

Pet Visitation: A Study of Hospital Volunteer Motivations

Michael Campbell\*  
Associate Professor  
Saint Leo University  
Saint Leo, FL 33574  
Tel. 352-588-5795

[Michael.Campbell03@SaintLeo.edu](mailto:Michael.Campbell03@SaintLeo.edu)

Diane Scotland-Coogan, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Saint Leo University  
Saint Leo FL 33574  
Tel. 352-588-8381

[diane.scotland-coo@saintleo.edu](mailto:diane.scotland-coo@saintleo.edu)

Lloyd Werk, MD, MPH  
Chief of General Academic Pediatrics  
Nemours Children's Hospital  
Orlando, FL 32827  
Tel. 407-650-7177  
[Lloyd.Werk@nemours.org](mailto:Lloyd.Werk@nemours.org)

\* Corresponding Author

**Abstract**

Volunteers have been a valuable resource in healthcare. Effective recruitment and engagement of volunteers help drive the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI's) triple aims of improved patient experience, care and cost reductions. IHI is a not-for-profit organization seeking to improve health and health care worldwide by partnering with "visionaries, leaders, and front-line practitioners around the globe to spark bold, inventive ways to improve the health of individuals and populations" (IHI, 2018). Volunteer recruitment and engagement requires understanding motivations for volunteers and matching that motivation with opportunities to give back. This study explores the unique motivations for volunteers who bring in their certified dogs to visit children in a pediatric hospital system. Data was collected to explore motivational trends in this volunteer's sample (n=26). This study found that these volunteers, when compared with general hospital-based volunteers, are significantly more motivated by an altruistic drive to serve others as well as a sense of personal development and learning. These powerful themes are developed and discussed along with recommendations for future efforts to nurture the growth of volunteerism in similar settings.

*Keywords:* altruism, volunteerism, volunteer motivation, pet visitation

## **Background**

As the general demographics in the United States shifts to engage an active, yet aging baby boom generation, there is increasing energy being invested in volunteering opportunities to leverage this generation's talents and gifts (Bruno & Fiorillo, 2012). Volunteerism has blossomed into an important component of the workforce and covers value-added services in various sectors of the economy from legal issues (Jones, 2016) to business (Haski-Leventhal, Kach, & Pournader, 2016) and into health care (Ferreira, Proença, & Proença, 2012). The Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that in 2015 approximately 62.6 million people volunteered through or for an organization (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This paper will explore a unique aspect of volunteerism, the motivations of people who bring their certified dogs to visit children in need.

## **Volunteerism in Healthcare**

Dating back to the early 1900's, volunteers have been a core component of the delivery of health care as the professionalization of hospitals and care centers became a formal structure in health care delivery (Jenkinson et al., 2013). The candy striper movement of the 1930's ushered in a community consciousness that supported the role of charitable gifts of time to care for the infirmed (Center, 2017). In 2011, there was an estimated 24.8% increase in hospital based volunteers (Pietra, 2011) with that growth projected to continue.

As part of the Triple Aim, a framework developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, volunteers are key contributors to improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction); improving the patients' health outcomes and reducing the per-capita cost of health care (AHA, 2017). The time volunteers spend with patients makes the somewhat impersonal environment appear more personal, increasing patient satisfaction.

Volunteers play many cost-effective roles, such as preventing falls in older hospitalized patients through engaging them in activities and summoning help to assist them in moving from bed (Donoghue, 2005; Giles, 2006; AHA, 2017). Human touch, through care for infants in need, is another opportunity for volunteer engagement through volunteer “cuddler programs” which have been associated with improved premature infant wellbeing, weight gain and earlier hospital discharge (Fritsch-deBruyn, 1990). The increase in patient interaction, the assistance provided to hospital staff, and the improved sense of calm and welcoming environment all add to the perception of quality service. Some of these services would not otherwise be offered based on hospital staff shortages.

Hospital based volunteerism offers numerous benefits both to the hospital system (staff, patients and milieu) and in many cases to the volunteers themselves. As health care costs continue to rise, the use of volunteers may enhance patient care without a considerable increase in costs (Hotchkiss, Unruh, & Fottler, 2014). Similarly, volunteers derive direct benefits from increased social engagement, improved skill development and an altruistic connection through giving back to their community. Physical health may be improved through social integration and enhanced social support systems, this has been found to reduce stress and disease risk. Social integration has also been linked to perceived sense of well-being (Wilson & Sethi, 2015). Many volunteers report their volunteer service made a difference in the lives of others, and this improved their life as well. This may be due to increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as the increased socialization (Tang, Morrow-Howell & Hong, 2009; Willigen, M.V., 2000).

