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Inclusive Volunteering: Benefits to Participants and Community

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Society has become increasingly interested in volunteerism. After previous research revealed a lack of volunteer opportunities for individuals with disabilities, a pilot project was developed to examine the benefits of volunteerism for this population, as well as their nondisabled peers and the agency in which they served. The project involved college undergraduates and adolescents from a local school for students with disabilities. After two semesters of work for a local agency, benefits were discussed and evaluated. Benefits to the participants with disabilities included pride, skill development and generalization, empowerment, and increases in social interaction and verbal communication. Benefits to the participants without disabilities included positive attitude change, increased social interaction, and professional development. Benefits were also recognized for the agency involved and the community at large. Implications are provided for further research and project replication.

KEY WORDS: *Community, Developmental Disabilities, Inclusion, Volunteerism*

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Interest in volunteerism is at an all time high, not just within the United States, but also on an international basis. The United Nations proclaimed the year 2001 as the "International Year of Volunteers" to celebrate the vital contributions of volunteers worldwide. Glaringly missing from this celebrated group during the "International Year of Volunteers" were community members with disabilities who have often been excluded, or at least not actively welcomed and included, in volunteer opportunities.

Importance of Volunteerism to Communities

The United States is founded on a tradition of volunteerism. Private citizens who willingly gave their time, money, and skills for the common good began most of the current institutions and social programs (Ellis & Noyes, 1990). Throughout history, volunteerism has represented a way of affirming individual rights and responsibilities (Ellis & Noyes, 1990). In 1998, it was estimated that volunteers provided services equivalent to over 9 million full-time employees in non-profit agencies at a value of $225 billion (Independent Sector, 1999). Volunteers have enabled organizations to maximize their resources in pursuit of their missions (Darling & Stavole, 1992). Yet most nonprofit 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 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).

Importance of Volunteerism to Those who Volunteer

With over 56% of American adults volunteering (Independent Sector, 1999), it is evident that many of our citizens have realized the dual nature of volunteerism—while helping others and giving of oneself to meet the needs of fellow community members, one can also reap significant personal benefits. Researchers have indicated that volunteers benefit psychosocially in such ways as increased self-esteem (Johnson, Beebe, Mortimar, & Snyder, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Primavera, 1999), attitudinal changes (Moore & Allen, 1996; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988), improved self-concept (Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1992; Moore & Allen, 1996; Primavera, 1999), reduced alienation (Calabrese & Shumer, 1986), increased feelings of helpfulness (Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1992), greater sense of social responsibility (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1998; Johnson et al., 1998; Primavera, 1999), reduction in problem behaviors (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990; Calabrese & Shumer, 1986), and increased sense of purpose (Weinstein, Xie, & Cleanthous, 1995).

Volunteerism by People With Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities, typically assumed to be in roles of *recipients* of services, have not been given opportunities to reap the substantial benefits associated with being *givers* of services—as volunteers. Since no other data bases on the prevalence of volunteers with disabilities were available, two needs assessments were conducted, one local and one national, that assessed the opportunities for individuals with disabilities to become volunteers within their communities. The local needs assessment found that only 2.4% of all volunteers in the Greensboro, NC community had an identified disability (Phoenix, 2000). The national needs assessment found 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, 2002). 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 volunteering and the number that could potentially be volunteering becomes apparent.

Bogdan and Taylor (1999) addressed the importance of individuals with disabilities being not only in the community, but part of the community as an end goal. They stated, "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" (p. 1). They went on to describe what being part of the community implied. One of their conclusions stated that being part of the community meant contributing to the community, not only through employment, but also through volunteering. They made the crucial interpretation that reciprocity is essential if ties to the community are to be established for people with disabilities.

Building Community Through Inclusive Volunteering (BCTIV) is an initiative that commenced 2 years ago by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) to address this issue. BCTIV promotes a paradigm shift that encourages the community to see those who were traditionally recipients of service as the givers of service.

Program Description

BCTIV brings people with and without disabilities together to participate cooperatively in community service by preparing volunteers, agencies, and the community for inclusive volunteering. This article describes the design and evaluation of one programming approach pilot-tested by BCTIV. The program matched university students with students from a special education school to work on a service-learning project. Over two academic semesters, the participants developed and maintained a trail—the "Trail of Peace"—at the World Peace Museum, a local nonprofit organization. The World Peace Museum is dedicated to promoting global wellness and world peace through the arts, public service programs, education, and research. The trail is approximately a ¼-mile-long loop through a heavily vegetated area that crosses a creek in two locations.

