The Effects of Volunteering on the Young Volunteer

Cynthia W. Moore\textsuperscript{1,2} and Joseph P. Allen\textsuperscript{1}

This article reviews some of the best researched volunteer service programs for adolescents and addresses three major questions: 1) What do existing data tell us about the effectiveness of community volunteer service programs in positively influencing the lives of the participants? 2) What do we know about why such programs work? 3) What are the most promising directions for future research and programming efforts to pursue? The review suggests that diverse, successful volunteer programs for adolescents, along with school-based support, are related to improvements in both the academic and social arenas. Specifically, volunteering relates to reduced rates of course failure, suspension from school, and school dropout, and improvement in reading grades; to a reduction in teen pregnancy; and to improved self-concept and attitudes toward society. The conditions under which the volunteering occurs, such as number of hours and the type of volunteer work, seem in some cases to be important to these outcomes, as does the age of the student volunteer; however, much is yet to be understood about these factors.

KEY WORDS: community service; adolescents; program evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

From the classroom to the Congress, volunteer community service has attracted increasing attention as a potentially beneficial experience for young people. President Clinton has recently signed legislation allowing college students to receive college tuition money by performing community service (World-wide, 1993). Aside from its obvious and substantial benefits to society

\textsuperscript{1}University of Virginia.

\textsuperscript{2}Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Cynthia W. Moore at the Department of Psychology, Gilmer Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903 (Internet address: oww2e@virginia.edu).
(Oimoto & Snyder, 1990), educators have also seriously considered the potential of volunteer work to promote civic responsibility and moral growth in students. For example, a recent survey of adolescents suggested that about one quarter of their high schools offered courses that require community service as part of the coursework (Independent Sector, 1990). Other estimates suggest that service is a graduation requirement in 4% of public schools and in 14% of Catholic schools (Newmann & Rutter, 1983). College campus-based service and full time service corps also attract adolescents approximately 50 full time corps exist in the United States, involving about 60,000 volunteers each year (Youth Service America, 1988). With potential benefits of such programs ranging from reductions in problem behaviors to enhancing social and school competence, community service may well be one of the hottest approaches to primary prevention nationally.

With so much interest in establishing opportunities for volunteer work, the question arises, does participation in community service actually bring about the hoped-for outcomes for young people? Reports of students, parents, teachers, and supervisors at service sites seem to be quite positive concerning improvements noted in the volunteer (Cardenas, Harris, del Refugio Robledo, & Supik, 1991), but the discrepancy between such qualitative data and the more scarce and ambiguous quantitative data is a source of some frustration for supporters of service programs.

This article provides a state-of-the-art review of some of the best researched volunteer service programs for adolescents and addresses three major questions. First, what do existing data tell us about the effectiveness of community volunteer service programs in positively influencing the lives of young people who participate in them? Second, to the extent that such programs do appear to work, what do we know about why they work, and with whom and under what conditions they are most effective? Finally, given current knowledge, what directions would be most promising for future research and future programs to pursue?

Because of the scarcity of evaluated efforts to engage youth in volunteer service, this review focuses primarily upon the fairly small number of programs that have been relatively well evaluated. This focus is designed to identify common elements across these diverse, successful programs. In addition, detail is provided about the methods and results of the evaluation of each program, along with a discussion of the ways in which findings from each evaluation are or are not consistent with findings from other programs. Although both the strengths and weaknesses of each evaluation will be discussed, it is important to note that in a new area of prevention research, with ongoing volunteer programs in the field, it is not reasonable to expect each evaluation to reach the highest standards of scientific rigor. The goal of this review is not simply to identify deficiencies in evaluations, but to consider these evaluations in conjunction with one another so that the weaknesses of any single evaluation may be somewhat balanced out by the strengths of others.

THEORETICAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Primary prevention programs are designed to promote health and competence in a targeted population (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Examination of some of the rationales for community service programs targeted at adolescents suggests that community service can be thought of as a primary prevention tool, and a means of empowering adolescents. For example, Newmann and Rutter proposed that community service may aid adolescents’ development into competent, independent adults, and promote the growth of reasoning skills, abstract and hypothetical thought, and problem-solving abilities (1983). In addition, volunteering may increase self-esteem and reliability, influence social and personal responsibility, impart a sense of personal worth, and increase adolescents’ capabilities for leadership and getting along with others (Harrison, 1987; Kirby, 1989). By enhancing these competencies in adolescents, volunteering may also increase adolescents’ resistance to other problems, such as teenage pregnancy, school drop-out, and delinquency (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990; Newmann, 1983).

Volunteering has also been seen as a mechanism by which adolescents gain mastery over their affairs, increasing their sense of personal control and concern with social influence, and thus as a way of empowering adolescents (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990; Rappaport, 1987). These goals may be accomplished through adolescents’ changed perceptions of themselves from “help-receivers” to “help-givers.” Volunteer programs designed for elders often focus on providing new social roles for retirees (Chambré, 1993); adolescents may also benefit from trying new roles. Increased contact between teenagers and adult supervisors, who can serve as role models, may also help adolescents to identify more with prosocial values. Such identification is related to social competence and negatively related to problem behaviors (Allen, Aber, & Leadbeater, 1990).

