number of specific areas below.

Information On How To Work With People With Disabilities

Open communication about limitations and accommodation needs seems to be key to success in supported volunteering. Here is how one participant made the point.

We found that a lot of it is the agency's responsibility during the screening process and making sure that you're asking the right questions at the beginning around what type of accommodations. Be honest right from the beginning and filter out through the screening what the needs are and then it's been a success.

But for staff in organizations that do not directly serve people with disabilities, working with people with disabilities can be scary, intimidating, or uncomfortable. Participants repeatedly talked about not knowing what to say or what to ask. The greatest fear is of being offensive to the prospective volunteer. Several participants indicated a need for basic information about various disabilities and how to work with people with various disabilities, as these quotes illustrate.

And I like the idea of tips - I don't know where funding is going to end up. And I know a lot of agencies have their own pamphlets, but a generic - something very generic and very basic. For a lot of the agencies represented around the table, you've worked with people with many kinds of disabilities. But many people out there have never. And we know with shelters and things and residences closing down, there's more and more people with disabilities who are out there and are now coming into our agencies and they need to be educated. It's the 90's, let's get with it.

I'd be very interested to know: "Are you offended if [I] ask you your ability with reading, writing; are you offended if [I] ask about your personal life with regard to your living accommodations?" Like I think there should be a rapport. ... When you come in the door, we don't know your abilities. The same as anybody else. What's the best way for us to say - "What do you want to do in this agency?" Maybe they don't like to be asked if they can read or write. Maybe they feel that we should assume that they can do it or that they have a supporter who can enable them.

... some sort of literature ... on how to resolve some of the conflicts where I don't know if I'm being impolite.

I was thinking just very broad info and language. What is the appropriate terminology for talking about the disability, what do you do in certain situations, for example, with an individual who might have cerebral palsy and you don't quite understand what the individual is saying, what is the protocol for that, like, I didn't quite get that, can you repeat that please?

If there's an end product to this [project] and it goes into writing and it went into every [agency] it would be nice to have everyone know, if you're a teacher - a facilitating teaching assistant - come with [the prospective volunteer], or a family member in some way, come with [the prospective volunteer]. Even if it's a first visit. It's terrifying for them; it's terrifying for us. I know a big hurdle I have is: "Can you read and write?" I feel like I'm totally belittling them by asking them that. But I don't want to be sending them home with my orientation package, not knowing if there's support there. "Are you in an apartment on your own?" I hate asking that. I don't ask people that generally, but if they are mentally or physically handicapped - "Are you going home to do this orientation package on your own? Do you need assistance? We can do it now together." But I find those very belittling questions and they're not forthcoming with what they say their abilities are.

A participant talked about how her organization tries to provide this exact kind of information when they are trying to locate volunteer placements in the community for their clients:

It's an information gap. When we look at volunteer opportunities for our clients we usually go into the agency and with the client's permission give them info about [the disability], what's involved because we want to set them up for success. You need to give people the tools they need to volunteer with people with [specific] injuries e.g. he'll [do such and such] and [you should] just say this. I usually do it in front of the client with their permission. It's better to be up front from the beginning and tell it like it is. We provide our clients with a lot of support.

A participant who works with people with disabilities could see the value in making the provision of such information into a cooperative community project:

I think the idea of needing some tips too, as a community project, we can be interdependent that way. I could offer that. If I have a little bit of skill in that area or K-W Hab has a skill in offering tips in working with the developmentally-challenged ... That would be something that you could give to me and I could do ...

Education for other staff in the organization would also be key since it isn't just the coordinator of volunteers who works with volunteers. Internal and external "educators" could be important resources in this regard.

Although I manage our volunteer program, I actually don't work with the volunteers really. The staff do. Those ongoing day to day things, that's the staff so they need that support more than me who has brief contact with the volunteers.

I'd just like to add that I think the educational piece is really important. I think of my co-workers as well, as the volunteer coordinator, I see this as a really nice fit. ... they need to be educated and how I can do that as easy as possible.

For us, what I think would be a start is for someone to come into the office and talk to all of the staff, because our volunteer program developed after [some of our other] programs. ... we are still trying to convince some of the [staff] in the office that volunteers are worthwhile. And especially the people who are going to be dealing with in-office volunteers. And I think it should be everyone in the staff ... someone to come in and explain the purpose, the need, how to deal with people, what to ask ...

... get the staff team involved wherever that person is going to be placed in that organization rather than just dumping the volunteer because if they're not involved, they might say we just can't handle the person and then you need to respect your staff as well. There's no point bringing a person in that [staff] don't want to see. So it's a staffing issue in terms of working with your staff giving them the information to help them work with the person.

If [staff] hear it coming from someone other than me, maybe they'll listen. If it's coming from an independent source then it's not me trying to just sell it.

Even in organizations that serve persons with disabilities, they feel a discomfort in working with people with **different** disabilities than those found among their own client group.

That's it too. I think as much as we all work with people of varying disabilities, a little bit of support with how you approach situations like you're saying. You don't feel comfortable asking that person ...

Another participant who works for an organization that serves people with a specific disability noted that that organization is already working with two other organizations, each of which serves a population of persons with different disabilities. The aim is for all three to share with the others information about working with people with other disabilities than one is familiar with. This could work equally well for those seeking information on how to work with volunteers who have disabilities.

Ongoing Support

Initial information is critical, but an ongoing source of information and support would also be of great help; someone to call when a barrier or difficulty is encountered; someone to brainstorm with; someone who knows about a particular type of disability, or someone who has worked with a specific volunteer and who might therefore have some ideas about approaches to that work. Participants seemed to find a great deal of comfort in the notion of there being someone there to call.

A support worker who places people with disabilities has found her ongoing availability to make a big difference.

[We have found] extreme reticence initially and so ...it helped those people ... when I said: "Look, you can call me any time still, if you have a problem." So they didn't feel so much that they were stranded with this person and ... they have nobody [to call]. ... So any kind of program ... that could provide that ongoing little support that if you do have - "I just don't know what to do with this individual; I'm struggling with this". You could call.

Another participant talked about how helpful it has been to be able to call for help when a communication impairment caused a block in the placement.

I do that now with K-W Habilitation Services once again because we utilize so many people from there. Communication is often a really big thing and when I meet with their support worker I'll say, "You know, she was trying to tell me something and I just couldn't get it." And so she gives me little tips and pointers. She says, "What I do is, I do this ... it might be one word, it might be tea, so we're going from tea. So I understand that you said something about tea ..." And I've actually even had to call her in when this one lady that we have was telling us a story about somebody getting shot. We weren't sure if she actually saw it or if it was on television ... we were quite concerned. And so she actually came physically down to the office that day; ... we determined that, yes, it was a story she was telling us that she had seen on television.

The opportunity to call a halt to a placement that doesn't work out is an attractive safety valve for Managers of Volunteers.

