

# ARE YOU READY FOR VOLUNTEERS?

Too often a community group is overworked, cannot afford any more paid staff, has tasks that are mundane, so decide to “get a/some volunteers”. This is sadly often an adhoc response to a crisis situation.

A proactive organisation will decide on volunteer input at their annual planning process and the management of the volunteer input should receive the same consideration as other major projects.

A successful volunteer programme should consider issues such as:

- What are the tasks we want volunteers to do
- What skills are required
- Who will supervise the volunteers
- How will we reward the volunteers
- What will be the cost of the programme
- Are the paid staff happy with the concept of working with volunteers?

## PRINCIPLES FOR A SOUND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

1. The participation of Volunteers within a programme must meet the needs of the organisation.
  - a. Volunteers must be given jobs that complement or enhance the work of paid staff; they are never given work which replaces the duties of paid staff.
  - b. Volunteers are not restricted to certain jobs or types of activities by virtue of their Volunteer status.
2. The application of a Volunteer programme should receive continued support from the organisation.
  - a. Such a commitment must be expressed through the allocation of resources (money, manpower, materials, working and storage space).
3. Responsibility for the administration of a Volunteer programme must be accepted by management.
  - a. Co-ordination of a Volunteer programme should be the primary responsibility of a single individual.
4. Planning a Volunteer programme should be a process which involves paid staff, and Volunteers.
5. Paid staff members at all levels must understand and accept the role and function of a Volunteer programme.

6. Volunteers must understand and accept the purpose and policies of the organisation.

### **COST OF VOLUNTEERS - RESOURCES HUMAN AND FINANCIAL**

The use of volunteers could incur cost.

An essential part of a successful programme is including an item in your annual budget "Volunteer Expenses". You need to include:

- Cost of Recruitment e.g. advertising.
- Expenses incurred so they can carry out their tasks.
- Cost of volunteers acknowledgement, e.g. cards, lunches, gifts etc.
- Transport expenses - may be they are using their own cars and need to be reimbursed for petrol.

Financial Resources are one part of the equation but do not forget the human resources required.

An extra duty will fall on someone to supervise the volunteer and this person needs to be committed to the role.

### **THE RIGHTS OF A VOLUNTEER**

- The right of being offered the opportunity to become a volunteer regardless of race, financial status, sex or age;
- The right to be interviewed and appropriately assigned to a meaningful job;
- The right to expect training and supervision to enable them to perform the duties well;
- The right to be involved in planning and evaluating the programme in which they participate;
- The right to receive recognition, and most important of all;
- The right to be regarded as persons, with individuality, uniqueness and value.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF A VOLUNTEERS**

- Be honest and open with the Co-ordinator of Volunteers and other staff, regarding intent, goals, needs and skills so that a good placement is possible;
- Understand the requirements of time and duties of assignments before accepting them and having accepted, fulfil the commitment to the best of your ability;
- Work to deserve being treated as a recognised and respected member of the team;
- Take the commitment seriously enough to participate in planning and evaluating the volunteer programme and in whatever training or learning opportunities are available;

- Share ideas for the volunteer frequently has a fresh, new perspective that is valuable. However, do not be hurt or resentful if the ideas are not always implemented;
- Respect the confidentiality of the society and its clients;
- Seek and accept honest feedback on performance. Remember, negative feedback is valuable too, when viewed as an opportunity for growth;
- Serve as goodwill ambassadors and interpreters for the society and its services in the community-at-large;

## **CONCLUSION**

Volunteering is about taking risks, plunging into the unknown. It involves sharing and being honest to oneself and thus to others. Volunteer is both a verb and a noun, but it is pre-eminently a verb, a doing word – a process – and a two way process at that. (Neville Peat)

A lot has been said about contracts, managing volunteers, expenses, responsibilities and other heady issues but, we must always remember the benefits of both to the organisation and the volunteers. Whilst the benefits to the organisation may be very visible, the benefits to the volunteer may not be so visible.

People volunteer for a variety of reasons initially because they want to give some time, but volunteering often opens the doors such as:

- Transition into paid work
- Training opportunities
- Mixing with different people
- Opportunities to try new interests e.g. crafts
- Escape from the burdens they experience in their personal lives e.g. caring for an invalid
- Opportunity to share their skills

**GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR DECISION WHETHER IT BE TO PROCEED  
OR PUT THE IDEA ON HOLD**

## **FURTHER READING**

Volunteers. A Guide for Volunteers and Their Organisations by Mary Wood,  
Hazard Press, 1988

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