Based on extensive research on volunteers working with people with AIDS, Omoto and Snyder (1990; Snyder, 1993) have described a set of motivations for volunteering they believe may also be relevant to volunteering in general. These overlap to a great extent with some of the benefits to adolescents attributed to volunteering. They suggest that motivation for volunteering may be based on personal values, such as a feeling of obligation to help others; a desire for better understanding of a group of people or social phenomenon; community concern; desire for personal develop-
ment and growth; or desire for esteem enhancement. These reasons endorsed by volunteers for their work suggest that volunteers themselves may begin with some understanding that their service may benefit themselves as well as society, and suggest further areas in which to look for development.

Thus, theoretical models suggest that community service may promote competence and self-esteem, reduce levels of problem behaviors, provide greater knowledge of community problems, and advance cognitive and moral development in adolescents, among other outcomes.

Following is a review of evaluated programs that include a service component. The outcomes of interest varied widely and included academic competence (e.g., grades, attendance, probability of dropping out, and disciplinary referrals), and problem behaviors (unplanned pregnancies), as well as measures of beliefs and attitudes about the self and the world (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, social competence, attitudes about society and adults). Although the focus of the first part of the review is on determining what research shows about the outcomes of volunteering on adolescents, the review is organized by program, not outcome, in order to provide a clear description of the evaluation techniques without redundancy. Programs focusing mainly on academic outcomes are presented first, followed by those with more of a focus on attitudinal change.

It should be noted that the review of studies on the effects on adolescent volunteering is thorough, but not exhaustive. The reports included made some attempt to quantify differences between students who volunteer and those who do not, or to describe changes over time in students who are volunteers. Some describe ongoing programs in school systems; others describe semester-long experiments. More detail is presented about the most rigorous evaluations, as they are believed to be potentially of most use to those interested in implementing programs and evaluations. A summary of the goals and results of each evaluation is included in Table 1 at the end of the program descriptions.

**REDUCING PROBLEM BEHAVIORS AND IMPROVING ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING**

Two carefully evaluated programs, the Teen Outreach Program and the Valued Youth Program, provide evidence for the positive effects of volunteering on behavioral and academic outcomes in adolescents, including teen pregnancy, school dropout, suspensions, and grades. The Teen Outreach Program, sponsored by the Association of Junior Leagues International, was designed to foster positive development in youth, by seeking to provide participants with the opportunity to examine their values, and to try new roles. It is offered to students at the junior high and high school level, and is comprised of two major components. Throughout the academic year, participants attend regular classroom-based discussions of age-appropriate issues, such as dealing with family stress, human growth, and understanding oneself and one's values. In addition, all students perform on a regular basis some volunteer work that is meaningful to them, for an average of 31 hours over the course of an academic year. Students are believed to begin to see themselves being needed in the community, and the volunteer component is hoped to encourage shared responsibility between schools and communities for educational reform, and strengthen school-community relations. Participants have ranged in age from 11-21 years old, and about 40% of the students are African-American, 40% are white, and 13% are Hispanic; thus the program serves students from a wide variety of backgrounds (Philliber & Allen, 1992a).

An eight-year longitudinal evaluation designed to determine the program's effects on levels of problem behaviors in adolescents, and to identify factors about the program that relate to any behavioral changes in the participants (Allen, Philliber, & Hogsson, 1990), included 237 sites across the United States and Canada, 3986 participants, and 4356 comparison students. Further, dom assignment data have been collected on 472 Teen Outreach Program students and 496 control students. In this way, motivational differences existing among students that could contribute to greater improvements in the Teen Outreach students, independent of any programmatic effects, are controlled.

Teens indicated at the beginning and end of the program whether they had ever been pregnant or caused a pregnancy, failed a course, and been suspended. At the end of the program they also indicated whether they had dropped out of school during the past year. Evidence on a sub-sample of students indicated that these self-reports of behavior were relatively well matched with data obtained from school records for measures of school failure and suspension (Philliber & Allen, 1992b). Analyses of the first seven years of data show that, relative to comparison students, the Teen Outreach students had a 5% lower rate of course failure in school, an 8% lower rate of school suspension, a 33% lower rate of pregnancy, and a 50% lower rate of school dropout. The differences in the rates of these problems between the two groups are statistically significant even after controlling for the student's race, gender, grade, living arrangement, mother's education, and pre-program levels of problem behaviors. Thus, the differences in rates of problem behaviors between the Teen Outreach group and the comparison group could not be explained by different demographic
characteristics, or by differing levels of problem behaviors before entry into the program.

In the subset of students who were randomly assigned to the program or a control group, Teen Outreach participants had a 32% lower rate of course failure in school, a 37% lower rate of school suspension, a 43% lower rate of pregnancy, and a 75% lower rate of school dropout, relative to the control group. As noted above, by randomly assigning students to a group, any differences in motivation between students prior to the beginning of the program will not affect the final comparisons in rates of problem behaviors. This provides more certainty that the program, not other unrelated factors, was responsible for their changes in behavior.

Follow-up data from a small sample of 59 Teen Outreach students and 55 comparison students suggests that students in the program are more likely to be maintaining their better performance in school over the comparison group, to be doing volunteer work at one and two years post-program, and are less likely to have pregnancies prior to age 18 than students in the comparison group (S. Philiiber, personal communication, February, 1994).

Major goals of the Valued Youth Program (VYP) were similar to those of Teen Outreach, but focused on children in middle school. VYP, based in San Antonio, Texas, and developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association, targeted limited-English-proficient children, and sought improvement in students' basic academic skills and perceptions of self and school, decreased truancy, fewer disciplinary referrals, and lower dropout rates. Efforts were also made to form school-home-community partnerships to increase the level of support available to the students. Thus the goals were preventive in nature, through direct reduction of the dropout incidence and the promotion of new competencies in an at-risk population. According to the program's report, its success comes from showing at-risk children that they are valued, by having them tutor younger children (Cardenas et al., 1991).