We'd need a lot of support, someone to come in and say these are the issues and this is how you deal with the issues. If there was a problem who can I call at the time rather than waiting ... is there a contact person that if something comes up and I need some information or I need an idea? Can we do it on trial period so that three months if it doesn't work out I don't have to feel bad saying no? I'm afraid if I get into it then I can't get out of it if it's not working so setting up something would be helpful. I feel, how are we going to handle that but yet I know that people here with acquired brain injury they think that too and what I do is go out and educate people that no, it doesn't mean (they can't cope) but yet I am feeling oh, I don't know if I can handle that. It's education, knowing how to deal with it.

Help To Convince The Board

Often the Manager of Volunteers is interested in and willing to involve volunteers who have special needs, but resistance is met at the administrative levels in the organization. Assistance from outside to convince senior administrators of the value of supported volunteering would be appreciated.

Learning how to approach this community, having some sort of background materials that we could go to the Boards and say, this won't take all my time or, this will not end up being an embarrassment to you, this will be a good thing for you, you will look good, let me do this. Something that we can persuade higher up. Fortunately I have an E.D. right now who is really supportive. She's fine. It's the next level up - the decision makers. This will not end up coming back on you, this will not be an embarrassment, this will not cost money, this is a good thing. So some sort of literature that can be thrown at them, how to approach them.

One participant said a half-hour board presentation would be useful, but it would have to come from outside, and be readily available to the board because the latter is not likely to go out seeking it.

Volunteers' Honesty and Disclosure

Several agency participants noted the importance of prospective volunteers being forthcoming about their own needs and limitations. When volunteers can participate in the placement development and accommodation process, the Manager of Volunteers will have more information to work with and everyone has a greater likelihood of success.

The key for us has been the more honest the volunteer is with us in the beginning the less we're putting out fires down the road and you're able to accommodate what they're abilities and disabilities are. The one instance for us it worked out very well the volunteer came with a support person but they communicated to me what the boundaries are, what can be done and can't and that helped.

Overall, [our experience with supported volunteering has been a] mixed bag and the ones that were positive resulted from upfront and open communication from the beginning.

We have a situation where one of their volunteers felt the best way to deal with the situation was to get the team together and have a get-to-know-you session where they talked about their disability and what their needs would be and if you see this happening this is what I need then. That was really helpful. If the volunteer is open to that sort of discussion, if not, it's not an option.

I can think of things we've done that have helped. We had an individual who was a contract employee and who is now a volunteer who is legally blind. She was very proactive and up front with me in terms of what she was capable of doing, what she was not. She made it very easy for me to ask those very awkward questions like, can you read this? do I need to put it in bigger print? what kind of accommodation do you need in terms of the program manual? how do you get around? This stuff was cleared up before the placement started.

Assistance With Job Design and Accommodations

Participants occasionally mentioned the need to be creative with job design and accommodation possibilities, particularly for prospective volunteers who have multiple disabilities.

... sometimes it's being creative and finding a part of one job and a little part of another job. That you can't always say that you can be this or you can do this. It just means that you have to be so creative.

That's where we can use support. That's where we as agency people need to create a support with each other - hearing what you're doing. That's what we're trying to find.

The Role Of Referral Agents

When a person with a disability is referred to volunteering by a worker from an agency, it is useful for that referring agent to know some details about the organization to which the volunteer is being referred to. A respondent explains:

Know the services of the organization that you're going to be referring someone to and know what their restrictions are in terms of resources, opportunities for that individual who will need enhanced support so that it's not a last ditch effort.

Everyone must be careful not to limit choices and potential by the information that is shared.

I agree we should have some background but you don't want to have specific info that can cloud the opportunity to discuss it with the individual because often you have these biases and preconceived notions that can get in the way of getting to know the person.

The Role Of The Volunteer Centre

The Volunteer Action Centre is in a key position to be helpful when referring people with special needs into organizations in the community.

... the connection with the Voluntary Action Centre is so crucial because I get most of the referrals from there. The recruitment coordinator needs to know what our barriers and limits are, who we can accept and work with. She has power ... and can direct volunteers to us.

Mental Health Issues Are More Difficult

Several participants mentioned that they find mental health issues to be the most difficult or scary to deal with among volunteers with special needs. The following quotes demonstrate a relatively pervasive sentiment.

We've had one individual with mental health issues and the unpredictability has been an issue

I think from our experience, ... the physical involvement or the developmental disability is often not as hard as sometimes the social/emotional issues to work with and finding the right people to work with them.

I would like to talk about mental health issues. Because volunteers and support people are out in the community, working fairly independently we shy away from volunteers who have mental health issues.

We've recruited volunteers with mental health problems and when I'm talking about this I'm talking about volunteers actually working in our program, they may not be on a committee or doing fundraising or whatever, that's a different situation, but we've run into difficulties where depending on the extent of their disability, they might be receiving just as much support as one of our members/clients so there's a fine line.

Some that have more mental health problems they don't seem to last long. They need a lot of one on one and if they don't have that close support person it doesn't always work out as well.

I always thought I could get people with disabilities volunteering in our agency simply by embarrassing the Board into it. We're supposed to specialize in this, create opportunities, advocate for individuals with disabilities, I'm advocating now! I don't think I could do that with a mental health problem but that's not to say that we couldn't accommodate. We'd need a lot of support, someone to come in and say these are the issues and this is how you deal with the issues. If there was a problem who can I call at the time rather than waiting ... is there a contact person that if something comes up and I need some info or I need an idea. Can we do it on trial period so that three months if it doesn't work out I don't have to feel bad saying no. I'm afraid if I get into it then I can't get out of it if it's not working so setting up something would be helpful. I feel, how are we going to handle that but yet I know that people [who accept our clients on placement] think that too and what I do is go out and educate people that no, it doesn't mean they can't cope but yet I am feeling oh, I don't know if I can handle that. It's education, knowing how to deal with it.

At our place I don't think they'd have a problem with any sort of physical disability but I think if we tried to introduce someone with a mental disability they'd go bananas because god knows with the women we do have it's, from the moment she walked in it was "got to get rid of her". If it was a physical, I think they could get around that.

The Complexities of Multiple Disabilities

A couple of participants noted the increased difficulties of placing special needs volunteers if they have multiple disabilities.

... there is someone who I would like to place and I don't even place volunteers, it's not in my job description, but he's come to me for years and years and years and I still don't know, I don't have the creative capability to deal with how to make him feel useful in the volunteer placement. I think he needs to be in the community, not within my agency. ... I would say it's a severe disability because it's one that's put up many, many barriers to my thought processes and I'm not sure where to go with it. He functions really well; he lives on his own; he does a lot of things and I think managing his life should be his way of feeling good about himself, but he wants more. There's that level of severity to the situation where it is challenging. He can't use his hands, his speech is difficult, so what are we going to do here? It takes [a lot of] time ...

Another participant picked up on the point and added:

I think that you touched on something important here - that where there's a number of disabilities, in a number of different areas - I'm thinking of a young lady, one of my former students, who when the speech is involved and the hands and the wheelchair, and yet so much to contribute in a lot of ways. It's just finding the right niche. We've spent hours talking about that. Just trying to help them, that's what you want.

