

Teaming Up for Inclusive Volunteering: A Case Study of a Volunteer Program for Youth with and without Disabilities

By: [Kimberly D. Miller](#), [Stuart J. Schleien](#), Heather C. Kraft, Dawn Bodo-Lehman, Annie M. Frisoli, and Robert W Strack

Miller, K., Schleien, S., Kraft, H., Bodo-Lehman, D., Frisoli, A., & Strack, R. (2004). Teaming up for inclusive volunteering: A case study of a volunteer program for youth with and without disabilities. *Leisure/Loisir*, 28 (1-2), 115-136.

Made available courtesy of Taylor and Francis: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/RLOI>

*****Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Taylor and Francis. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.*****

Abstract:

Volunteerism is a recreational activity that may hold the key to greater social inclusion for individuals with disabilities into our communities. Facilitating inclusive volunteering opportunities for youth with and without disabilities has a potential scope of impact that must not be ignored, including benefits to the youth and our communities. A case study of an inclusive youth volunteer program is described. Out-comes for participants included increased knowledge of volunteerism, increased social interaction, and psychosocial outcomes such as increased belief in self and increased sense of responsibility. The feasibility and sustainability of inclusive volunteer programs, as well as future programming and research needs are also discussed.

Keywords: benefits, community, visibility, inclusion, leisure, volunteerism

Article:

In the quiet hours when we are alone and there is nobody to tell us what fine fellows we are, we come sometimes upon a moment in which we wonder, not how much money we are earning, nor how famous we have become, but what good we are doing. —A.A. Milne

During the past two decades, legislation has been enacted (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act; Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001) that mandates that individuals with disabilities have the same access to their communities as their peers without disabilities. Consequently, a large number of individuals with disabilities have moved out of institutional settings and into our communities. Within the recreation profession, community recreation providers are being urged to adopt more inclusive practices within their agencies (Hutchison & McGill, 1998; Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997; Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 2001). While advances are being made, more efforts are needed to weave citizens with disabilities into the social fabric of our communities (Walker, 1999).

"A community exists when individuals share locale and engage in patterned social interaction, share common identity, participate in inter-dependent activity, and work toward shared goals and collective action" (Kang, 1997, p. 224). Individuals with disabilities are often excluded from opportunities to contribute to community goals and collective action. As a result, despite the fact that people with disabilities are in the community, they are often forced into dependent rather than interdependent relationships. Scholars have eloquently argued the importance and value of individuals with disabilities being not only in the community, but part of the community as the end goal (Bogdan & Taylor, 1999; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Schleien, 1993). As Bogdan and Taylor (1999) pointed out, "Being in the community points only to physical presence; being part of the community means having the opportunity to interact and form relationships with other community members" (pp. 1-2).

If communities are built through the collective efforts of community structures and individuals (McKnight,

1997), it seems logical to also enlist the skills of individuals with disabilities in a manner that benefits their communities. As Schleien (1993) stated, "The time has come to adapt a new way of thinking, one founded on the premise that the community belongs to everyone, and everyone—regardless of level and type of ability—belongs to the community" (p. 67). A principle foundation of inclusive volunteering is its potential to provide people with and without disabilities with opportunities to develop social connections with neighbours and fellow citizens based on reciprocity. This article demonstrates that a key component to helping individuals with disabilities become part of their community may lie in inclusive volunteerism.

Volunteerism and Leisure

Volunteering can be broadly defined as a freely chosen activity benefiting others with no expectation of remuneration (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). Arguments have been presented for the qualification of volunteer activity as leisure (Henderson, 1981) and/or serious leisure (Parker, 1992; Stebbins, 1996). These arguments are based on the parallel nature of the benefits and motivations associated with both volunteering and leisure. Researchers have indicated that volunteers benefit psychosocially through increased self-esteem (Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Primavera, 1999), positive attitudinal changes (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Moore & Allen, 1996), improved self-concept (Moore & Allen, 1996; Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1992; Primavera, 1999), reduced alienation (Calabrese & Shumer, 1986), increased feelings of helpfulness (Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1992), greater sense of social responsibility (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Johnson et al., 1998; Primavera, 1999), development of civic identity (Nieme & Chapman, 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1997), reduction in problem behaviours (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990; Calabrese & Shumer, 1986), and increased sense of purpose (Weinstein, Xie, & Cleanthous, 1995). Similar benefits of volunteering for individuals with disabilities are expected. Research conducted on the benefits of volunteerism specific to people with disabilities, although limited, suggests additional benefits including: increased amounts of appropriate behaviour, raised levels of maturity and responsibility, improved socialization and relationship skills, increased sensitivity to the needs of others, a sense of agency or the ability to act upon and influence the world, development of social networks, and practical and work skills development (Brill, 1994; Miller et al., 2002; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998). Given the potential significance and breadth of these outcomes, volunteerism by people with disabilities could significantly impact their levels of independence, employability, and quality of life. While participation in volunteer activities can lead to gains in work skills, program emphasis should be on volunteerism as a leisure activity, and never a substitute for competitive employment or for the primary purpose of attempting to gain employment.