The Valued Youth Program completed a two year evaluation of its implementation at four schools in two school districts. Limited-English-proficient tutors (101) and a control group of students (93) were randomly selected; all of these students had performed below grade level on reading achievement tests. The only difference between the two groups was that tutors were of lower socioeconomic status, which placed them at greater risk for dropping out. Students were compared at the beginning and end of the two year evaluation period on grades, disciplinary action referrals, absenteeism, self-concept and perception of quality of school life. The number of students in each group that dropped out of school was also tracked.

Effects of Volunteering

Results indicated that after two years, the Valued Youth Program positively influenced students in four areas: dropout rate, reading grades, self-concept, and attitudes towards school. Most clear-cut is the dropout rate difference between the two groups: only 1% of the tutors had dropped out by the end of the second year of the program, whereas 12% of the students in the control group had dropped out.

A two-step multiple regression analysis was used to test the gains made in reading grades over the two year period. Being in the tutor group was related to significantly higher reading grades in the first year of the program, controlling for baseline reading grades. Tutors also had even higher grades in the second year of the program, after controlling for reading grades both at baseline and for the change in reading grades from baseline to the first year.

Based on a similar statistical model, tutors were reported to have also made greater increases on a self-concept scale after the first program year than students from the control group. Although there was no direct relationship between tutoring and the self-concept scores at the end of the second program year, there was a relationship between self-concept change in the first year of the program and self-concept in the second year. This suggests that the initial influence of the Valued Youth Program was maintained in the second year. Teachers also rated tutors' self-concept, and over the two year evaluation, rated increasing numbers of tutors as having a positive or very positive self concept.

Thus, the combined results of two well-evaluated programs incorporating volunteer work to a large degree suggest that volunteering can indeed have an important impact on reducing levels of problem behaviors and improving academic functioning in adolescents at both middle school and high school levels.

SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Adolescent Alienation

The effects of involving adolescents in community service on their feelings of alienation were tested in a study involving 50 high school students (Calabrese & Schumer, 1986). Students were divided into three groups; students who wanted to do community service but were randomly assigned to a control group, students who worked on a service project for 10 weeks, and students who continued the service work even after the formal project was over. School grade point average, attendance and discipline data (num-
ber of teacher referrals to the office), and self-reported levels of alienation (with subscales of total alienation, isolation, normlessness and powerlessness) were obtained before and after the completion of the 10-week service project, and then again 10 weeks later. The projects were completed by small groups of students assisted by a faculty member.

Analyses of variance comparing the three groups of students indicated that students’ self-reported levels of alienation decreased after being involved in community service; however, alienation levels for the group that stopped service after 10 weeks climbed back to close to their initial levels. The group that continued with the project for 20 weeks also showed reduced levels of isolation. Both service groups had lower levels of discipline problems during the service period compared to the control group, but similar rates to the control group in the 10 weeks following the end of the formal service project.

Thus the idea that community service may reduce feelings of alienation for adolescents, at least during the period of service, is supported by this research, and the results of the TOP and YVP evaluations suggesting fewer behavior problems in school for volunteers are strengthened as well. That students who stopped volunteering became as alienated as the control group suggests that the community service was integral to this change. In addition, the finding that the students who continued to volunteer but without the supervision of an adult did not maintain lower levels of disciplinary referrals suggests that the role of adults may also be quite important to the success of a volunteer experience. The research also suggests that the social aspects of volunteering are not to be ignored in attempting to understand its impact, and underscores the importance of evaluating the stability of improvements noted in other studies.

**Beliefs and Attitudes About the Self and Others**

One source of information on the effects of volunteering on students’ attitudes toward themselves and others, as well as on responsible behavior and moral development, was an extensive assessment of 4000 students in 33 experiential education programs (Conrad & Hedin, 1981b; Conrad & Hedin, 1982). The research focused on three major areas of potential benefit to the student: 1) social development—to what extent do experiential education programs affect students’ levels of responsibility, attitudes toward others, attitudes toward active participation in the community, and career planning? 2) psychological development—do experiential education programs affect students’ self-esteem generally and in social situations, or level of moral reasoning? and 3) intellectual development—are there changes in students’ knowledge of community issues and resources, and problem-solving abilities after participation in an experiential education program?

Although some differences between the effects of experiential education programs generally and volunteering specifically are expected, many aspects of the actual activities are similar and the research therefore bears further examination.

Experiential education programs based in several types of schools (public, private and parochial), in a variety of geographical areas and with different student populations were surveyed. Programs included a range of activities, such as volunteer service, political and social action, outdoor activities, internships in government and business, and research in communities. The length of the programs ranged from 4 weeks to 9 months, and the frequency from 2-4 hours per week to full time. However, within those guidelines the main criteria for selection were that the program have a reputation for excellence, have been operating for at least four years, and be an integral part of the school’s academic curriculum.

Junior high and high school students in the programs were assessed at two time periods; in addition, six programs obtained comparison groups of students, similar in age, grade in school, gender, and socio-economic status. The students in the comparison groups were in a regular classroom at the same school as some of the students in the experiential education programs. Students filled out self-report measures both before and after participation in the program; variables assessed included self-acceptance, self-esteem in social situations, frequency of career exploration activities, attitudes towards adults, attitudes towards being active in society, problem solving, sense of competence, sense of efficacy (which allows one to believe that concern plus action can make a difference) and actual performance of responsible acts.