Barriers To Involvement

Elsewhere we have noted the comments by focus group participants regarding the special difficulties associated with multiple disabilities, mental health issues and resistance encountered from both staff and administrators/boards of directors. A variety of other barriers were mentioned as well, as described in this quote:

I think that part of what that is too - and I don't think that we've talked about some of the gaps - and that's where people with disabilities that aren't volunteering - the reason they're not coming in or saying they want to come is because of lack of confidence, depression, fear, anxiety and they can't afford the bus fare, because they are on a pension. It's not just paying them for work, it's helping them get there because they don't even have a foothold on the pay thing yet.

When the volunteer needs a support worker to accompany him or her during the volunteer placement, this can make the difference in finding work that the volunteer can do. On the other hand, having the second person accompany the volunteer can be a deterrent, especially when the position is supposed to be one-to-one visiting or companionship.

Accommodations

While it is important to remember that not all people with disabilities will need accommodations to be made in their volunteer placements, it is clear from the wide range of special needs volunteers that have been accepted by the organizations represented in these focus groups that a great variety of accommodations have been implemented in support of volunteer involvement.

Some volunteers have needed assistance with writing tasks, and others have needed attendant care. A board member who had a vision impairment was helped by the use of taped board minutes; another board member with developmental disabilities was linked up with a “board buddy” who helped her to understand the topics under discussion.

Many agency representatives made note of the extra time they spend with special needs volunteers, putting together the appropriate set of tasks into custom jobs that correspond to volunteers’ abilities.

... definitely I have had to give extra attention to these people to place them in an appropriate placement.

...But there is that extra work to go through and I think we need to identify that because it's important for agencies to be aware of that. I mean, I haven't had a problem with it. I've really enjoyed and the people I've worked with ... to find placements for them have been incredibly supportive as well in trying to work things through for both of them.

I've had 3 different special needs people who do volunteer work too who are still with me and I find that it takes extra time. Somebody comes in and gives them some training. You have to really be concise in what you tell them. You know, give them lots of steps. But it's worth it

What I find is that I need to be very clear and have very simple steps in what I'm asking her to do. Generally, it means some training if it's a new task and even some of the old tasks I have to go over with her again. She has excellent phone manner. I think she would do reception work if the phone rang. She writes the messages down very clearly and has always really enjoyed that. It's been a learning experience for her. But I found for myself that I also had to learn. ... what I found was that I was expecting too much of her and that I had to stop and say OK, let's just do part of the job. She appears more competent than what she is until you give her the chance to really work it through. ... it's really evolved for her into some really neat things [part-time work]. But I think it was key that I took the time and worked out tasks every week for her and she has been steady.

Deliberate Or Accidental Inclusivity

One theme that arose consistently throughout the sessions with agency representatives is that supported volunteering rarely results from deliberate recruitment efforts on the part of the agency. Organizations are not out there seeking special needs volunteers. Not one agency representative indicated that they had launched any special recruitment drives or included any affirmative action messages in their regular marketing and publicity activities. Managers of volunteers will consider accepting people with special needs if the latter make the effort to apply or if a third party referral agency makes the approach on behalf of the volunteer. The one exception is at the board level. Ironically, some boards deliberately seek consumer representation on the board, and in some cases, these consumers are people with disabilities. It is possible that some of these boards are the same boards that resist the involvement of people with disabilities through supported volunteering at the direct service level.

B.) Individuals

The following narrative and excerpts relate to the three focus group sessions held with people with disabilities who are volunteering presently, have recently volunteered, or who have never volunteered.

Volunteer Motivation

Participants provided a wide range of reasons for their pursuit of volunteer work. Here is an overview:

Because I didn't want to sit at home all the time. I was at school. After school I had two jobs. Now I want to get more jobs so I don't get bored at home all the time.

Because I wanted to learn new skills and also so I wouldn't get bored at home as well ... so I would have something to do to spread out the week a bit. How it happened at the [agency where I volunteer] - they asked me if I would be interested in volunteering. It's been great.

I think that my volunteer experiences had to do with finding out about something that really mattered to me or knowing something was already there that really mattered to me. I wanted to support a cause that I was interested in.

I like to learn about something and volunteering helps me to learn.

To help the community plus my teacher said I should volunteer to help the community and to learn to respect the others out there.

I got involved through a job search club at [agency]. I was looking for a job and I couldn't find one because of the recession because they always laid me off. I was looking around and I said to myself, that's very interesting, I'd like to get into it. So I asked ... at the Job Search Club and she got me into [my present volunteer work].

... It was interesting. I want to go to meetings. I want to volunteer for the volunteer fair because I am in a volunteering job right now. They said "We like you and we want to keep you on" and I said I know that. I like it and I want to stay in it and make something of myself and be famous.

I went looking for volunteer work. I wanted to help people.

I got involved for a number of reasons. One was because whenever you can go in and help the community, I think that is very important because we all live in the community and a lot of people that you're helping - it really increases their quality of life which is the main reason why I think we're all here - we want to increase quality of life. If you can do that - get down to the grass roots and actually help people, that's a good thing.

I've seen a lot of organizations, when they're fundraising, use the slogan "Because you'll never know when you'll need it." To me I think that's absolutely terrible. I think you should just be able to help people and when you look at it ... when you look at the main goal it is to increase people's quality of life and self esteem. And if you can do that, I think you have made the whole world a better place, which, I think is a nice thing.

I like to help people. It provides them with less work load; it cuts their work load in half; it minimizes time. [helps staff in their busy day]

Getting out of the house. That's a really big reason. You get bored at home. All you do is watch TV all day and you don't have a social life at home either. You don't see other people you know, just your family.

I had been having some difficulty getting some full time paid employment and I am qualified to work in that area. I thought that volunteering might help me in getting some contacts, and in showing people I can still do the job in spite of the fact that I have some visual impairments, so for me it was for me showing people that I do have the skills and I do have abilities and that they were able to trust me and I was able to develop trust as well.

I also volunteered [on a local board of directors] and what I did was the administrative committee and fundraising; and one of the reasons why I thought about getting involved in that was the social aspect. I wanted to interact with other disabled people, because having a visual impairment and being legally blind I don't spend a lot of time with others in my disability group and I wanted to meet other people with other disabilities; I wanted to get to understand what people's issues are and in volunteering I was able to do that; find out about other people and what their needs are.

It helped me to further develop career goals. I then went back to school and took something else. I was qualified to do work in child care and that was a good profession, but visually I did run into some difficulty around some job accommodation issues, so I decided to look at more of a social work profession, and doing the volunteer work allowed me to see if I had the people skills. I worked with children, but this gave me the idea that yes I could work with adults.

I was in a time period when I wasn't doing very much with employment, and like some of the other people were saying, it was boring at home and I felt I had a lot to offer and I didn't feel like just sitting at home.

The Rewards of Volunteering

Participants stated clearly and enthusiastically what they get back from their volunteer work.