Program Facilitators

A faculty member and four graduate students studying therapeutic recreation at UNCG facilitated the program. The student facilitators received training in strategies and techniques for inclusion in community recreation settings. Two of the graduate students were Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists and the others were studying to become certified. The roles of the facilitators included acting as a liaison between the participants, the nonprofit agency, and the special education school; facilitating an inclusive atmosphere that was focused on teamwork; providing direction in making tasks cooperatively goal structured; and program evaluation. These programmatic strategies are described in further detail in subsequent sections.

Participants With and Without Disabilities

Participants with and without disabilities volunteered cooperatively on the trail once a week for 10 consecutive weeks across two semesters. Each volunteer experience was from 1- to 1½-hours in duration.

Participants with disabilities. The participants with disabilities were members of a class of students from a special education school serving students with primarily moderate to severe cognitive impairments. The school's administrator and classroom teachers, based on perceived ability levels and interests among the school's students, selected the class. The identified volunteer tasks were determined chronologically age appropriate for this class. The same class of 10 special education students participated in each of the two academic semesters. Eight of the students participated in both of the academic semesters. The other two students only participated in one semester each. The students ranged in age from 12 to 18 years. The disability labels of the students included 6 with moderate mental retardation, 3 with autism, and one with multiple disabilities.

Participants without disabilities. The participants without disabilities, ages 19 to 37

years (85% were younger than 25) were enrolled as undergraduate students in a course entitled "Recreation Services With Underrepresented Groups." This course was designed to help students gain an awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of people from underrepresented groups with regard to leisure services in the community. One of the course activities included a field experience that required the students to select from several opportunities to work with individuals with disabilities in the community. During each academic semester, a different group of 10 students self-selected to participate in the volunteering program to meet this requirement, for a total of 20 students. A large majority of the students had limited-to-no experience with people with disabilities.

Participant Preparation

Prior to bringing the participants with and without disabilities together each semester, a brief orientation was conducted by one of the program facilitators with the participants without disabilities. During this meeting, expectations of attendance and conduct were established. The students were also provided with a brief synopsis of the types of volunteer tasks (e.g., lining the trail with deadwood, clearing unwanted vegetation, building footbridges) in which they would be engaged. Finally, they were encouraged to work with the special education students in a cooperative manner. Helping to include their partners in every task was emphasized over productivity. The special education teachers prepared the participants with disabilities in the same manner.

The initial meeting between participants with and without disabilities occurred at the gymnasium of the special education school since this was a familiar and comfortable environment for the special education students. During this meeting, students with and without disabilities participated in "ice breakers" and cooperative games designed to help them get to know one another, understand each other's strengths and limitations, and establish an atmosphere of trust and teamwork. They also discussed what volunteerism is and how their volunteer efforts would contribute to their community.

Task Development and Assignment

Volunteer tasks were identified by World Peace Museum staff. They were encouraged to have several tasks planned each week so that participants could have a choice in which task they preferred to pursue. Having several choices available enabled the groups to work on several different tasks concurrently. It was also the agency's responsibility to provide the necessary tools for the completion of the activities.

Subsequent meetings with the participants occurred on-site at the Trail of Peace. Since the participants without disabilities usually arrived at the site prior to the arrival of the school bus carrying the participants with disabilities, an opportunity arose for the World Peace Museum staff to discuss the day's activities. Also during this time, program facilitators and the participants without disabilities discussed how each of these tasks could be cooperatively goal structured to involve all of the participants. Through this cooperative structure, participants were not working alone to complete a task or competing against others in completing tasks. Instead, participants worked together toward a common goal (e.g., relocating heavy logs to line the trail, carrying heavy stones down to the creek to build waterfalls) and were not rewarded (e.g., verbal praise from the program facilitator) for their accomplishments unless every participant played a role in meeting the team goal. For a more detailed discussion of cooperative goal structures, refer to Rynders et al. (1993).

When participants with disabilities arrived at the trail, all of the participants were provided with opportunities to interact socially and naturally pair up. Typically, a volunteer with a disability approached a nondisabled peer to form a cooperative dyad. Those volunteers with disabilities that did not initiate part-

nering were approached by an available nondisabled peer. During the first two gatherings at the trail, program facilitators led a team-building activity to facilitate social interactions between the participants. The targeted tasks were then presented to the entire group and the participants with disabilities were encouraged to select a task. Tasks completed included using deadwood to line the trail and mark its direction, construction of steps down into the trail, construction of a footbridge and three waterfalls along the creek, planting of trees, bushes, and flowers along the trail, clearing unwanted foliage, and construction and placement of birdhouses and benches throughout the trail.