The results suggested that the group involved in experiential education programs gained more than comparison students on measures of moral development, self-acceptance, positive attitudes toward adults, positive attitudes toward being active in community, likelihood of taking responsible action, and a belief in how much responsibility the individual has to help people in need. Students’ feelings of competence in helping, and their reports of actual performance in volunteer work (i.e., keeping commitments, helping in a group as much as possible) showed the largest gains.

Changes in social development in student volunteers were also assessed by Newmann and Rutter (1983). Eight public schools were included in their evaluation, which focused on programs in which a minimum of 20 11th and 12th graders participated, received academic credit for participation, spent at least 4 hours volunteering per week, and spent a minimum of two hours per week in a school class connected to the program. Each
group of volunteers was assigned a matched comparison group of about 20 students; in two schools, these were students who were planning to take the community service program in a coming semester. Comparisons between two groups of twenty students were made at the beginning and end of a semester.

Students were assessed on sense of responsibility towards the school and society, sense of self-competence and self-efficacy in working on collective tasks and dealing with adults, and anticipated participation in adult groups and politics. The only significant difference between volunteers and comparison students was on social competence. Program students increased significantly more than comparison students on specific questions from this measure, including sense of competence in communicating effectively to groups, starting conversations with strangers, persuading adults to take their views seriously, and making plans and organizing group activities.

Interviews were also conducted with a few students from each school. Students expressed enthusiasm for the program, praising its contribution to personal growth in communication skills, patience, taking responsibility, and in facilitating constructive relationships with others. They indicated that the most rewarding aspects were feelings of accomplishment with other people and being successful in teaching a task.

The combined results of Conrad and Hedin, and Newmann and Rutter, clarify the nature of the relationship between volunteering and self-reported attitudes and beliefs. Each study examined volunteering's association with mostly non-overlapping variables, thus, their results differ: Conrad and Hedin found that volunteering was associated with improvements in moral development, self-acceptance, attitudes towards adults and society, the likelihood of taking responsible action, and beliefs in the importance of helping others, whereas Newmann and Rutter found improvements in the social competence of volunteers. However, Conrad and Hedin failed to find significant differences between volunteers and controls on social competence, which Newmann and Rutter reported as improved in volunteers, and Newmann and Rutter failed to find differences on responsible attitudes towards society, which Conrad and Hedin reported as significant. Thus, it will be important for future research efforts to further examine these outcomes.

In addition, it should be noted that not all the outcomes examined were associated with volunteering: Conrad and Hedin found no differences between groups in self-esteem in social situations, or frequency of career exploration activities, and Newmann and Rutter found no differences on responsibility toward school, or anticipated participation in adult groups and politics. Newmann and Rutter suggested that because students were not engaged in political action or political organizations, they might not be expected to grow in political efficacy or anticipated participation. In addi-

tion, teacher and student goals for the student had mainly to do with self-development, rather than helping others. Little emphasis was placed on school responsibility and other similar areas, so minimal program impact on those areas of development would be expected.

Several other studies of volunteers provide encouraging results as well. Although the results of this research are less conclusive because these studies did not use a control or comparison group of students, they offer insight into how volunteers see themselves changing over time, and suggest outcomes to be followed-up.

The Young Volunteers in ACTION (YVA) program facilitates 14-22 year olds tutoring, working in parks and hospitals, and fighting drug abuse. Volunteers served an average of 8.4 months, and provided an average of 5.7 hours per week of service (ACTION, 1986). Data from on-site interviews with 18 project directors, 151 workstation supervisors, and 302 volunteers at 18 YVA projects, collected an average of 8 months apart, were used to assess the effects of YVA on the workstation and on the volunteer. Students reported after their volunteer experience how much they had gained in a variety of areas. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 meaning “a lot,” average scores ranged from 4.1 to 4.5 on ratings of self-esteem, understanding of how an individual can help the community, knowledge of community needs or problems and how organizations work, and knowledge of themselves. Supervisors also rated the volunteers as showing increases on all of these measures at the time of the second survey; thus, both volunteers and those with whom they worked saw the volunteer experience as very positive.

Volunteers' and supervisors' ratings of the volunteers' sense of community service, ability to work with community members, ability to work with supervisors, career planning, and willingness to learn something new all increased, and ratings of need for supervision decreased, significantly. Finally, volunteers gave average ratings between 4-4.5 on items asking about the likelihood of their continuing volunteer work in school, as an adult, and of their encouraging others to volunteer.

A study of 72 college students participating in a 1 credit “Community Service Laboratory” found similar results. Each student volunteered 3 hours a week for eight weeks in their selected site and completed pre- and post-test measures. After completing the volunteer work, students' ratings were significantly higher on items rating the importance of community involvement, of being a community leader, and of influencing politics, and the possibility of making an impact on the world, among others. From responses to open-ended questions about the volunteer experience, Giles and Eyler (1993) noted that students felt that their stereotypes had been changed, and that they were more likely to attribute misfortune to circum-
stances beyond the control of service clients. This latter finding may partly explain the students' feelings of increased responsibility for social change.