If they were to call me next year I would go back again because I felt good, happy that I helped kids. They looked up to me and that felt really good.

They found me a real neat place to volunteer. They care a lot about people and they care a lot about me. It's wonderful. Some days I don't feel that good and it still feels good that we can share our feelings for each other and that we can pray together in the mornings and we can pray for each other. We can find the support that we need.

People like me. They say "Good morning! Welcome back!" I always am happy.

It's rewarding. I'm thinking of my teaching types of volunteer things and I find it very rewarding when you see that lightbulb go off in somebody's head that tells you they understand what it is you're trying to teach them. And I've had experiences where people come up to me months or years later and say thank you for teaching me all that. So you can't help but feel good about that.

I like everything. I want to do volunteer work because I am a good worker and it feels good. I like to keep on going. I like to be busy.

I liked to be with the children. I'm a people person. It gave me a chance to know new and different people.

I like the fact that I can help people. When they ask a question, I can find the information. It makes me feel good about myself because I can help them.

I get to learn something. I like it. I like to learn things and do things.

I like to be with the kids. I like to feel comfortable with them and I like to help them.

One word: I enjoy it a lot. It makes me feel happy. I can do more now that I express myself. I learned how to decide for myself, not just my mother's idea, and to do things on my own and just to get out, ...

I was on the board of (a local) gallery and I thought it was a great experience because my artistic ability is just about nil so volunteering gives me a way of getting outside of my business life to pursue other interests that both benefit me from a learning perspective and help other people.

I like to volunteer and I just love to play with kids too. [It gives me a chance to do something I really love to do]. I would be hurt and upset if I couldn't volunteer any more.

Volunteering is fun. You meet different people that you wouldn't normally meet. People don't generally know how to talk to a person in a wheelchair, or go out of their way to talk to a person in a wheelchair.

Deliberate Involvement or Suggested By Others?

Almost every volunteer in our focus groups was referred to volunteering through an agency from which they were receiving services. This is not surprising since we made contact with prospective focus group participants through disability-serving agencies and so they would naturally put us in contact with their clients and ex-clients. Because of the skewed sample in the focus groups, however, it is not possible to comment on the mechanisms used by other persons with disabilities to find their way into volunteering if they are not currently receiving services from an organization that encourages voluntary action among its clients.

The Role Of The Volunteer Action Centre

Six of the sixteen participants identified that they had also used the placement assistance services of the Volunteer Action Centre, often in cooperation with the original referral agency.

Barriers To Involvement In Volunteering

Focus group participants experienced a range of barriers in their pursuit of volunteer work. These are discussed below. Interestingly, it was a small minority of barriers that actually bore any clear connection to a disability or limitation.

Physical Limitations, Accessibility, and Accommodation Requirements

The bathroom was a bit of a problem because the door that I could get through was a fire door and we had to find a way to leave that door open so I could get in, but it was a fire door.

I have a motorized wheelchair ... this is good and bad. When I travel, I need a vehicle that can accommodate this big chair. I always find that the fact that I am sitting and I am short to begin with is a real problem when it comes to reaching things. This means that file drawers and high cupboards are out of my reach. Even a photocopy machine is difficult. At work I'm responsible for ordering supplies and putting them away and the supply cupboard is not accessible.

I guess in most cases I have not had the experience where employers would reorganize everything for me. What they are more likely to do is say well if you can't do that then we will get someone else to do it for you. Most of the time I think well okay, do that. It depends on what is. If it is something that makes me feel like my dignity is gone then I would be bothered. If it is just a matter of asking someone to put something away then I don't see that as a big deal.

Transportation

Transportation was noted the most often by the greatest number of participants as a barrier to volunteer involvement. While public transportation is available for people with disabilities, scheduling can be difficult since a minimum half hour window is required by the service around pick up and drop off times. During our focus groups for example, participants had to leave early because the transportation service arrived early. Others were observed waiting for transportation up to 20 minutes after the conclusion of the session.

Some focus group participants rely heavily on family and friends for assistance with transportation and one participant who wants to pursue a volunteer position in a neighbouring community will need to commit excessive amounts of extra time for the complexities of travel arrangements and pay \$10.00 for the out of town service, an amount which could be prohibitive for persons on low or fixed incomes and disability pensions.

Expertise Of The Placement Agency

Several of the participants who had experienced the most success in their volunteer work had placements in disability-serving agencies, and in particular, in agencies that serve clients with the same issues or disabilities as the volunteers themselves. As one might guess, physical accessibility is not an issue, attitudes are not an issue, and the people who work with volunteers have the creativity and experience to assist with accommodations and job design solutions that contribute to successful placements in these settings. Unfortunately, however, this openness can not be taken for granted, as is suggested by this respondent:

It's ironic that most agencies that want to involve volunteers in volunteer work are helping the handicapped and yet they won't have them in their own organization.

Negative Attitudes and Ill-Treatment

Some of our focus group participants encountered appalling attitudes and hurtful reception in their efforts to find volunteer work. In this first example, the volunteer needed the environment to be accessible to a wheelchair. In her first tries to volunteer she was confronted by physical barriers, but the treatment she received from the agencies along the way was shameful.

I called [a local agency] and they had me in for an interview but then they didn't call me back. I called them back and said, "Where are we here?" And they said "You'll get called back" and so I waited for a week and I called them back. They said "We don't want you here because we don't need you here" so, scratch that idea. Apparently what they didn't tell me was that there were stairs to get in to the place - and me I can't get up stairs. When I called them back, I asked them is your place accessible, and they said yes. But when I went there for the interview, I found that they had stairs. I said, "I thought your place was accessible?" And they said, "well, we're sorry, we forgot to tell you that we've got stairs" I said, "You fibbed!" I said, I was believing that you were actually going to need me. They said, "Well, call us back and we'll reconsider" but the reaction I got was they didn't need me. So, scratch that idea.

... I called another [agency] and said, "I'm looking for volunteer work; do you need me ...?" They said "ya" so I didn't actually go there, but [Volunteer Action Centre] got in touch with them and told them of my interest ... could you possibly get her in ... and the non-accessibility - getting upstairs - that didn't work out either.

... So those other two places didn't really appeal to me but I thought I'd call them, but they didn't work out. It would have been good to have that information ahead of time. I was really angry with both places. I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me about that so I didn't have to pursue it?"

But I tried a total of three times and after the third time, I said I'm not pursuing this any further. I'll get somebody else to pursue this and I'll let them get frustrated..

Other volunteers who often need only minor accommodations and a bit of creativity have had to push hard for their own rights or struggle to find creative solutions.

I didn't have trouble with accessibility, but in terms of vision issues, yes. If I had gone to a particular place to volunteer and say I have vision issues, usually I get "Oh, hold the phone here!" Sometimes people don't have the money to make things larger for me to see. But I would find that people would really have a hard time, thinking, well now we need equipment, or now we need adaptations or even if you're just volunteering we still have to change things so that you can volunteer here. I think I got better after a while at being able to say up-front this is what I need and it's only going to take this small amount of adaptation.