On days when rain did not permit volunteer work on the trail, participants met at the gymnasium of the special education school to work on projects related to the trail's development (e.g., building birdhouses and benches). The final session of each semester was devoted to closing ceremonies where the volunteers' accomplishments were celebrated and they had an opportunity to say their farewells.

Debriefing

At the end of each volunteer session, volunteers with and without disabilities discussed the day's activities and accomplishments. Then the participants with disabilities departed on their school bus, at which time the volunteers without disabilities participated in a short debriefing session. During these debriefings, program facilitators directed the nondisabled participants through a discussion of the day's events. They were invited to share their feelings on how the activities had been facilitated, strategies that had worked well for the inclusive groupings, and barriers they encountered.

Program Evaluation

Program Evaluation Procedures

Field observations. Following each session, complete, accurate, and detailed field notes were generated by the four student program facilitators. Each observer generated field notes that described the participants, their interactions, volunteer tasks being completed, strategies that were utilized in the field, and obstacles encountered.

Focus groups. Each academic semester, 1- to 1½-hour focus groups were conducted with the nondisabled participants before participating in the program (i.e., immediately following the orientation) and following the completion of the semester. The focus of these evaluations were the perceptions of the effectiveness and feasibility of people with disabilities as volunteers and their willingness to partner with them as volunteers. A post-participation focus group was conducted with the volunteers with disabilities that sought to evaluate their perceptions of their volunteer experiences, their continued interest in volunteering alongside peers without disabilities, and their interest in future volunteering in general. Methods used during this focus group, to gain responses across the varied ability levels of the group, included self-initiated responses, verbal choices (e.g., liked/didn't like, older/same-age), picture cards (i.e., various emotions, tools, and tasks), and opportunities to draw. A post-participation focus group was also conducted with special education school staff (i.e., classroom teachers, aides, principal). They were asked to discuss their perceived outcomes for the students, effectiveness of the program design, and interest in continuing the volunteer efforts. The moderator for each focus group worked from a semi-structured interview guide and tape-recorded the session.

Reliability of Results

The transcribed focus groups were analyzed by two research assistants. They independently identified themes that reoccurred throughout and across focus groups. The research assistants then compared identified themes for consensus. Simultaneously, two other research assistants analyzed the field notes independently to identify themes. They compared their findings to gain consensus. Once each subgroup had reached a consensus, the group as a whole established a consensus

across focus groups and field notes, and data were coded accordingly.

Results

The information gathered through the field observations and focus groups revealed a number of outcomes. These outcomes were grouped into the following categories: volunteers, nonprofit agency, and the community as a whole.

Outcomes for Volunteers With and Without Disabilities

Emotional/Behavioral. The participants appeared to enjoy their experiences. Volunteers with disabilities who had participated during the first semester displayed an eagerness to participate again as demonstrated by one volunteer who made a picture for "all my UNCG friends" and another who expressed a desire for "new dirt for all his new friends." During the post-participation focus group, when asked whether they enjoyed volunteering on the trail and if they wanted to do it again, the volunteers with disabilities gave a resounding "yes, with more 'new friends' [the term that they chose to use in reference to their partners without disabilities]." The special education staff stated, "... they really enjoyed what they were doing ... for them it was an escape to do something good that they really liked."

Field observations also reflected positive emotional outcomes such as excitement of a job well done, enjoyment, increased involvement, and eagerness to participate. Volunteers with disabilities completed their tasks and exhibited huge smiles, bright eyes, and erect posture, as well as comments such as "Donna did it! Donna drilled!" and "Yeah, I did it! I did a good job, didn't I?," or reporting to a visiting local news crew, "It's hard work and all, but I can handle it." Field notes also revealed decreases in self-stimulatory behavior, such as diminished body rocking, hand flapping, and other stereotypical behaviors, in participants with autism.

Special education staff appeared impressed with the level of their students' involvement. One staff member stated, "If it was raining on Thursday [the day before the program] or whatever, you best believe we were going to hear, 'what about new friends tomorrow?' ... so it was something they definitely were attached to in a very positive way." Another teacher stated, "It was just amazing to see, somebody who sometimes is just so lazy to pick up a pencil or whatever, and here they are out in the park moving this big log."