Hamilton and Fenzel (1988) looked at the effects of service in either community improvement or child care on adolescents' beliefs about how much responsibility individuals and society have to help people in need. Both types of volunteer work were designed to provide decision-making opportunities and to meet community needs, although the community improvement projects tended to give adolescents more responsibility and autonomy than the child care projects. Projects varied in length and intensity. Pre- and post-service data were obtained on 44 adolescents, using a self-report measure called the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (Conrad & Hedin, 1981a). Volunteers also kept journals, and additional information was gathered from informal interviews with adult advisors.

Volunteers showed a small, but statistically significant gain on the scale measuring their belief that society ought to help those in need, but did not change significantly in terms of their own sense of personal duty to help meet those needs. According to the adult supervisors, volunteers became more confident of decision-making abilities. Students also felt they had gained quite a bit from the experience. Most said they'd felt useful and challenged, had learned something about themselves, and had enjoyed the work.

**SUMMARY OF EFFECTS OF VOLUNTEERING**

The research on effects of community service on the volunteer, although somewhat limited, seems quite promising. Two programs aimed at reducing specific problem behaviors report success, and the evaluations are strong enough that their results must be taken seriously. There is good evidence that volunteering, along with school-based support, relates to a reduction in teen pregnancy, course failure, suspension from school, and school dropout, and an improvement in reading grades and self-concept (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990; Cardenas et al., 1991). In addition, community service also seems to relate to less alienation, increases in positive attitudes towards adults, self-acceptance, moral development, and likelihood of taking responsible action (Calabrese et al., 1986; Conrad et al., 1981b; Newmann et al., 1983).

Participation in a community service project did not relate at all or did not relate consistently to increases in social competence, career exploration, greater problem-solving abilities, responsibility towards the school, anticipated participation in politics, or beliefs in the individual's responsibility to help people in need (vs. society's responsibility) (Conrad et al.,...
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Citation/Name</th>
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<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Variables Measured</th>
<th>Limitations of Study</th>
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<th>Significant Effects</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Callaher &amp; Schmoker, 1986</td>
<td>Target: High school students</td>
<td>Longitudinal study of 50 students divided into groups who did not volunteer, groups who volunteered, and a control group of students who continued volunteering after the formal project ended.</td>
<td>Discipline problems at school</td>
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<td>Discipline problems towards self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-confidence.</td>
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<td>Target: Junior high school</td>
<td>Program: Experiential education</td>
<td>Goal: To determine the effects of the program on students' social, psychological, and intellectual development.</td>
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<td>5. Newman &amp; Rutter, 1985</td>
<td>Target: 11th and 12th grade students</td>
<td>Program: Students were randomly assigned to a school program for 20 weeks, designed to improve social skills and academic achievement.</td>
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Note: Positive effects only as long as student continued to volunteer.
Effects of Volunteering

**COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS: WHAT MAKES PROGRAMS WORK?**

Establishing that programs utilizing volunteer community service appear to have an effect on students is enormously important given the interest in such programs. Perhaps even more important, however, is beginning to understand exactly what about these programs produces effects, the conditions under which these effects are produced, and the types of students who are most able to benefit from such programs. What follows is a compilation of evidence about which components of successful volunteer service programs appear most closely linked to their success.

As part of the evaluation of the Teen Outreach Program, efforts were made to determine which parts of the program (community service or classroom-based discussions) were most clearly related to the changes in behavior. At this point, comparisons were made among sites, rather than students, as the goal was to determine how the varying implementations of the program related to its success. Importantly, there were no significant correlations between changes in level of problem behaviors in Teen Outreach and comparison students at the same site. This suggests that the success of the Teen Outreach students at any particular site was probably not due to factors about the school which affected all students and were unrelated to the program.

Analyses testing the importance of the amount of volunteer work completed suggested that increasing from 0-10 hours of volunteering was related to the program’s success at middle school sites, but more volunteering beyond that didn’t necessarily lead to more successful programs (Allen, Kuperminc, Philliber, & Herre, 1993). This is important because it indicates that students who volunteer less than 10 hours over the school year may not be realizing the full benefits of the program. It also provides direct evidence that volunteering, and not simply participation in youth service programs, is linked to positive outcomes for students.

At 64 sites, students were asked about the quality of their service and classroom experiences. They completed the Autonomy, Relatedness, and Volunteer Experiences Questionnaire at the end of the academic year. This assessed the extent to which students viewed the program as having given
them the opportunity to feel responsible, in control, and taken seriously (promoting autonomy); having promoted connection or relatedness between adolescents and facilitators; and provided a challenging and enjoyable volunteer experience about which students felt proud.

Students at sites where the Teen Outreach Program promoted autonomy and relatedness tended to have lower levels of exit problem behaviors, after controlling for entry levels of problem behaviors and for sociodemographic factors. Facilitator ratings of how much the program promoted autonomy and relatedness in the adolescents were similarly related to lower levels of adolescent problem behaviors at program exit. Both of these findings applied to middle school, but not high school, sites.

In addition, student ratings of the quality of the volunteer experience (for example, feeling proud of the work accomplished) were linked to lower levels of problem behaviors for middle school students at the end of the program, but not for high school students (Allen et al., 1993). Middle school sites where students felt engaged by their volunteer work, and where they felt they had a choice in selecting the work, tended to be more successful (Allen, Kuperminc, & Philliber, 1992).