The benefits of volunteering align well with the benefits sought for participants by recreation professionals. Despite the fact that most recreational professionals agree that volunteering is a form of recreation and/or leisure, there has been little effort on behalf of the profession to facilitate volunteer experiences. Considering the broad impact that volunteering could have, we are compelled to facilitate and evaluate inclusive volunteering further.

Scope of Impact

While we are focused on the benefits that individuals with disabilities could reap through inclusive community volunteerism, we recognize that our local communities have a great deal to gain as well. Broadening the diversity and increasing the numbers of those who volunteer will also impact the functioning of our communities' volunteer sectors. According to Statistics Canada, 6.5 million Canadians volunteered through a charitable or non-profit organization in 2000. These individuals volunteered a total of 1.05 billion hours, or the equivalent of 549,000 full-time jobs (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001). In the US, 83.9 million adults formally volunteered 15.5 billion hours in 2000, or the equivalent of 9 million full-time employees (Independent Sector, 2001). Simply put, volunteers enable organizations to maximize their resources in pursuit of their missions (Darling & Stavole, 1992).

Yet, most non-profit organizations indicate that maintaining and replenishing a pool of talented volunteers is an ongoing and often difficult process (Wysocki, 1991). "Although statistics show that over half of all U.S. citizens are involved in volunteer activity, most organizations which involve volunteers indicate that the need for

volunteers is greater than the current supply and can only see that need growing in the future" (Hostad, 1993, p. 32). This reality is one of the driving forces behind the volunteer administration profession's call to diversify their volunteer forces (Rodriguez, 1997; Zimmer, 1990). Hostad (1993) concluded that the greatest challenge for the non-profit sector in the twenty-first century will be to tap the other half of U.S. citizens who are currently not volunteering. As the prevalence data on volunteering indicate, those who are not volunteering include people with disabilities and other disenfranchised groups.

State-of-the-Art in Inclusive Volunteering

An extensive amount of information is available on the prevalence of volunteers without disabilities in our communities, but little is known about volunteering by people with disabilities. To our knowledge, only three assessments of the prevalence of volunteers with disabilities have been conducted. Graff and Vedell (2000) sampled volunteer coordinators in the Waterloo Region of Ontario, Canada and found that 85% of the respondents involved people with disabilities as volunteers within the past year. However, data were not available concerning what proportion of the volunteer pool was comprised of individuals with disabilities.

A needs assessment conducted in Greensboro, North Carolina found that only 2.4% of the total number of volunteers in Greensboro had an identified disability (Phoenix, 2000). A national needs assessment revealed that only 5.4% of all volunteers in the United States had an identified disability, and only 1.1% had a developmental disability (Miller, Schleien, & Bedini, 2003). Considering that approximately 19% of the population is disabled, and approximately 3% have a developmental disability (Kraus, Stoddard, & Gilmartin, 1996), a disparity between the number of people with disabilities currently volunteering and the potential numbers of volunteers signifies a viable opportunity to engage more of our citizens in the community process.

A few Canadian organizations are currently working on helping communities develop the necessary attitudes and skills for including volunteers with disabilities. "Ready ... Get Set ... Volunteer!" is a project launched by Opportunities for All (www.k-wvolcentre.on.ca/rgsv.htm) and is housed at the Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo & Area of Ontario, Canada. This program assists individuals who want to volunteer and the agencies that engage volunteers to provide more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to make a contribution to their community. In partnership with the Ministry of Citizenship and the Ontario Network of Independent Living Centres, the Volunteer Centre of Toronto has implemented the "Ready & Able" program to assist volunteer coordinators with resource materials, recruitment, interviewing, and working with volunteers with disabilities (www.volunteertoronto.on.ca/vct-indexpage.asp).

Likewise, in the U.S., some efforts have been made to develop and understand methods for creating inclusive volunteering projects. "Project SUCCESS" was developed by United Cerebral Palsy in Washington, DC to build an inclusive service-learning program that pairs youth with and without disabilities together to independently research, plan, and execute local service projects (www.ucpa.org). "Partnership FIVE. (Fostering Inclusive Volunteer Efforts)" is a program being implemented by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) designed to prepare individuals with disabilities to become volunteers in their community. In addition, efforts are made to support family members and careproviders in helping their sons and daughters access volunteer opportunities. Other activities include preparing community non-profit agencies to support these individuals in their volunteer efforts, creating a network of support mechanisms for inclusive volunteering, and creating a paradigm shift where individuals with disabilities are seen as contributing to the building of community capacity.

Building on previous efforts, the inclusive volunteer program described next attempted to foster an inclusive volunteer environment for youth with and without disabilities, through which everyone's talents and abilities could shine. The program description and results attempt to recognize and accommodate the challenges specific to facilitating inclusive volunteer efforts.