So I asked the person at [the agency where I volunteer] - she wanted me to roll money. I said, the rolls are too small and the print is too small ... So she says, we'll make a chart up for you with coloured squares and we'll put the amounts beside the squares and all you have to do is look at the charts. I said, gee, we could have done this before. I am so frustrated. I would like to help you with your work load, but if you can't help determine what I need to help me, I can't do the work.

Here a volunteer comments on what she has observed about attitudes among volunteer agencies towards people with disabilities.

The one thing I wanted to mention, I really believe - and I don't want to be discriminatory here because I'm not that way at all - but I truly believe that people who do not have disabilities have a harder time dealing with people whose disabilities are more severe. And whether you look severe or not. I have a visual impairment and I am legally blind, but I don't tend to look blind. I don't walk with a cane and I don't have a dog. I have friends who are totally blind who do walk with a cane and have a dog and they have a lot more difficulty than I do.

And in my work with the [agency], working with people who have quite severe disabilities, because visually they look severely disabled, I think they do have a harder time. And, like I say, I don't like to say that, but I think it's true.

Several volunteers described experiences that deeply insulted their dignity.

... they placed me ... working at the data base. After two weeks they put me in a separate room and every time I needed a new piece of paper I had to go out of the room and a long way away to get it. I said, this is not safe for me or them ... and I'm not doing it. I loved it there. I made a data base there. There must have been a negative attitude there. ... I have to fight every day for what I need.

At [agency], the building was unaccessible, but since I was on crutches at the time, I was able to get in. I went up and down the stairs - I fell one time. I went through 5 weeks of training and at the end of it they said, most of our kids need physical activity and you can't do it so we can't match you up with them. I was quite upset. If they would have told me this at the beginning that would have been different but they didn't say anything until the end. I don't understand it and I've never understood it. I can understand what they said that a lot of their kids have aggression that they need to let out and so we can't match you up with anybody because all of our kids need to do sports and all of that, and I'm sure that's true, but to make a blanket statement that they can't match you up with somebody ... it probably would have felt awful no matter how it happened, but I think it was pretty stinky of them to let me go through the whole training program and then tell me ... why wouldn't they have said right off the bat, we need somebody who can be physically active with these kids. ... they made me go through all of that and then told me no.

In this example the difficulty is in the circumstance and the setting.

I'm not sure it's a negative attitude, but a lot of functions I need to go to where everyone is standing around and it is noisy, they can't hear me talk. I have a soft voice, and for them to bend down, it's uncomfortable for them, so I avoid a lot of those functions because you end up sitting by yourself a lot of the time. It's a combination. First, wheelchairs make people uncomfortable. Having a dog has been a big benefit because he breaks down barriers, but then when people are having to bend over to speak with you, they are uncomfortable and they feel like they are invading your space, plus it's hard to hear. In most functions, if they could have a place where people could sit, it would make a big difference.

A volunteer who has severe multiple disabilities has tried hard through a number of positions that have not worked out for him. He is not completely discouraged yet, but the experience has been difficult. His conclusion from his efforts is this:

They do treat you differently from other people. It's not right and it's not fair.

Family Overprotectiveness

Several participants commented on the extent to which they needed to struggle to overcome the overprotectiveness of their own families in the process of getting out, getting about, and finding volunteer work.

I was at the Volunteer Action Centre and my mother said I wouldn't make it and I did make it and I proved to her that I could do it. My mother said "You can't do it" and I said, "Oh yes I can!" I said, "I want to try and I want to express to you that I can do more things as a volunteer and be more independent and go to meetings and do things on my own and decide."

In response to this comment, another participant shared her own similar experience.

I'm relating to the mother issue. I think that growing up, I was always given the message, even though it was never said in a mean kind of way, "You can't do that" and "Oh, we can't ask you to do that" so I grew up thinking I couldn't do anything. It was big time protection.

A third volunteer added her own comment.

My sisters too. Sometimes they protect me. Sometimes you don't need that protection. You need to grow up on your own and say how you feel.

Why Not Volunteer Before Now?

We only had one participant in the focus groups who had never volunteered before. When asked why, her comment was, simply, "I never thought about it."

Accommodations Required

Depending on the nature and severity of the disability, accommodations required by volunteers might be significant, or virtually non-existent. There was a wide range of accommodation needs represented among focus group participants.

Two participants noted that agencies sometimes need to take a bit more time providing instructions about the work they want to be done by volunteers.

Some of the focus group participants use wheel chairs, so physical accessibility is an issue for them. Speech was impaired in some of participants. The degree of impairment varied from minimal to severe. With those who have more severe speech impairments, agencies need to be patient and comfortable, sometimes needing to ask several times for a comment to be repeated. A support worker, advocate, or family member could be of assistance in this regard.

Several participants had visual impairments or were legally blind. Accommodation requirements varied. One person who was legally blind gets around well, but needs a visual orientation to surroundings, including things like light switches, knobs on stoves, and so on. She had done board work in a portion of her volunteer commitment, and minutes on tapes, reading reports out loud at meetings, good lighting, getting board materials well in advance of the meetings, and speech recognition software that she herself can usually provide have all made her board involvement possible and productive for her. Licencing limitations on the software can be a problem if one wants to volunteer in several places at one time. In another placement, this same volunteer was found that simply making bigger labels for key items in her job made the difference between success and failure for her.

Another participant who is legally blind acts as a telephone receptionist for the agency where she volunteers. Large message pads and a black pen are the only accommodations needed to do the work.

For one participant who uses a walker, getting through heavy front doors can be a challenge. Automatic doors are the ideal aid, but assistance works too.

For the participant quoted above who has trouble reaching from her wheelchair, and for others in wheelchairs, placing supplies in lower cabinets makes work materials accessible. When that is not possible, some of the work can be shifted to or shared with someone else for whom reach is not a limitation.

One participant who experiences mental health issues noted that the fact that the people at her volunteer work site understand when she's not feeling well makes it possible for her to go to her placement, even when she's feeling unwell. Here the accommodation required was in people's attitude and capacity to understand, empathize, and accept others.

One person with a developmental disability is a consumer representative on a board of directors. The organization provides a meeting buddy to help with comprehension, reading, instructions, and travel.

Sometimes there is a good match between the accommodation requirements of the prospective volunteer and the conditions already present in the volunteer placement. For example,

In some areas it was harder than in others. Where I found it the hardest was where my disability had to be accommodated or more so than in other places. It depended on the nature of the work and the nature of the setting, and how I needed to accommodate myself to get the work done.

What Helps? Participating In Problem Solving

Participants were asked to comment on what they have found to be helpful with respect to the location or creation of satisfying volunteer placements. They talked a lot about creative problem solving and their own role in finding or making accommodations that will work. Contributing to a sense of ease is important. Here are some of their comments.

So I said to the ... supervisor, can we make the name tags big and bold in big letters, and that worked out just fine. So I was able to say what I actually needed and that made it better for the person to feel comfortable in saying "Yeah, I think we can do that."