Aspects of the classroom component related to a reduction in problem behaviors were also assessed; results indicated that facilitators of different ethnic backgrounds, gender, educational backgrounds, and ages were all equally successful in helping to reduce problem behaviors in the youth. Particularly in middle schools, sites with classrooms in which students, rather than facilitators, did most of the talking, tended to be the most successful. For all ages, successful sites were ones where students felt the facilitator was sensitive to their feelings and needs, and where they felt the social environment of the program was emotionally supportive and safe. Because the classroom component of the program tended to be implemented fairly consistently across sites, its relative importance to the success of the program has not yet been determined (Allen et al., 1992). Thus, although volunteering was linked to program success, it cannot be concluded that volunteering alone would produce reductions in problem behaviors, as it always occurred in conjunction with classroom-based discussions.

Finally, although several aspects of the program better predicted program success at middle school vs. high school sites, overall, sites with more students in higher grades were likely to have fewer exit problem behaviors, after accounting for entry behaviors, than sites with younger students. Thus, Teen Outreach appears to be more successful with older students (Allen et al., 1993).

Although the Valued Youth Program evaluation did not specifically examine components of the program that were most closely related to its success, a description of program characteristics might at least clarify what is sufficient, if not necessary, for success. The student tutors received a broad base of social support. They attended weekly classes to improve their tutoring skills, literacy skills and self-concept, participated in field trips, and had the opportunity to interact with successful role models who represented the students’ ethnic backgrounds. Tutors were also recognized throughout the year with a variety of events. The integrity of the program was supported by an implementation team with a clear definition of roles, and staff enrichment programs. The program also gained parental involvement through a personal outreach plan in which a bilingual person visited parents’ homes to enlist their understanding and support of the program. Clearly, volunteering as tutors was only one aspect of an extensive, carefully planned program, and it is therefore very risky to assume that the changes that occurred in VYP participants would also characterize volunteers in other situations.

The second part of the Conrad and Hedin’s (1981b) study of experiential education programs examined factors that seemed to be shared by the most successful programs. Although this study was not specific to volunteering, it does suggest that experiences outside of the classroom can be beneficial to students and also hints at aspects of these experiences that are important. Programs that were at least 12 weeks long, in which students participated at least two days a week and which also had a seminar for students to reflect on their experiences, seemed to be associated with greater positive changes in the students. The finding that more hours in the program resulted in better outcomes is similar to conclusions drawn from the Teen Outreach Program evaluation, which increases confidence in this particular result. The type of experience the student had did not seem to affect the impact of the program, if length, intensity, and presence of a seminar were included in the analysis.

According to ratings made by the students, factors that contributed most to their developmental gains were a mixture of features including opportunity for autonomy and having a collegial relationship with adults. The only student characteristic that contributed to the programs’ effectiveness was student age: older students were more likely to show positive change. (The adolescents in the study ranged from junior high school students to high school seniors.) Again, this result mirrors a finding from the Teen Outreach evaluation.

Hamilton and Fenzel’s work (1988) also suggests that the type of service placement may affect the outcomes for volunteers as well. The community volunteers differed from the child care volunteers in three ways: they gained more on the social responsibility scale, they were more likely to say they would volunteer again in the near future, and adult supervisors noticed increased confidence in decision-making abilities especially with...
this group. It is not clear exactly what aspects of the community service contributed to its more positive effects: community service volunteers did not evaluate their programs as more challenging or enjoyable, or themselves as being more useful or carrying greater responsibility than the child care volunteers. However, this research highlights the importance of continuing to investigate what types of service opportunities result in the most benefits to the adolescent.

What Makes Programs Work: Suggestions from Related Research

The work of Omoto and Snyder (1990; Snyder, 1993) on volunteers working with people with AIDS supplies additional ideas regarding the conditions under which volunteering exerts the greatest influence. They advocate for a functional analysis of volunteering, which explores the needs being met, motives being fulfilled, and functions being served by volunteering. Based on the idea that volunteers who behave similarly on the surface may have differing underlying motivations, Omoto and Snyder have found evidence in their own data that volunteers gravitate toward volunteer roles that fulfill their personal motivations. They suggest that these differing motivations, described earlier in the paper, may interact with the volunteer experience to determine the effectiveness of the volunteer, the volunteer's satisfaction with his or her experience, and the length of the service.

It seems, then, that providing a variety of service opportunities, perhaps geared at satisfying the major motivations people give for volunteering, could enhance the positive effects of volunteering for adolescents, as well as encourage continued service beyond the limits of the structured program in which the adolescent participated.

Maton’s (1990) research on the relationship between meaningful instrumental activity and well-being in teenagers may also shed some light on the aspects of volunteering that contribute to positive effects in the volunteer. Meaningful instrumental activity was defined as a skill-related activity, valued by the person because it contributes to personal goals or to purposes that transcend the self, or because it provides an opportunity to use valued skills and a sense of environmental mastery. He found that in a college population, frequency of involvement in such activity in the past week was positively related to life satisfaction, independent of social support. A group of high-risk, urban adolescents was also surveyed, half of whom had dropped out of school. Participation in meaningful instrumental activity and social support from fields both related to life satisfaction. These factors were also related to self-esteem for black males still in school, but not for the dropouts.

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No causal chain can be inferred from these results, but it is possible that involvement in meaningful instrumental activities influences feelings of life satisfaction. Thus, these results suggest that perhaps part of what makes volunteering a positive experience for students is that they are provided the opportunity of using skills they may not otherwise use, skills that are valued by the student. If community service is a meaningful instrumental activity for many students, Maton’s finding that such activity correlates with life satisfaction and self-esteem helps explain the positive impact that service seems to have on the volunteer.