Teaming Up for Inclusive Volunteering: A Case Study

This case study was implemented through a collaboration of five agencies: Kids Korps USA, UNCG, Lifespan

(out-of-school-time program for youth with disabilities), Boys & Girls Club of Greater High Point, and a neighbourhood Home Depot. Based on the vision of Kids Korps USA, this program was designed to help youth with and without disabilities become actively involved in their communities through volunteering. The emphasis was on volunteerism as a leisure activity. Over an eight-month period, three groups of youth participated in the program. Each group met weekly for 1 1/2 hours and participated for eight consecutive weeks. During weekly sessions, youth participated in team-building activities, learned about volunteerism (i.e., individual benefits of volunteering, its importance to the community, how to become involved in volunteer activities), and completed a volunteer activity.

Participants

Youth were recruited from the Boys & Girls Club and Lifespan. Program staff visited each agency and addressed youth and parents about the program and allowed interested youth to sign up. A total of 12 youth with disabilities (ages 10 to 16 years), 38 youth without disabilities (ages 10 to 17 years), and 2 junior leaders (ages 19 and 20 years) choose to participate in the program. Youth with disabilities displayed a wide range of ability levels. Their disabilities included mild to severe developmental delays (e.g., autism, Down syndrome, mental retardation), traumatic brain injury, sensory impairments (e.g., visual impairments), minor hemiparesis, and gross motor deficits requiring the use of a wheelchair (e.g., cerebral palsy). Twenty-five percent of the youth did not communicate verbally, and instead, regularly used facial expressions, pointing, touching, eye contact, clapping, and other gestures.

Roles and Responsibilities

The program plan was based on a curriculum inspired by Kids Korps USA. Kids Korps USA is a youth volunteer organization that engages young people, ages 5 to 18, in charitable activities and community-based service. Its mission is to instill in youth the spirit of giving while providing valuable education in leadership and responsibility.

Kids Korps programs promote respect for, and service to, communities; family togetherness; healthy peer relationships; and teamwork. These programs are based on the premise that volunteerism is a pro-active method for tapping into a youth's unique strengths to build capacities for dealing with crises, meeting needs, and solving problems. It creates opportunities for youth to develop personal and social skills, become more aware of their social and physical environment, feel that the community values them and their efforts, and experience increased self-esteem—all of which are essential to healthy development.

Collaboration was a key factor in implementing the program plan since Kids Korps USA did not have the necessary resources or know-how to execute an inclusive volunteering program. Therapeutic recreation staff from the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at UNCG provided ongoing technical support to Kids Korps. Examples of support included restructuring activities from an individualistic to a cooperative design; facilitation of the division of participants into small heterogeneous groups that included youth with and without disabilities; physical and rule adaptations for ensuring participant success; and creating a socially inclusive and supportive environment. Lifespan and Boys & Girls Club staff collaborated to facilitate the program by providing transportation to and from inclusive volunteering activities, encouraging acceptance and social interactions between all participants, and providing hands-on assistance during program sessions. Hands-on assistance included holding materials steady while youth hammered or glued objects together, giving additional verbal instruction, and providing full physical prompts for youth with and without disabilities as they learned how to use new tools. Home Depot's collaborative contribution consisted of providing woodworking and environmental projects as well as knowledgeable staff.

Program Plan/Setting

The volunteer program took place in a variety of settings, including Lifespan, Boys & Girls Club, Home Depot, a nursing home, and a community bowling alley. Program plans were based on curriculum developed by Kids Korps USA. During program sessions, a recreation professional and a therapeutic recreation graduate student at UNCG served as program leaders by implementing team-building activities, discussions about volunteering,

project activities, and debriefing sessions. A brief description of each of the eight sessions follows:

Session 1. The initial session focused on educating participants about what a volunteer is, why people volunteer, the various roles that volunteers could play in the community, and the overall importance of volunteerism to youth and community. Youth participated in icebreaker and team-building activities, and watched a Kids Korps video in order to establish the concepts of volunteerism and full social inclusion.

Session 2. The goals of this session were to help participants establish an understanding of the needs of older adults. They also learned about the many diverse roles volunteers could play in meeting those needs. There were multiple objectives used to help meet these goals. Initially, individuals participated in a team-building activity to reinforce the concept of teamwork and to foster an accepting and inclusive environment. Program leaders discussed the needs of older adults in the community and assisted participants in identifying ways that volunteers could help meet their needs. The volunteers made greeting cards, posters, and beaded bracelets and necklaces to deliver to older adults at a local nursing home.

Session 3. This session took place at the local Home Depot. The goal of this session was to work as a team to complete woodworking projects that would be delivered to nursing home residents. Participants engaged in an initial team-building activity to emphasize teamwork and completed several woodworking projects (e.g., bug houses that were later filled with potpourri and decorated with butterflies).

Session 4. A nursing home was the location of this fourth session. The goal was for youth to serve as formal volunteers and meet the needs of older adults in their community. They visited a local nursing home and gave the products they produced in prior sessions to the residents. Participants also interviewed the residents in order to interact and not merely hand over the items without any discussion. The following questions were asked during the one-on-one interviews: "How are you doing? What do you like to do? What are your favourite foods? Do you have any family in town?"