The one thing - I was on the board in a location that was very dimly lit and that was difficult for me because I need good lighting. So the President of the board would make sure that people would read things out instead of having everyone sit there and read on the spot. And they started to give me a copy of the board minutes in a larger font - and they were very workable - here's one font, is it big enough? Do you need it larger? And also, at the time that I started, previous to when I started, board members weren't getting the board minutes in advance and when I started, they started getting the minutes a good week in advance which is a good thing, and so I could use my own equipment at home and that allowed me to read it in advance.

Being able to articulate one's own needs was noted as an important asset.

When I go somewhere, like today when [name of person] asked me to come, I asked about the barriers that might get in the way of my coming in and so I arranged all of that before I came, So before I go somewhere, I will tell them what my needs are. Now this is maybe where I'm a little luckier, that I can get a look at things, or I can have things made, I can assess it. I don't think it's fair of me to go to a meeting and ask you to do that. You don't know what my needs are, nor are you in a situation where ... I always figure it's my job to put you at ease. That gets us through the first couple of meetings and after wards, people start saying, "Would it be easier if we do this or that" and then we work through it. But it's important for me to start the ball by making people feel comfortable.

... because I have a physical disability or not is immaterial. Everybody has a responsibility to ease everybody, so just asking whether you can help or not is your step forward. Mine is the direction or making you feel comfortable. Just because you have a disability doesn't make that everybody's responsibility.

Usually I can just say things off the top of my head and that's a good answer or a bad answer. If I thought about it really really hard, I don't think it would be too hard to tell them [what I need] - if you tell them right off the bat what your disability is and what you expect from them, it will depend on how the person reacts and what their answer is. It depends on what they're like and how easy they are to talk to.

The other thing that I can think of is that a lot of things that happened to me was around safety. They wondered if I could really do this - can she see well enough to do this and is it going to compromise other people in our setting? And I run into this a lot. What it makes me do is be a bit more assertive to say "this will not compromise the safety of the people in this environment. I am not a risk. I do know when I am in an unsafe situation and when I'm not, and I do know when to ask for help and when not.

Two participants discussed the importance of fighting for what is needed, and never allowing a situation to go unchallenged because it will only make it harder for the next person to break down that barrier.

When you come up against a problem, you have to solve it because that gives that agency, and whoever they talk to, the ability to use that experience. So with [another participants barrier at an agency], you have to solve that problem so that it won't happen again. It's important even though it may be very difficult to do. ... Sometimes it doesn't matter what you are talking about, if people have preconceived notions, they're going to keep them, but you need to address them and say "can we resolve this?" and if not, then you move on. You don't just leave.

... Unfortunately, if there's a disability or a minority, or whatever, the next person coming behind you will have a harder time because you've already made it an okay practice if you don't object.

Several participants responded with caveats. If the will is not there in the agency at the beginning to work towards success, the struggle is so much harder.

I think that any experience that starts off like that, no matter what you do to try to get the ball rolling yourself, you're not going to get anywhere because it just isn't there. If it doesn't start out on the right foot with being included and inclusive, you can't get anywhere.

It has to start from day one. It's a bit of everything. We as persons with disabilities try to make people feel comfortable and try to get the ball rolling but people have to reciprocate in order to make that a real, trusting relationship.

It would help if they had a willingness to give it a try and see how far we could get before everything comes crashing down around you. I think that they might give me a chance and if it doesn't work out it doesn't work out and if it works out, it works out.

Education For Staff

Several participants mentioned that education about disabilities and accommodations would be useful for the staff who work with volunteers.

What about some education for the staff to understand what [other participant's] disability is and what he's all about and what some of his needs might be to allow him to start on that even foot of "this is me and this is what I'm about." It sounds to me that people weren't comfortable because they didn't have enough information to be comfortable with.

I think that non-disabled people need to become more educated about a variety of severe and non-severe disabilities, and when people really understand a little bit more about what it's like to have a certain type of disability, and what it takes for that person to really function in the community, then I think they will truly have some understanding. ... I think people have to become educated to become comfortable about what they're dealing with.

I've been in an employment situation with an agency that specifically worked with disabled persons and they, themselves were not able to accommodate my visual needs, and my employment was terminated. I was just let go. I really firmly believe that it takes a lot of education and a real understanding before you get a workable thing happening.

Would You Pursue More or Other Volunteer Work In The Future?

In response to this question there was a consistent undercurrent of fear and reluctance. This may be as good an indicator as any of the struggles people with disabilities go through to find volunteer work.

I like what I do [where I am now]. Maybe a new situation would make me nervous in terms of the help that I would need. I'm not good at asking for help. I like to do things on my own. But I would try it and see how it would work out in a different business or whatever.

It was scary at the start. I wasn't sure that I could do what they wanted me to, but now that I've been at it for a long time, it's lots of fun.

At the beginning [it was hard] but now it is easy.

I found it scary at the beginning too because I didn't know what I was doing at their store. Everything was new.

Do You Have Advice For Others?

Despite the fears and the difficulties, participants had generally rousing and enthusiastic advice for other people with disabilities seeking volunteer work, even from some of the same participants who expressed a bit of fear for themselves and their own future searches for volunteer work.

I would say go for it! Volunteer where you want to volunteer.

I'd say go for it too!

Stick at it.

Find something that you like doing and that way you'll enjoy the volunteer work more. Pick the right kind of work.

Make sure you like it.

Be positive. Pray about what you want to do with yourself and your life.

Know what you want to do. Have an idea in your head and don't be afraid to try it. You have to have some courage.

It's important to get out there and try to network. My experience was that people who knew me can talk to other people they know and say, "I know this great gal. She has a visual impairment but these are the background she has and the things that she can do." So, word of mouth - people working together to connect you. Even before you go to phone them, if they have a tiny piece of information about you beforehand, that might ease the relationship a bit. Use your contacts.

One participant had some sage advice about realistic expectations.

I'm really practical, so I'd say, if you're going to volunteer, be realistic about it. Don't volunteer to be an astronaut if you don't even know how to do less. Your skills need to match the thing you want to do. I guess with my background I have seen people try to [shoot for more than they are capable of] and they fall on their face and then they don't want to volunteer again. I would never deter anyone from doing it but I would say something along the lines of if you like a certain kind of work and you are able to do it, then go for it.

Several others recommended getting some help.

Go call the KWHabilitation Centre to get some help to get involved.

Go to the Volunteer Action Centre.

I would tell them to go to a session and get some instructions and directions and stay there until you get the whole information.

What Would Help To Find Volunteer Work In the Future?

Participants were asked to think about going out to find volunteer work in the future and to comment on what they thought would make that search easier. Here are their comments.

Having contact people in agencies.

Agencies have to understand about different disabilities and where people are at. Not to be afraid.

... education around volunteer opportunities, or whatever, but I think some education for ourselves around assertiveness and how to say, these are my needs or how to feel comfortable, ... if there's an issue and it's not followed up - how to feel comfortable in how to follow up - some training on assertiveness or communicating so that when we do go out to work as volunteers we do feel confident and well equipped and vice versa - so would the employer as well.