Special education staff also noted increased sense of purpose: "I didn't hear it talked about in terms of 'we have to go over there and work over there.' It was like we have to go over there and help do something. What a different frame of mind." They appeared especially impressed and pleased with how two of the students with autism participated in all activities, stating that the two "never participate in group activities."

Volunteers without disabilities stated in post-participation focus groups that their experiences had been positive and that they believed they had benefited from participation in numerous ways (see subsequent results). Many of the participants without disabilities stated that they had not anticipated the level in which they would become "attached" to their peer partners with disabilities. Several volunteers without disabilities also indicated that they were sad to see the program come to an end and would miss their peer partners. Others wished an opportunity had been available for them to bring some of their friends and family to the program to experience the positive outcomes they were enjoying.

Communication/Social interactions. Special education staff also observed increased verbal communication, social interaction, and relationship development among their students and the nondisabled volunteers. They spoke of one student in particular who was labeled nonverbal and used limited verbal communication initially. By the end of the first semester he was actively participating and quite verbal, including initiating social interactions with his peers. One staff member discussed how this

increase in verbalization had generalized to school, stating:

> There was a definite change after the program, from leading up to it. So I think it enhanced, it helped, because he talked more. He's verbalizing more . . . I'm telling you, it's a different Trevor from the first year when I came, a totally different Trevor.[1]

Another volunteer who was labeled nonverbal, using limited sign language only when approached, also displayed significant gains in verbal communication. He began to use more sign language and began to initiate interactions with his partners such as a thumbs-up when completing a task and signing "work" when he was ready to begin a task. More impressive was the fact that he uttered several words, such as "icky, icky, icky" when doing work in the mud and yelling "root, root" after working hard to dig up a long root.

Special education staff also identified the development of friendships between the volunteers with and without disabilities and their frequent concern for seeing their "new friends." Volunteers spoke often of their "new friends" throughout the weeks. As the program progressed, field observations noted an increase in the number of conversations between volunteers on subjects tangential to the on-site activities. Topics included sharing information about friends and families and, since the program was held on Fridays, weekend plans. The post-participation focus group with the volunteers with disabilities was filled with references to their "new friends."

Several nondisabled volunteers stated that their exposure to individuals with disabilities widened their social circle, increased their comfort level, increased the likelihood of their initiating interaction with people with disabilities in the future, and allowed them to develop social relationships with people they may not have otherwise met. They indicated that being focused on the completion of a common goal created relationships that would have been forced otherwise. One volunteer observed:

> I think volunteering definitely was a good approach to get the two different populations interacting with each other. Because a lot of times when you didn't really have much to say, you could focus on the activity and get stuff done. But, at the same time, if there wasn't much to do, you could talk to people. So I think that this volunteer project has definitely helped get people interacting with each other.

Although many of the nondisabled peers referred to the volunteers with disabilities as their friends or buddies, they also admitted that they probably would not continue to nurture those relationships beyond participation in the program due to other obligations. However, it is encouraging to note that the participants now took a different view on making friends with individuals with disabilities. When asked whether a person's disability would influence your willingness to make friends with that person, one participant made the following representative statement:

> Four months ago, I just think, yes, I probably would have thought twice about it, because I wouldn't have been comfortable. Now I feel comfortable. Now I feel like . . . all those barriers that I thought of before, I feel like I've gotten past the majority of them; therefore, I wouldn't think anything of it, if they had a disability to keep me from being best friends with somebody.

Skill development. In addition to increased social skills, volunteers with disabilities developed skills in other areas. They used shovels, post-hole diggers, hedge clippers, bow saws, hammers, and drills for the very first time.

[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality.

Volunteers without disabilities were often observed using behavioral strategies such as modeling, partial participation strategies, physical and verbal cues, and hand-over-hand guidance to assist their partners. Many of the volunteers with disabilities learned to use a variety of tools. Special education teachers attributed the program for helping students develop time-on-task skills that generalized to the classroom. For example, students involved in the recycling program at school were staying on task longer and seeing these tasks through to completion—a dramatic change from when they initiated the recycling program.

Volunteers without disabilities also believed that they had become more skilled. Problem solving skills, learning to adapt to certain situations, as well as being able to react differently to various situations were mentioned by several participants as skills they acquired. A therapeutic recreation student stated that she had gained the experience that would be necessary to develop a similar inclusive program. Several students believed that they gained experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities and learned what worked and did not work. A leisure service management student stated that such a benefit was important since, "I have to understand everybody so I can make my programs more beneficial to the masses."