Session 5. The goals of this session were to help youth volunteers understand the issues of recycling as it related to the environment and the roles they could play in recycling. The session commenced with a team-building activity. Then the participants received a packet of information about recycling and its importance to the community. Program leaders facilitated an interactive discussion about recycling and volunteering. The youth identified ways in which they could help meet the recycling needs of their community and completed a project related to recycling (i.e., egg carton caterpillars, milk carton flower vases, milk jug piggy banks). Participants were encouraged to share their finished products with neighbours and friends as a way of extending the concepts of both volunteerism and recycling.

Session 6. The goal of this session was to work as a team at Home Depot to build wooden flower boxes or paint clay pots in which pansies were placed, that would enhance their community. The participants discussed ways that volunteers could help make the environment a better place in which to live.

Session 7. The goal for participants during this session was to beautify their community's environment by planting a flower garden. Across the three groups of youth, two flower gardens were developed at two different Boys & Girls Clubs and one at the church where the Lifespan program was housed. Home Depot, once again, generously provided the necessary supplies and instruction. After completing the garden, the youth discussed many ways that volunteers could assist to enhance their neighbourhoods.

Session 8. The final session was used to review what the volunteers learned during the eight-week program and to celebrate the group's accomplishments. To create a social atmosphere, the youth met at a bowling alley, an activity selected by a Lifespan staff member. Multiple activities were used to meet the session's objectives. Youth with and without disabilities formed inclusive teams and bowled as a celebration of their accomplishments. After bowling, program leaders reviewed the basic principles of volunteerism; ways in which volunteers are important in helping to meet the needs of older adults; and how volunteers address their

community's environmental needs. They also identified ways in which they could volunteer in the future. At the program's conclusion, each volunteer received a certificate of participation and completed a program evaluation.

Program Evaluation

Data were collected through pre- and post-participation interviews and through naturalistic observations. Pre- and post-participation interviews were conducted using semistructured interview guides. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. Youth with and without disabilities participated in both pre- and post-participation interviews designed to assess their knowledge of volunteerism and their perceptions on participation in an inclusive program. Post-participation interviews were conducted with the staff of the partnering agencies (i.e., Boys & Girls Club, Lifespan, Kids Korps) that were designed to assess the perceived benefits to youth participants and the sustainability of these initiatives. Tables 1 and 2 list the questions asked during pre- and post-participation interviews.

Table 1
Pre-Participation Semistructured Interview Guides

| Interviewees | Interview Questions |
|----------------------------|---|
| Youth without disabilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a volunteer? What do they do? Is what they do important? 2. Have you ever volunteered before? Why or why not? 3. What made you want to participate in this program? 4. Can you describe a disability? Have you ever known someone with a disability? 5. Do you think having someone with a disability in the program will affect how much you enjoy or get out of your volunteering? How? 6. Would you rather volunteer in a group that did not have someone with a disability in it? Why or why not? |
| Youth with disabilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a volunteer? What do they do? Is what they do important? 2. Have you ever volunteered before? Why or why not? 3. What made you want to participate in this program? |

Table 2
Post-Participation Semistructured Interview Guides

| Interviewees | Interview Questions |
|------------------------------|--|
| Youth without disabilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a volunteer? What do they do? Is what they do important? 2. What did you like/not like about the volunteer program? 3. Did you help anyone through this program? Who and how? 4. Do you want to volunteer again in the future? Would you like to volunteer with youth with disabilities in the future? 5. Did having youth with disabilities in the program affect how much you enjoyed or got out of your volunteering? 6. Have your feelings or attitudes changed toward people with disabilities since starting this program? |
| Youth with disabilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a volunteer? What do they do? Is what they do important? 2. What did you like/not like about the volunteer program? 3. Did you help anyone through this program? Who and how? 4. Do you want to volunteer again in the future? |
| Staff of partnering agencies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you feel about the program overall? 2. What barriers do you see to providing inclusive programs in the future? 3. What did your agency learn from being a partner in this program? 4. How did the youth of your agency benefit from this program? 5. Do you wish to continue offering inclusive opportunities? 6. What strategies would you use to facilitate an inclusive volunteering program in the future? |

Each week, immediately following the session, program staff recorded their observations. They were asked to address the following probes within their observation notes: (a) a general description of the program; (b) description of the social structure of activities; (c) description of any social interaction; (d) roles that program leaders played in program implementation; (e) strategies that program leaders implemented to attempt to include all participants in activities; (f) strategies that volunteers used to attempt to include everyone in activities; (g) specific modifications or adjustments made to the program, activities, and equipment to enhance success; (h) roles that other adults played to assist with the program; (i) perceived outcomes for volunteers (e.g., learned new skill; became more social; made new friend; product development; became more comfortable with the environment and peers; inappropriate behaviour reduced); and (j) barriers that interfered with the success of the program and strategies implemented to overcome them.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed for emerging themes relating to program outcomes that re-occurred across interviews (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). These themes were then compared to the observation notes for supporting evidence. For social validation of the themes, "member checks" (Henderson, 1991) were conducted by presenting the themes to the partnering agencies for their analyses. Representatives from each of the partnering agencies reviewed the themes and a consensus was reached on the validity of the program outcomes identified through the themes.