In summary, evidence suggests that the success of volunteer programs depends upon a number of factors. The number of hours spent volunteering is related to outcome; however, different studies have suggested different amounts of time as optimal. It seems that programs lasting 12 weeks or longer are more successful than shorter programs, and that an opportunity to reflect on the volunteer experience is related to positive changes in students. A student’s level of engagement and perception of having a choice of placements was also important to program success; further, it may be that service opportunities that fulfill the motives of the volunteer are most conducive to promoting positive changes in adolescents. Thus, although the type of placement was important to the success of only some of the programs, it seems to be an important variable for future study, perhaps in the context of a functional analysis framework. Finally, there was some evidence that volunteering promoted more positive change in older students.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In order to continue to further bolster the confidence of funding agencies in the positive effects of volunteering, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of the information available thus far, and in so doing, to be able to organize future research efforts that effectively build on current knowledge.

Similar problems exist in study design across much of the research reviewed. Few studies were able to randomly assign students interested in volunteering to volunteer and control groups. Several did not use even a comparison group of students matched on age, socio-economic background and level of problem behavior, and sample sizes were not always adequately large, adversely affecting the power of any statistical tests. Although not uniformly done in these program evaluations, statistical control of initial levels of problem behaviors and other outcome measures is critical, in order to ensure that differences between groups on the post-test measures are
not due simply to initial differences rather than to effects of program participation.

Most assessments of changes in behavior were based exclusively on student reports; when information was gathered from teachers or supervisors, it consisted mainly of assessments of the adolescents’ internal states, rather than reports of their observable behavior. In addition, no study included behavior ratings made by an adult who was unaware of whether the teen was participating in a community service project or not. Thus, teacher-reported improvements in student attitudes may be due as much to the teachers’ expectations as to any change in the students. For example, in the evaluation of the Valued Youth Program, teachers rated tutors’ self-concept, and over the two year evaluation, rated increasing numbers of tutors as having a positive or very positive self-concept. However, similar ratings were not completed for the control group, and because the teachers knew the students were tutors, it is possible that teachers were responding to their own expectations for the tutors’ improvement, rather than to observable differences in the tutors.

Because most of the volunteer programs made several work sites available to students, each student’s experience may have been very different; thus, “volunteering” is not one clear entity (Conrad & Hedin, 1989). Some students may have benefited greatly from volunteering at particular sites, whereas others may not have benefited from volunteering at other sites. When the effects of volunteering on all these students are evaluated together, real changes that occur for some students in some volunteer sites may be masked. Also, each workplace may foster different aspects of development—one may foster responsibility, another, sociability. Statistical results may show only an overall non-significant effect of volunteering on any one outcome, if type of volunteer work is not also included in the analyses.

A concern regarding Conrad and Hedin’s results voiced by Newmann and Rutter generalizes to the results of several of the evaluations: although statistically significant, changes on self-report paper and pencil measures were often very small in magnitude. Using behavioral outcomes, such as number of absences per semester, provides a more stringent demonstration of a program’s effectiveness, but are subject to the same problem as the questionnaires: with a large sample size, even small changes may be statistically significant. We must then question the importance of such small changes (Newmann et al., 1983). However, it is important to note that some programs, the Teen Outreach Program in particular, have reported rather large behavioral changes within a fairly rigorous design.

Also, in several evaluations (of the Teen Outreach Program, the Valued Youth Program, and the experiential education programs in particular), volunteering was only one of two or more program components. Volunteer’s effectiveness in preventing problem behaviors without the classroom or support components was not examined, so it is impossible to determine from these results how much of a role the volunteer component played in the success of these programs. For example, in the Valued Youth Program, perhaps the extra classes for tutors, extra attention from teachers, or exposure to other role models were more related to students remaining in school. This does not imply a weakness in the programs, only suggests that we need further information in order to better understand what specific effects volunteering can be expected to have.

The difference in the quantitative results described in this report, and student, teacher, and parent reactions to the community service is striking, and bears further comment. For example, in one study, about 75% of the volunteers surveyed reported learning “more” or “much more” from their volunteer program than from regular classes (Conrad et al., 1989). A survey of 14-17 year old volunteers from low income families found that 73% expected to continue to volunteer as adults, and 91% said they would encourage others to do volunteer work (Lewis, 1988). Parents and teachers often praised the programs’ effects on their children, even when the results from the more formal evaluation were somewhat less promising. If these comments are to be taken seriously, several steps are in order.

First, our theories regarding how community service might affect an adolescent need to be more clearly articulated. As noted above, a great number of possible effects have been posited, with no corresponding explanation of the pathway by which those changes would be expected to occur. Also, the lack of changes in a number of areas of development, and the small magnitude of some changes that are significant, suggests that the effects of volunteering are not always as broad as expected (Newmann et al., 1983). Although community service programs have the potential of becoming an extremely useful primary prevention tool, no tool fixes everything. We may have rushed to put a solution in place before accurately defining the problem we wish to solve.

Sagor (1990) delineated three steps for assessing programs designed to reduce risk of problems in an at-risk population: 1) articulate a theory on the causes of being at-risk; 2) select indicators to assess the success of the intervention; and 3) develop systems to collect and evaluate the outcome data. Notably, theory enunciation precedes data collection and analysis. It may be no accident that the two programs with the most promising results, the Teen Outreach Program and the Valued Youth Program, were programs which provided a clear statement of how volunteering was expected to help the students, and utilized the most specific and behavioral outcome measures.
Second, it is important in choosing student outcomes to assess whether the potential changes in students would generalize to other settings. Competencies and behaviors learned in one setting may not automatically generalize to other settings. Thus, whenever students are assessed by teachers and parents, there exists a danger that real differences in their behavioral repertoire will not be noticed. Yet, conversely, the problem with trusting mentor or supervisor reports too much is that there is no control group of students with which to compare mentor ratings.