Pride and ownership. Volunteers with disabilities took pride and ownership in their accomplishments. One participant brought the other group home residents and staff out to the trail to show off what he had accomplished. Another volunteer kept a birdhouse that she helped build in her classroom for an entire week.

The special education staff noted, "I think they really felt that there was something that was happening and something was growing and taking ownership to it to which I think is wonderful." They also stated, "It's their trail, you can see the pride and ownership; it's theirs. It's something they worked on, something that they value."

Empowerment. Volunteers with disabilities were encouraged to make choices throughout the program. Each week, they chose the partner with whom they would work. Together the volunteer dyad would select a task from the activity options available. The positive results from this approach were evident in the manner in which they began to take initiative and leadership roles. For example, a volunteer with a disability noticed that his nondisabled partner was struggling with digging up a root—a task at which he was very good. He approached his partner and traded his post-hole digger for his partner's shovel and began digging up the root himself. Volunteers with disabilities also began making suggestions for improving the trail. They began to approach agency staff with suggestions. Two volunteers with disabilities suggested that railings needed to be located on both sides of the bridges instead of the one-sided method used. Another volunteer suggested that signs be installed to caution walkers of the steep hills along the trail. One volunteer with a disability actually borrowed a book on home improvement from his school library to bring with him to the trail. His teacher stated that he had checked out the book on the prior Monday and worked all week at marking pages that had relevance to the trail. As this volunteer stated, "Me like to help park [trail]."

Attitude changes. Although there were no openly negative attitudes toward people with disabilities expressed by the volunteers without disabilities prior to participation in the program, a comparison of the information gathered in the pre- and post-participation focus groups indicated that attitudes were impacted in a positive manner.

When asked if they had any concerns, participants without disabilities in both pre-participation focus groups reported several fears about volunteering with people with disabilities. These fears included a) not knowing how to interact due to lack of exposure to or experience in working with people with disabilities, b) being rejected by the participants with disabilities, c) "doing the wrong thing," and d)

"doing too much" for their partner with a disability. For example:

> I think communication might be a key failure. Because what if we get a person that we're trying to communicate with and they don't talk to us . . . I've never handled that kind of situation before . . . I wouldn't know what to do.

And, " . . . maybe doing too much. Like thinking maybe they can't handle that so I'm going to do it for them. And then they could get frustrated, or you know, vice versa."

Statements made during post-participation focus groups revealed that participation in the program had reduced many fears. One volunteer stated:

> One thing I was afraid about is communication . . . But, then after we got out there, it was a lot easier than I thought it was gonna be. I mean, a lot. It took a little while to try and understand what some people were saying, but once I was around them for awhile, it was easy, a lot easier than I thought it was going to be.

One volunteer put it simply, "I think it benefited me because I think my fear was addressed." Another nondisabled peer stated, "I think it has changed my attitude. I was pretty apprehensive in the beginning because I've never really worked with people with disabilities, and I found that I'm pretty okay with it."

Several nondisabled volunteers during the post-participation focus groups stated that they had many misperceptions prior to participation. For example, one participant stated, "I was just really surprised. I didn't think that they would be able to help as much as they did." And another noted:

> "I thought, you know, it would be simple tasks, and thought I'd be more of a guardian or supervisor than basically a partner with people. I thought that when I was going there, I was going there with the sole intent to watch over people with disabilities; and I was proven wrong."

Many volunteers without disabilities commented during the post-participation focus groups that they were currently more likely to "look at their abilities versus their disabilities," were "more comfortable [with people with disabilities]," were less "narrow-minded," and were "less apprehensive around people with disabilities" as a result of their participation. Several volunteers recognized that their peers' abilities would enable them to volunteer their time in many agencies, tapping their strengths and capabilities. This was a dramatic change in attitude, when earlier, volunteers without disabilities had identified "cleaning trays at *McDonalds*" as the primary example of "volunteer" work that people with disabilities were capable of performing. Nondisabled peers also indicated that participation in the program had made them stronger advocates: "It's just made me despise people that make fun of people with disabilities . . . I guess it has made me a stronger advocate."

It should be noted, however, that those few volunteers who had prior experience working with individuals with disabilities were less likely to perceive personal attitude changes toward their peers.