Program Outcomes

A multitude of positive outcomes from this program were identified. These outcomes are organized according to the themes that arose from the data analysis. Outcomes for participants included an increased understanding of volunteerism, increased social interaction, and psychosocial outcomes such as increased belief in self and increased sense of responsibility. An evaluation of the feasibility and sustainability of inclusive volunteer programs is also presented.

Increased Understanding of Volunteerism

Prior to and following each volunteer activity, the participants reflected on the reasons for, and benefits accruing from their services. This led to the youth understanding the concepts of what a volunteer is, how people volunteer, and the importance of teamwork to get things accomplished. While all participants stated that they had learned more about volunteerism— staff of the partnering agencies reiterated this --the qualitative data did not clearly demonstrate this for the youth without disabilities. When youth were asked what they accomplished specifically as volunteers, the common response was "helped people." Although this is often-times an important component to volunteering, participants required repeated prompts from program leaders to verbalize what else they had accomplished during the program (e.g., made projects for older adults; planted flowers to beautify the environment) and the impact that these activities had on their community.

For youth with disabilities, the increased understanding of volunteerism was more evident. For example, one youth with a moderate developmental delay stated that he did not know what a volunteer was during the pre-participation interview. During the post-interview, he stated, "Good help out." Another youth with a developmental disability defined a volunteer prior to participation as, "Somebody who works in the community." During the post-participation interview, this same youth stated, "A person who helps out and stuff, like, helping out with stuff with not asking and not getting paid."

It is interesting to note that the youth without disabilities were more focused on the assistance they provided to their peers with disabilities than to the other ways in which they had given to their community. When asked who and how they had helped, almost all of them cited a situation in which they had provided assistance to a peer with a disability.

Increased Social Interaction

Early on, several of the youth with and without disabilities expressed fear related to becoming friends with strangers with visibly different backgrounds. The volunteers without disabilities were "scared" that they would not do or say the right things. Observation notes demonstrated that by the program's conclusion, communication flowed between the two groups as if they were beginning to establish their own language.

Observation notes identified several participants with disabilities who did not socialize during the initial weeks of the program, but interacted often with others by program's end. For example, a participant with a disability who rarely smiled or held his head up early on, smiled, looked ahead, and spoke to program leaders by the final program session by answering questions using two- to three-word phrases. He also smiled regularly at other participants. As the weeks progressed, the volunteers with disabilities appeared to be enjoying the activities and their new partners with greater intensity. This was evidenced by increased verbal communication (e.g., addressing their peers by name, laughter, lengthier one-on-one and group discussions) and non-verbal communications (e.g., hand-holding, hugging, working together, taking pictures of each other). Also, by the final session, several participants with disabilities verbalized that they liked their peers without disabilities and began to initiate group games independently and verbally and/or physically communicated with their peers.

Similar outcomes were observed with volunteers without disabilities. Observation notes demonstrated that as the program progressed, participants without disabilities initiated social interactions and provided assistance to their peers with disabilities with greater frequency. Initially, non-disabled participants only sought out program leaders for assistance and socialization. When this occurred, program leaders would redirect them to interact with their peers. By program's end, participants were socializing and helping each other on a regular basis. For

example, one non-disabled participant stated during the post-participation interview, "In the beginning I was shy, but now that I'm used to seeing them [peers with disabilities] and being around them, I'm used to it now. It's just like being with a regular friend." Another participant, stated, "At first I felt like, 'Oh my goodness,' but then I got interested in it and it was okay." Even staff of the Boys & Girls Club stated that the youth had never been around "disability kids," and that they were now more comfortable, and even felt confident, in their ability to interact with youth with disabilities.

Psychosocial Outcomes

Youth with and without disabilities often discussed the joy that they experienced through volunteering. They all stated that volunteering made them, "feel good," as is the common sentiment of volunteers in general. In addition, staff of the partnering agencies perceived that youth with and without disabilities had increased their belief in self and sense of responsibility through participation in the program. A staff member with the youth with disabilities stated, "here [Lifespan] we deal a lot with working with the children to basically believe in themselves And I saw a lot of that." The staff member with the youth without disabilities offered an example of a participant who had not been around peers with disabilities before, and how he was unsure of whether he would be able to interact with them. She stated that this participant's belief in self had been greatly impacted when he discovered that he not only could interact with them, but was good at it. In addition, staff from the partnering agencies identified examples of how they perceived an increased sense of responsibility in the youth. For example, a staff member serving the youth with disabilities stated that two of the volunteers had a high sense of responsibility for maintaining the garden that had been planted by the group at their facility. She stated that the youth watered the flowers daily without prompting.