Third, the quality of measures must be considered. It may be that the paper and pencil measures traditionally employed are not effective measures of the types of outcomes that are likely to occur. Perhaps qualitative analyses of student journal entries, interviews of adolescents assessing their social competence, or longitudinal studies of frequency of problem behavior would be better measures of the success of a volunteering program.

Fourth, it should not be assumed that all relevant change in the volunteers will show up immediately or last forever. Since the outcome variables measured are often quite broad variables, such as self-esteem and responsibility, they are influenced by many factors and may not change quickly (Conrad et al., 1989). Thus future studies may do well to continue following the groups over longer periods of time. Not only would this allow for the discovery of so-called “sleeper effects,” but it would also provide even stronger support for the importance of volunteering if any positive effects were maintained over time.

Beyond the question of whether community service benefits the volunteer, a number of other questions lie unexamined. Do the effects of community service change if it is required as opposed to being voluntary? Should the service be simply altruistic or career oriented (Harrison, 1987)? How long do any benefits of volunteering last in the volunteer? The research of Calabrese and Schumer (1986) suggests that continued volunteer work may be necessary to sustain positive changes; if so, at what intensity, and for how long? Does volunteering have different effects on children of different ages? Conrad and Hedin’s research found that older students benefit the most from community service; are there alternative service opportunities that would benefit younger children as much? Which aspects of community service programs are necessary to maximize gains made by students—support by teachers, classroom components, challenging service opportunities, supervisors serving as role models?

One way of answering the last question might be to employ an interrupted time series design, with multiple replications (Linney & Reppucci, 1982), extending the work done by Calabrese and Schumer. Students would be followed over a period of time and assessed on the outcome variables, both when they were and weren’t performing community service, or when they were and weren’t attending the classroom component of the program. Natural breaks in the school year could even serve as periods of “treatment removal” (for the classroom component) if students continued to volunteer over the summer.

It would also be important to determine which characteristics of service projects allow the most growth in the participants. This could be accomplished by analyzing the community service placement as a behavior setting. This would include looking at the number of participants in the setting, the primary behavioral functions occurring there, participatory roles, and pressure for participation in the various functions (Barker, 1965). Moos’ Social Climate scales might also be employed (1974); these assess aspects of the setting including relationship components like supportiveness, involvement and cohesion; personal development dimensions, like autonomy; and system maintenance and change components, such as order, clarity and control in the setting (Linney et al., 1982).

Further, in order to maintain the success of any prevention effort, parallel changes in a student’s environment must occur that will enhance the existing competencies of the child, and buffer the child from stressful events in the future (Sameroff, 1990). Thus an assessment of any change, or lack of change, in the student’s classroom or school could help explain the stability or ephemeral nature of any improvements made by the volunteer.

Community service programs have the potential of affecting multiple systems, and of establishing connections between various levels of a community. Research regarding these events would also be useful. For example, knowledge of a program’s impact on the work site and the school, information about new connections between the school and the broader community, and the students and their communities might provide a different kind of support for the program. Stronger connections between the school and larger community may afford new opportunities for teachers and students, as well as affect the school climate. Adolescent volunteers have the capability of changing their communities as well, by working on issues that adults have ignored and emphasizing their importance, by demonstrating that significant change can occur through “small wins” (Weick, 1984), and by beginning to solve some of the problems confronting the community, such as loss of independence by the elderly, or poor school achievement by children from non-English speaking families (Cardenas et al., 1991; Snyder, 1993). These systemic effects have not yet been evaluated, yet may provide justification on a broader level for volunteer opportunities for adolescents.

In conclusion, the critical components of volunteer work for adolescents still await further confirmation according to rigorous research criteria, but volunteering itself appears positive according to most students who
have participated, their parents and teachers, and to the available data. Kelly (1971) proposed several "qualities for a community psychologist," which bear an interesting relationship to some of the hoped-for outcomes in adolescent volunteers: that part of one's identity should be related to engagement with the community, that one will learn tolerance for diversity, a metabolic balance of patience and zeal, and the ability to cope effectively with varied resources. He also defined "doing ecological good" as "the development and creation of competencies within the community." Volunteer programs may do just that; not only is there some evidence to show that the adolescents become more competent, but they themselves may also encourage new competencies in those with whom they work.

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REFERENCES


Effects of Volunteering


Seth C. Kalichman¹,²

The spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic demands that prevention reach large populations in short periods of time, goals that may be facilitated by videotape interventions. This paper reviews empirical studies that have tested the effects of HIV education and prevention videotapes. Although most videotapes are not based on psychological theories and most studies have suffered methodological limitations, research has shown that educational videotapes increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS and change attitudes related to HIV risk behavior. In general, videotapes have shown promising results at increasing readiness to change but have not demonstrated significant effects on HIV risk behavior. However, few videotape interventions have explicitly targeted risk reduction behaviors. In light of the empirical findings, a model is proposed for developing HIV prevention videotapes based on HIV risk behavior change theories.

KEY WORDS: AIDS Risk; AIDS Prevention; videotape prevention.

¹Psychology Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.  
²Correspondence should be addressed to Seth C. Kalichman, Psychology Department, Georgia State University, University Plaza, Atlanta, GA 30303.