You look at ... the place that you really liked, you say, that's something I really enjoyed and when I go to the next one, I'll make sure that the part that I really enjoyed is there and the part that made me leave right at the beginning, then you've got a great chance of making it happen. That to me is educating yourself as well as the other side. Both parts need to do some work. Tell the people what it is - like anything in life.

Some more ideas about who to call, where, what when, how. What now?

[I'm] basically chicken. I'm afraid of failure because hospitals don't usually believe in spiritual powers. Years ago they cautioned me about doing that kind of work because they didn't want me to have unrealistic expectations. But I think that I could counsel people who are facing operations or who are refusing operations because they are scared or people who are palliative care persons or their families - giving them some support. I am short on nerve. Maybe if somebody came with me the first time to introduce me to persons and their families.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the purpose of the OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL project is “to increase the community’s capacity to open up new opportunities for all persons to exercise more control over their own lives and make a contribution to this community through volunteer work,” an initial assessment of where the community is at with respect to supported volunteering was an essential starting point for this project. The goal of the focus group research was to obtain more detail about supported volunteering in the Waterloo Region than was gathered in the initial community agency survey.

The focus group research, based on six separate sessions with a total of 26 agency representatives and 16 individuals should not be considered a comprehensive overview of supported volunteering as it has been experienced by all, or even a majority, of agencies or volunteers or prospective volunteers in the Waterloo Region. Information gathered here has allowed us to identify and highlight some of the key observations and issues about supported volunteering as experienced by this subset of agency and individual representatives. Certainly the data gathered here can be used both to guide further research, and to guide future phases of the OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL PROJECT.

Many organizations in the Waterloo Region are deploying volunteers who have disabilities and there was a general sentiment among agency representatives in these focus groups that this is a good thing. Most agencies would fall short of feeling that they have an obligation to do so, but most felt that inclusivity is consistent with organizational values and a reflection of the type of community we all want to live in.

Other observations from this focus group research include:

- ▶ Involving people with disabilities as volunteers is not always easy and not always successful. It can absorb more time and energy from organizations and staff, all of whom are pressed to work harder in light of cutbacks and increasing service demands. Although we cannot say with certainty how pervasive this pattern is, some staff in some settings are resistant to the involvement of volunteers in general and seemingly even more resistant to the notion of involvement of persons with disabilities as volunteers. This resistance is, at least in part, due to increasing work pressures on staff throughout the service system, although discrimination and prejudice seem to play a part as well.
- ▶ Many agencies indicated a need for information about disabilities and the process of job accommodations, and a further need to learn about how to work with people with various kinds of disabilities. Discomfort, ignorance, and embarrassment stand in the way of creative job accommodations and problem solving. Agencies also indicated a strong need for ongoing sources of information and support - someone to call when help is needed, during the course of placements.
- ▶ Referral agents need to learn more about the nature of work and limitations of prospective placement agencies so that the volunteers who are referred have a good initial chance of finding success.
- ▶ A significant proportion of placements do not work out and many are short term. On the other hand, some placements, even those of a short term nature, turn out to be extremely productive, and play very important roles in the happiness, well-being, and recovery of the volunteers engaged in them.

- ▶ As a general observation, it seems that for many volunteers who have disabilities, relatively minor and low-cost accommodations have made enormous differences in how possible and comfortable volunteer work can be. Without question, some participants need substantive accommodations which, when already present as in the case of elevators and ramps, are nearly taken for granted, but which pose absolute barriers when not in place.
- ▶ Some participants need help to work out what kind of accommodation would make the difference, but most of the participants in these focus groups seemed to be able to immediately identify what their own needs are through long experience navigating through the rest of their lives.
- ▶ It seems fair to conclude, however, that on the whole, locating suitable and satisfying volunteer work has not been easy for the largest proportion of participants in these focus groups. Most have encountered barriers and negative attitudes. Many of the participants have had to try several different placements before finding one that works. Some have experienced hurtful encounters, and rude and inconsiderate behaviour along the way. Many feel trepidation when thinking about having to find new or different volunteer work in the future. Nonetheless, they are, as a group, quite enthusiastic about their involvement. Volunteer work responds to a wide range of motivations, and is mostly a positive, rewarding and enjoyable experience once the specifics of the position are worked through. Most of the participants in these focus groups found their volunteer work with the assistance of disability service agencies and the Volunteer Action Centre. Given the struggles they have encountered along the way, one wonders how other people with disabilities would manage without the assistance, information, and advocacy of referral agents such as have been involved with those in our research groups.
- ▶ Barriers are not insurmountable, although they are not insignificant. Success has often been due solely to the persistence and perseverance of the prospective volunteers who have continued to search for placements even after encountering obstacles, rudeness, and insults to their dignity. Satisfying and productive volunteer work should not be that difficult to find.

This brief glimpse into supported volunteering has provided more details about the key issues experienced by at least some agencies and individuals in the Waterloo Region. Implications and recommendations based on the data reviewed here will be integrated into the final report of the OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL project.

LLG/
October 12, 1998
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APPENDIX

Appendix `A': Focus Group Session Questions

Session #1 AGENCIES THAT DO INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: It is our understanding that this focus group has brought together agencies and organizations that have involved one or more people with disabilities as volunteers over the last year. Is that correct?
- Q2: Would anyone like to begin our discussion by sharing a bit about their experience in involving as volunteers people with disabilities?
- Q3: Has your involvement of persons with disabilities been deliberate? Or have people with disabilities found their way to volunteer for your organization just by chance?
- Q4: Could we talk a bit about the nature of the disabilities represented among volunteers with your organizations:
- what disabilities?
- severity?
- limitations and identified accommodation needs?
- Q5: What has your experience been to date: have the persons with disabilities encountered any significant barriers to the involvement they were hoping for?
- have there been people with disabilities who have applied to volunteer with your organization that you have had to turn down or who have not worked out?
- Q6: Could we talk about strategies, solutions, accommodations that have been created in your organizations to facilitate the involvement of persons with disabilities?
- accommodations - job modifications, altering environment, provision of support (define nature and extent)?
- what about any attempts to change attitudinal barriers ... has anyone done any specific education or sensitivity or anti-oppression/anti-racism training in this area?
- Q7: Have you encountered any barriers that you have not been able to resolve?
- accommodation needs?
- attitudes (staff, volunteers, clients, administration, ...)?
- Q8: Can you think of anything that might have made your integration/accommodations easier?
- information about disabilities?
- accommodation ideas?
- support for yourself - brainstorm, someone to call?
- support (person) for the volunteer - initial ... ongoing?
- Q9: On balance, has your experience indicated that the amount of time/resources required upfront to place people with disabilities as volunteers
a) was as great as you might have thought?
b) has been worth it in the end?
- Q10: What about involvement of persons with disabilities as volunteers in your organization in the future?
- would you be open to it?
- would you consider active recruitment?
- what would increase the likelihood of your accepting a person with disabilities as a volunteer in the future?
- Q11: Do you believe that voluntary organizations have any responsibility or obligation to reach out to people with disabilities as prospective volunteers, or to make any special efforts at integration or accommodation?