Feasibility

Partnering agencies admitted that they were apprehensive about the feasibility of an inclusive volunteering program when they were first approached with the concept. Reflecting back on her thoughts prior to program implementation, a staff member serving the youth without disabilities stated:

At first, I thought it was going to be a whole big mess. So I didn't know how it was going to work out and how everything was going to come out. But every time we left, our kids talked about them [their peers with disabilities] the whole way home. I mean, they liked working with the Lifespan kids. They really liked it!

Similarly, a staff member responsible for the youth with disabilities stated:

I was really surprised how quickly the kids seemed to really take to each other. I did not necessarily have concerns, but I just questioned our guys just jumping in. So I learned that children in that age range really do mix well together, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Staff members serving the youth with disabilities also noted that the inclusive volunteering program made them more aware of the importance of providing opportunities for their constituents to participate in inclusive environments. They gained an emergent interest in developing additional inclusive opportunities. Without prompting from program coordinators, staff members from their respective agencies voiced interest in continuing inclusive outings and activities beyond volunteering. In fact, they made arrangements for their participants to get together for a pizza lunch.

Participant reactions were even more revealing. The youth overwhelmingly stated that they enjoyed the inclusive environment and would unequivocally choose to volunteer in groups that included youth with and without disabilities in the future. One volunteer without a disability stated, "It wouldn't be the same [without the kids with disabilities] ... so, I think it's better with kids, working with kids with disabilities."

Sustainability

All partnering agencies and participants were clearly interested in continuing the inclusive volunteering

program. However, the program's sustainability, without the support from UNCG program staff, is not as clear. When asked what strategies they would use to facilitate inclusive volunteer programs in the months and years ahead, none of the staff from the partnering agencies cited strategies that UNCG program staff believed were essential to the success of the inclusive nature of the program (i.e., use of team-building activities to promote an atmosphere of teamwork and to allow participants to become more familiar with each other in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere; small heterogeneous groups working on co-operatively structured activities; and using behaviour-specific positive reinforcement to support co-operative efforts). Instead, the response of one staff member serving the youth with disabilities gave the representative response, "I'd call Kim Miller [project coordinator from UNCG] and ask her what she did."

Broader Community Impact

Older adults received social visits and gifts from young, smiling volunteers. Three flower gardens were built that helped beautify the community where the youth lived. Trash was recycled into gifts that were offered to neighbours. From a longer-term and more significant perspective, it is hopeful that lifelong volunteers were created who might benefit their communities for years to come. Research indicates that youth who volunteer are twice as likely to mature into adult volunteers, and that 60% of adults who currently volunteer began so by the age of 14 years (Hamilton & Hussain, 1998).

It is also worthy to note the program's impact on its corporate partner, Home Depot. Community service is highly valued at Home Depot, and this program complemented company values. Home Depot associates involved in this program enjoyed teaching the children how to make wooden gift items for others (e.g., flower boxes), and expressed a strong interest in continuing this inclusive volunteer program throughout the year.

Discussion and Implications

A multitude of positive outcomes for the youth volunteers were identified. These outcomes included an increased understanding of volunteerism, increased social interaction, and psychosocial outcomes such as increased belief in self and increased sense of responsibility. Outcomes of increased social interaction, belief in self, and sense of responsibility are consistent with the literature addressing the benefits of community service to volunteers (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1998; Johnson et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Primavera, 1999). These outcomes are also consistent with those associated with volunteerism specific to individuals with disabilities (Brill, 1994; Miller et al., 2002; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998).

Kids Korps has had much success in teaching the concept of volunteerism to its mainstream audience. However, staff learned that additional work is needed to engage a wider range of volunteers. Further development of supporting materials to address the abstract concept of volunteerism to diverse ability groups is needed. Greater preparation and development of visual materials, exercises, and activities that more clearly illustrate volunteer service activities and their benefits (e.g., to seniors, animals, environments) need to occur. In addition, further development of curriculum materials that connect volunteer actions with community needs is warranted.

Participants without disabilities did not communicate clearly that they comprehended the primary purpose of the program; that is, to create one unified volunteer group to make a difference in the community by serving others. They identified the assistance they had provided to their peers with disabilities, and not what they had given back to the broader community (e.g., older adults, environment) when asked who they had helped and what they had accomplished. This may have been due to several programming approaches that were used, including the (over) emphasis on the importance of teamwork and including peers with disabilities in every activity, structure of the debriefings, and the nature of the evaluation. Firstly, program leaders continuously emphasized the importance of teamwork between participants with and without disabilities. Social and helpful behaviours were the targets of the staff's behaviour-specific positive reinforcement. Secondly, debriefings following each program session highlighted what it was like to work as a team of people of varying abilities. Program leaders praised individuals and co-operative work teams that adapted to the needs of its members with disabilities. Thirdly, the nature of the evaluation protocol may have over-emphasized the disability aspect of the program (e.g., pre-participation interview questions that asked the nondisabled youth about their feelings toward

volunteering with youth with disabilities). These program approaches appeared to have led to the development of peer tutor roles versus peer companion roles. Rynders and Schleien (1991) have recommended that a more balanced approach to these two roles is warranted in most inclusive community programs.