Outcomes for the World Peace Museum

The World Peace Museum was the recipient of nearly 500 hours of volunteer service over two academic semesters. Volunteers with and without disabilities transformed a heavily vegetated piece of land into a usable community trail. The museum's Board of Directors estimated that the work contributed by these volunteers raised the museum's property value by $10,000. The museum director stated:

> We believe that your program provides an invaluable service to volunteer-dependent organizations such as ours in expanding our volunteer pool . . . I have

been impressed with their [students with and without disabilities] efforts and the ability of the students with disabilities to learn new skills in a foreign environment. As the museum's director, I am grateful for your service.

Outcomes for the Community

Volunteers without disabilities perceived that the program had benefits to the community as well. During post-participation focus groups, participants without disabilities perceived several ways that community awareness increased through the program. Firstly, it was believed that the community was exposed to people with disabilities in a healthy manner. It provided opportunities for interaction between people with and without disabilities within the community. Many students mentioned that stereotypes held in the community may have been broken down. One student suggested, "It would definitely prove to society that they [people with disabilities] are capable of helping others instead of always having to be dependent on others."

The idea that community members would be able to see what people with disabilities were capable of accomplishing was also discussed. One volunteer stated, "I think it also shows the community how there's not always as many limitations as we may suspect from the beginning. They can do a whole lot more and they never cease to surprise you." Other volunteers believed that after witnessing what people with disabilities could accomplish, more volunteer opportunities in the community would become available.

Discussion and Implications

The outcomes of this pilot program to facilitate cooperative volunteering by individuals with and without disabilities were numerous. The extensive evaluation has also provided valuable information needed for improving future implementation efforts. The insight gained from key players will serve as the organizer to address how future volunteer programs may be improved and broadened.

Agency Involvement

Designing tasks for large groups of volunteers on a regular basis is not a simple task for volunteer coordinators in nonprofit agencies. Often, nonprofit agencies do not have the wherewithal to accommodate large groups of volunteers, working in cooperative groups, on a continual basis. Therefore, selecting agencies that can accommodate a group of volunteers of varying abilities is critical. Agencies must have enough important tasks for everyone, sufficient tools for everyone to work with, and ample choices of tasks on which to work so that volunteers can match their individual strengths and interests with agency needs.

Special Education Teacher Involvement

The cooperation of the special education teachers was essential to the success of this program. Providing transportation to the volunteer site, keeping the program facilitators abreast of any behavioral issues, and emphasizing the importance of active participation by the students were key roles of the teachers. Special education staff believed that it was important for their students to become independent of them in this community experience, and therefore, intentionally "stepped back" and placed "trust" in the program facilitators. Program facilitators respected the teachers' approach, but also recognized the potential to meet individualized education plan (IEP) goals and objectives through the volunteer experience if the school staff had become more involved. More in-depth involvement of classroom teachers (e.g., individual goal development for program participation and on-site data collection) in future inclusive volunteering efforts would undoubtedly yield greater benefits toward IEP goal achievement (e.g., time management, functional academic skills, horticultural skills) for the participants with disabilities.

Program Facilitators

Four graduate students helped facilitate the program. This amount of personpower was considered a luxury, not a necessity, for program success. Program facilitators believed that future inclusive volunteering could be implemented with a single facilitator, as long as a staff member from the nonprofit agency assisted with identifying additional tasks as needs arose and a classroom teacher was available if any behavioral problems became apparent.

Participants

Pairing volunteers with and without disabilities. The program model used during this pilot effort involved matching special education students between the ages of 12 and 18 years with college-age participants without disabilities. In all cases, the participants without disabilities were older than those with disabilities. Special education teachers believed that this was critical to the success of the program. When considering the possibility of matching their students with other high school students (i.e., same-age peers), the special education staff had reservations:

> Some of the high school volunteers that come in . . . they don't have that same maturity level that your students brought to the project, and I don't think that the same results would have been gained from the project because there is a big maturity [difference], it's a big difference.

And, "I can see them [high school students] being a little intimidated, maybe not so comfortable and pairing up with the kids that were the easiest to be with, you know, and not with all the kids that needed it." Whether these concerns are realistic has yet to be determined. However, the teachers believed that not having the proper match between their students and their nondisabled partners, at least as far as maturity is concerned, could be a potential pitfall. Additionally, during the post-participation focus group it was noted that the volunteers with disabilities were quite pleased with the age of their partners with all but one indicating that they would prefer being matched with "older" partners again in the future. The one individual that preferred being matched with same-aged partners said that it was because she "wanted to try something new."