Session #2 AGENCIES THAT DO AND AGENCIES THAT DO NOT INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: Could we start with a round about which of your organizations have and have not involved people with disabilities as volunteers?
- Q2: For those of you who have involved persons with disabilities as volunteers, can you briefly describe your experiences so far?
- what disabilities?
 - degree of severity of disability?
 - limitations and identified accommodation needs?
- have there been people with disabilities who have applied to volunteer with your organization that you have had to turn down or who have not worked out?
- Q3: For those of you who have not involved persons with disabilities as volunteers, can you talk to us about your experience? (Please do not feel like we are judging you, etc. ... your candid responses will help us to understand the realities of agencies in our community)
- has anyone with a disability applied to volunteer with your organization?
 - if not, why do you think that might be?
 - if yes, can you describe what happened and why it did not work out?
- Q4: This is a question for all of you: Can you think of anything that might have made your integration/accommodations easier?
- information about disabilities?
 - accommodation ideas?
 - support for yourself - brainstorm, someone to call?
 - support (person) for the volunteer - initial ... ongoing?
- Q5: For those of you who have involved persons with disabilities as volunteers, on balance, has your experience indicated that the amount of time/resources required upfront to place people with disabilities as volunteers
- a) was as great as you might have thought?
 - b) has been worth it in the end?
 - c) would you recommend that other managers of volunteers consider involving persons with disabilities as volunteers?
- Q6: Do you believe that voluntary organizations have any responsibility or obligation to reach out to people with disabilities as prospective volunteers, or to make any special efforts at integration or accommodation?

Session #3 AGENCIES THAT DO NOT INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: Can you talk to us about your experience? (Please do not feel like we are judging you, etc. ... your candid responses will help us to understand the realities of agencies in our community)
- is there something about your setting or the work you do that makes it particularly ill-suited to involvement of persons with disabilities as volunteers?

 - has anyone with a disability applied to volunteer with your organization?
 - if not, why do you think that might be?
 - if someone with a disability applied to become a volunteer in your organization, how would you approach that application?

 - if yes, can you describe what happened and why it did not work out?
- Q2: Can you think of anything that might make integration of people with disabilities as volunteers easier/more attractive in your setting?
- information about disabilities?
 - accommodation ideas?
 - support for yourself - brainstorm, someone to call?
 - support (person) for the volunteer - initial ... ongoing?
- Q3: How do you think staff and other volunteers at your organization would react if you recruited and placed a volunteer who had
- a) a physical disability?
 - b) a developmental disability?
 - c) a psychiatric illness?
- Q4: Would you be open to considering involvement of persons with disabilities as volunteers in your setting in the future? (Details, please)
- Q5: Do you believe that voluntary organizations have any responsibility or obligation to reach out to people with disabilities as prospective volunteers, or to make any special efforts at integration or accommodation?

Session #4 PERSONS WHO DO OR HAVE RECENTLY VOLUNTEER(ED)

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: It is our understanding that this focus group has brought together people who are currently volunteering, or who have volunteered quite recently. Is that correct?
- Q2: Could we do a brief round and find out just a bit about the kind of volunteer work you have done most recently - what kind of work in what kind of organizations?
- Q3: Why did you decide to volunteer? What did you think you might get out of volunteering?
- Q4: How did you locate your volunteer placement?
- what route to locate the placement?
- referral agencies involved?
- volunteer centre used?
- Q5: Would you say it was easy to find volunteer work that you wanted to do?
- Q6: Have any of you needed any special accommodations to allow you to do the volunteer work you have done recently? (Details: job modification, environment modification, support, etc.)
- tell me about the process of getting the accommodations you need(ed)
- who did you talk to about your needs; how did that go?
- has the agency done/offered what you need?
- are there things that could help you do your work that are not possible/available?
- Q7: Have you encountered any negative attitudes in your volunteer work that have made you feel uncomfortable?
- Q8: What is the best thing about volunteering? What do you like the most? What have you gotten from your volunteer work?
- Q9: Do you have any advice for other people who have a disability and who want to volunteer - anything that might make it easier for them to get involved in a position they enjoy?
- Q10: Would you like to do more volunteer work in the future?

Session #5 PERSONS WHO DO OR HAVE RECENTLY VOLUNTEER(ED) AND PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRIED WITH LIMITED SUCCESS

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: It is our understanding that this focus group has brought together people who are currently volunteering, or who have volunteered quite recently. Is that correct?
- Q2: Could we do a brief round and find out just a bit about the kind of volunteer work you have done most recently - what kind of work in what kind of organizations?
- Q3: Why did you decide to volunteer? What did you think you might get out of volunteering?
- Q4: How did you locate your volunteer placement?
- what route to locate the placement?
- referral agencies involved?
- volunteer centre used?
- Q5: Would you say it was easy to find volunteer work that you wanted to do?
- Q6: Have any of you needed any special accommodations to allow you to do the volunteer work you have done recently? (Details: job modification, environment modification, support, etc.)
- tell me about the process of getting the accommodations you need(ed)
- who did you talk to about your needs; how did that go?
- has the agency done/offered what you need?
- are there things that could help you do your work that are not possible/available?
- Q7: Have you encountered any negative attitudes in your volunteer work that have made you feel uncomfortable?
- Q8: Would you like to do more volunteer work in the future?
- if yes, what might help you to find the kind of placement you would like?
- Q9: Do you have any advice for other people who have a disability and who want to volunteer - anything that might make it easier for them to get involved in a position they enjoy?

Session #6 PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER PURSUED VOLUNTEERING

Introductions - round table

Provide Project Background: Project Overview, Define 'Supported Volunteering,' Survey Results Overview, Purpose of Focus Group, Process Rules

- Q1: What do you think volunteering is?
- Q2: Who do you think volunteers?
- do you know anyone who volunteers? What do they tell you about their volunteer work?
- Q3: Do you think people with disabilities can find interesting and enjoyable volunteer work if they want?
- what are some of the places that might welcome your involvement as a volunteer?
- Q4: None of you has volunteered? We are interested in knowing why that is. Before you answer, let me say that some people do volunteer and some people don't. There's nothing wrong with not volunteering, but we wonder if you have thought about it at all for yourself. Can you talk to us a bit about that? Why might it be that you have not volunteered so far?
- Q5: Do you think you might try to volunteer at some point in the near future?
- what might it take to get you to consider volunteering at some point in the near future
- Q6: If you decided you were going to volunteer - say, next week - do you think it would be easy or hard to find a volunteer placement you would like to do?
- Q7: If you were going to volunteer at some point in the near future, can you think of how you might go about that? Where would you start?
- Q8: Can you tell us what you might need to help you get involved in volunteering?
e.g., help, assistance, support, transportation, accommodations, attendant care, aids or devices, etc.