Despite attempts to schedule training by UNCG program staff for the partnering agencies on the inclusion strategies that would be implemented, such training was never completed due to various scheduling issues. Instead, brief discussions were held with the staff of the partnering agencies about fulfilling the various roles of a trainer advocate, as implied in the literature (Heyne, Schleien, & McAvoy, 1993; Rynders & Schleien, 1991; Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997) during program implementation. These discussions emphasized the need for staff members to avoid providing assistance to the participants with disabilities exclusively, but instead, providing assistance to inclusive groups. This included providing verbal prompts to the participants without disabilities on how best to engage the participants with disabilities when needed. While staff performed their trainer advocacy roles effectively, the lack of training on inclusion strategies may have had a detrimental impact on the sustainability of the inclusive volunteer program. It is possible that without further support from UNCG program staff, it is unlikely that this program will be sustained. This is consistent with previous findings on sustainability of inclusive initiatives (Germ & Schleien, 1997).

Recommendations for Future Programming

Based on these implications, the following recommendations are made to more successfully engage youth volunteers of varying abilities. Alternatives to the support materials and presentation of curriculum, the addition of more diverse roles for volunteers with and without disabilities, and clarification of program goals for volunteers are warranted.

Volunteer activities need to be identified and developed that are of interest and flexible enough to accommodate participants with a wider range of abilities. Ideally, youth could elect to participate in a small component of a larger volunteer assignment that is of greater interest, as well as a good match, for the individual's chronological age and abilities. This approach could enable a greater number of volunteers to be active in the community.

It is necessary that volunteers understand clearly their dual roles as volunteers and peer companions. It may be helpful for volunteers to understand the potential multitude of benefits to inclusive volunteering; that is, serving as peer partners to others with disabilities, as well as accomplishing important community work. It is possible that a better balance between civic responsibility and social inclusion could help serve as a beneficial framework for more inclusive and healthier communities, as well as more effective volunteers.

Finally, a more substantial effort by inclusion facilitators to provide partnering agency staff with training on best professional practices for inclusive volunteering is essential if inclusive volunteer programs are to become more prevalent and sustainable throughout our communities.

At this time, we still know little about engaging people with disabilities in community service. Although we believe that having a sense of responsibility to the local community is a necessary quality-of-life ingredient for individual citizens, to date, it remains unclear whether we can accomplish this. The "early research" described in this article provides modest, yet growing evidence that inclusive volunteering can be very beneficial. A multitude of positive outcomes at the individual and community levels were observed that encourage us to continue to pursue these initiatives. We also continue to learn that a collaborative effort is needed to create a well-conceived and carefully designed program. Do we believe there is an important role for recreation professionals to play as facilitators of inclusive volunteering? Absolutely! With a genuine concern for building healthy and inclusive communities, an understanding of the leisure aspects of volunteerism, and prepared with a strong skill set to successfully engage individuals of varying abilities, it is very possible that recreation professionals are in the best position to make volunteering a reality for a greater number of citizens.

Tapping into the unique skills and abilities of all citizens makes a community a better place to live for everyone. Now is the time for every individual, including people with disabilities, to have the opportunity to "live the

good life" by volunteering and performing community service. All people must have opportunities to give of themselves to their communities, to do things of public value, by keying into their personal interests and strengths to make our communities more powerful, and in turn, better places to live.