These results are consistent with the research of Rynders et al. (1993) who recommended that nondisabled peers be somewhat older than their peers with disabilities when they serve as peer tutors or companions. Another model that could be considered would partner same-age peers (i.e., high school students) and use college-age students as mentors to these dyads.

Motivation. One of the frustrations voiced by the nondisabled volunteers related to the motivation levels of a few of the participants with disabilities. Volunteers with disabilities did not freely elect to participate in this program. Their involvement was decided by school administrators on their behalf. Although many students were interested in participating in the targeted volunteer tasks, a few of the students were not as interested in doing manual labor in an often muddy, outdoor environment. They appeared to enjoy being at the volunteer site, but were not particularly motivated to work on the tasks at hand and, were therefore, often difficult to keep on task. Having tasks available that would have met some of the museum's needs, but did not involve manual labor in the outdoor environment, may have alleviated these problems. It is recommended that future inclusive volunteering efforts consider the provision of a broader array of volunteer task options and solicit voluntary involvement by both the participants with and without disabilities.

Overemphasis on productivity. For a few of the nondisabled volunteers, productivity occasionally took priority over involving their peers with disabilities and socialization. Two types of situations appeared to instigate such

behavior—when museum staff became highly involved (hands-on) in the task at hand and appeared to communicate a need for increased productivity in order to complete it within a set duration of time, or when the volunteers with disabilities arrived late to the volunteer site and the nondisabled peers began working without them. On these occasions, several nondisabled volunteers appeared to be already set in a productivity mode that they struggled to break when the volunteers with disabilities arrived and attempted to join them. It is suggested that community agency staff be trained on the importance of cooperative learning and find an appropriate balance between task accomplishment and socialization. This is consistent with the recommendations of Schleien, Ray, and Green (1997) to support peers without disabilities in their teaching of skills (cooperative tutoring) and in a socialization role (cooperative companionship) when they are in the company of their peers with disabilities. Also, volunteers without disabilities could wait for the arrival of their peers before commencing activity.

What Next in Inclusive Volunteering?

Within a pilot program, BCTIV demonstrated both the potential benefits and feasibility of inclusive volunteering. Due to the many positive outcomes resulting from this program, it is recommended that research on the potential outcomes associated with inclusive volunteering be explored further. There appears to be substantial potential for significant benefits to volunteers with and without disabilities. Since such a program is dependent upon the cooperative efforts of community agencies, who may currently perceive little benefit from the inclusion of volunteers with disabilities, further evaluation of inclusive volunteering is needed.

Exploration of other approaches to facilitate inclusive volunteering is also recommended. For example, what are the outcomes for individual dyads that are placed in community agencies to fulfill existing volunteer roles? Are these outcomes different from those found with large group service-learning approaches such as the one described here? Are the inclusion strategies for implementing dyad pairings different from those utilized in a group setting? Additionally, were the program outcomes attributable to the outdoor setting or would similar results be found in other volunteer settings (e.g., nursing homes, public libraries)?

Although many inclusion strategies used in this program appeared to have positive impacts, the program's evaluation was not designed to determine the efficiency of these methods. Many of these strategies have been previously field-tested and validated as effective for inclusion in community recreation and sports settings (Schleien et al., 1997). Future research should test specific programming strategies in volunteer settings so that a set of "promising practices" could be identified that are applicable across a variety of volunteer settings, tasks, and individuals.

The potential impact that inclusive volunteering has on the lives of individuals with disabilities is exciting in its own right and merits our attention. Moreover, we believe that there are many other benefits that could be accrued, including benefits to nondisabled peers, agencies that often tap into volunteer pools, and the community at large. Therapeutic recreation specialists rarely have opportunities to impact individuals other than those they serve directly. Such opportunities to serve constituents in exemplary ways, and simultaneously help individuals with disabilities impact their own communities, should be explored further. It is possible that the facilitation of inclusive volunteering will become a more integral part of our roles as therapeutic recreation specialists and recreation programmers and will make substantial changes in the way we staff our community agencies. People with disabilities in volunteer roles as *givers* to the community, rather than as recipients of charitable service, is a match that must be made. As a volunteer with a disability reminded us, a

volunteer is "somebody who helps somebody else make something better." Everyone deserves the opportunity to help build healthier and stronger communities.

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