References

- Allen, IP., Philliber, S., & Hoggson, N. (1990). School-based prevention of teenage pregnancy and school dropout: Process evaluation of the national replication of the Teen Outreach Program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, /8(4), 505-524.
- Bogdan, R. & Taylor, S.J. (1999, February). Building stronger communities for all: Thoughts about community participation for people with developmental disabilities. Paper presented at the meeting of the President's Committee on Mental Retardation's Forgotten Generations Conference, Washington, DC.
- Brill, C.L. (1994). The effects of participation in service-learning on adolescents with disabilities. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17, 369-380.
- Calabrese, R., & Shumer, H. (1986). The effects of service activities on adolescent alienation. *Adolescence*, 21(83), 675-687.
- Cnaan, R.A., Handy, F., & Wadsworth, M. (1996). Defining who is a volunteer: Conceptual and empirical considerations. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 25, 364-383.
- Darling, L.L., & Stavole, R.D. (1992). Volunteers: The overlooked and under-valued asset. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 11(1), 27-35.
- Germ, P.A. & Schleien, S.J. (1997). Inclusive community leisure services: Responsibilities of key players. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 31(1), 22-37.
- Graff, L.L., & Vedell, J.A. (2000). Opportunities for all: The potential for supported volunteering in community agencies. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, /8(2), 10-16.
- Hall, M., McKeown, L., Roberts, K. (2001). *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 national survey of giving, volunteering, and participating* (Catalogue No. 71-542-X1E). Ottawa: Ministry of Industry.
- Hamilton, M., & Hussain, A. (1998). *America's teenage volunteers*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.
- Hamilton, S.F., & Fenzel, L.M. (1988). The impact of volunteer experience on adolescent social development: Evidence of program effects. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 3(1), 65-80.
- Henderson, K. (1981). Motives and perceptions of volunteerism as a leisure activity. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 13, 208-218.
- Henderson, K.A. (1991). *Dimensions of choice: A qualitative approach to recreation, parks, and leisure research*. State College, PA: Venture.
- Heyne, L., Schleien, S., & McAvoy, L. (1993). *Making friends: Using recreation activities to promote friendships between children with and without disabilities*. Minneapolis: School of Kinesiology and Leisure Studies, College of Education, University of Minnesota.
- Hostad, C. (1993). Diversity in volunteerism. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 11(3), 32-37.
- Hutchison, R, & McGill, J. (1998). *Leisure, integration, and community* (2nd ed). Toronto: Leisurability.
- Independent Sector. (2001). *Giving and volunteering in the United States 2001: Key findings* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.independentsector.org/PDFs/GVOIkeyfind.pdf>.
- Johnson, M.K., Beebe, T., Mortimer, J.T., & Snyder, M. (1998). Volunteerism in adolescence: A process perspective. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(3), 309-322.
- Kang, R. (1997). Building community capacity for health promotion: A challenge for public health nurses. In B.W. Spradley & J.A. Allender (Ed.s.) *Readings in community health nursing*. (5th ed., pp. 221-232). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Krause, L.E., Stoddard, S., & Gilmartin, D. (1996). *Chartbook on disability in the United States, 1996*. An InfoUse Report. Washington, DC: U.S. National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.
- Kretzmann, J.P. & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.
- McKnight, J.L. (1997). A 21st century map for healthy communities and families. *Families in Society*, 78, 117-127.
- Miller, K.D., Schleien, S.J., & Bedini, L.A. (2003). Barriers to the inclusion of volunteers with developmental

- disabilities. *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 21(1), 25-30.
- Miller, K.D., Schleien, S.J., Rider, C., Hall, C., Roche, M., & Worsley, J. (2002). Inclusive volunteering: Benefits to participants and community. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 36(3), 247-259.
- Moore, C.W., & Allen, J.P. (1996). The effects of volunteering on the young volunteer. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 17(2), 231-258.
- Niemi, R.G., & Chapman, C. (1998). The civic development of 9th- through 12th-grade students in the United States: 1996 (NCES 1999-131). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics.
- Omoto, A.M., & Snyder, M. (1990). Basic research in action: Volunteerism and society's response to AIDS. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 16, 152-165.
- Omoto, A.M., Snyder, M., & Berghuis, J.P. (1992). The psychology of volunteerism: A conceptual analysis and a program of action research. In J.B. Pryor and G.D. Reeder (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of HIV Infection*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Parker, S. (1992). Volunteering as serious leisure. *Journal of Applied Recreation*, 17(1), 1-11.
- Phoenix, T.L. (2000, January/February). Building community through inclusive volunteering. *Centerline.. A Newsletter of the Volunteer Center of Greensboro*, p. 4.
- Primavera, J. (1999). The unintended consequences of volunteerism: Positive outcomes for those who serve. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 18(112), 125-140.
- Rodriguez, S. (1997). Diversity in volunteerism: Deriving advantage from difference. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 15(3), 18-20.
- Roker, D., Player, K., & Coleman, J. (1998). Challenging the image: The involvement of young people with disabilities in volunteering and campaigning. *Disability & Society*, 13(5), 725-741.
- Rynders, J.E., & Schleien, S.J. (1991). *Together successfully: Creating recreational and educational programs that integrate people with and without disabilities*. Arlington, TX: ARC-USA.
- Schleien, S.J. (1993). Access and inclusion in community leisure services. *Parks and Recreation*, 28(4), 66-72.
- Schleien, S.J., Ray, M.T., & Green, F.P. (1997). *Community recreation and people with disabilities: Strategies for inclusion* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Smith, R.W., Austin, D.R., & Kennedy, D.W. (2001). *Inclusive and special recreation: Opportunities for persons with disabilities* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1988). *Understanding and conducting qualitative research*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Stebbins, R.A. (1996). Volunteering: A serious leisure perspective. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 25, 211-224.
- Walker, P. (1999). From community presence to sense of place: Community experiences of adults with developmental disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24(1), 23-32.
- Weinstein, L., Xie, X., & Cleanthous, C.C. (1995). Purpose in life, boredom, and volunteerism in a group of retirees. *Psychological Reports*, 76 (2), 482.
- Wysocici, L.K. (1991). An untapped volunteer resource: People with HIV disease, ARC, or AIDS. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 9 (3), 8-11.
- Youniss, J., & Yates, M. (1997). *Community service and social responsibility in youth*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zimmer, L.A. (1990). People with disadvantages: A source for innovative recruitment. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 8(3), 39-41.