### **Animal-Assisted Activity and Therapy**

There is a developing body of literature (MacDonald & Barrett, 2016; Palley, O'Rourke & Niemi, 2010) that supports the use of various animal-assisted activities

(AAA) and animal-assisted therapies (AAT) to improve the patient experience and their care outcomes (Kinley & Reyno, 2016; Stewart, Dispenza, Parker, Chang & Cunnien, 2014; Amiot & Bastian, 2015). There is limited information as to the experience of the volunteers.

It is estimated that nearly 90% of hospitals in the United States have begun to offer some form of animal engagement in their care stream (McKinney, 2015). AAT and AAA are being utilized successfully in many health care areas including nursing homes (Kaiser et al., 2002), group therapy (Perry, Rubinstein, & Austin, 2012), hospitals (Abrahamson, Cai, Richards, Cline & O'Haire, 2016; Perry, Rubinstein, & Austin, 2012), including preoperative areas (Miller & Ingram, 2000), mental health units (Nepps, Stewart, & Bruckno, 2014; Berget, Ekeberg & Braastad, 2008; Ruzek & Rosen, 2009), waiting rooms (Creagan, Bauer, Thomley, & Borg, 2015), and critical care (Connor & Miller, 2000), palliative care (Engelman, 2013), inpatient psychiatric units (Perry, Rubinstein, & Austin, 2012), educational institutions (Perry, Rubinstein, & Austin, 2012), outpatient pain management facilities (Marcus et al., 2013) and occupational therapy (Beck et al., 2012). These animal-assisted activities have been found to decrease stress and improve the patient's and their family's morale (Morrison, 2007).

Researchers have found that human-dog interactions have a physiologic effect on the patient through an increase of oxytocin, and decrease of cortisol (Hannibal & Bishop, 2014). Research looking at human cognition and behavior from a hormonal perspective has identified the hormone oxytocin as a moderator of social attachments, trust, emotion recognition, and cooperation (Baumgartner et al., 2008; Macuglia, 2014; MacDonald, & MacDonald, 2010; Nave et al. 2015). Short-term interaction between a dog and its owner has been linked to a significant increase in oxytocin levels. As Macuglia (2014) points out, oxytocin is a powerful hormone that helps to regulate and promote health social interaction among other social important benefits.

Increases in levels of oxytocin has been found to increase trusting behavior in humans. Research has also shown Oxytocin enhances cognitive mechanisms involved in affiliation and social communication, as well as having a calming effect, and the ability to counteract the effects of cortisol (Uvnäs-Moberg, 1998). Oxytocin levels were found to almost double in both the companion animal and their owner following positive time spent together (Handlin et al., 2011). This may suggest a similar response in the animal-assisted volunteers as the human animal contact offer an indirect link to physiologic changes leading to increased bonding and improved emotional health.

Another biochemical indicator of the impact of animals on human functions is measurement of cortisol levels in saliva. Rising cortisol levels has long been linked to environmental stressors and efforts to lessen stress can be tracked indirectly through static or declining cortisol levels. Social support provided by dogs have served to attenuate salivary cortisol levels beyond the reduction shown when compared with human support in the form of a friend, even for those who were not previously familiar with the dog before the interaction (Polheber & Matchock, 2014). Engelman (2013) studied AAT in palliative care. He concluded the therapy dog “appeared to ‘lighten the atmosphere’ and bring a ‘bit of home’ and ‘normalcy’ to the healing environment of the hospital room.” Further, patient report less pain with exposure to AAT. Research findings have demonstrated that health care staff members view AAA as a positive experience (Kaiser et al., 2002), and that their benefits to the hospital staff. They reported reduced stress (Abrahamson, Cai, Richards, Cline & O’Haire, 2016; Engelman, 2013), increased social interactions, and a perception that the patients found comfort in their interactions with the animals (Abrahamson, Cai, Richards, Cline & O’Haire, 2016).

While the dog is an essential part of the AAA team, Bibbo (2013) found what the handler is actively doing with the dog is an important contributing factor. The dogs ease and promote communication between two strangers, the handler at the same time interacts with the patient which can augment perceived social support (Kaiser et al., 2002). In further exploring these constructs, this study proposes to explore the role that volunteers, as a conduit to AAA and AAT, are engaged to offer supportive care in the context of pediatric healthcare. It is the nexus of these constructs which drives this study to explore the unique motivations and benefits that volunteers who leverage their pets as a therapeutic tool in the health care process. The study objective is to explore what factors, motivate and influence individuals' decision to volunteer with their pets in a pediatric hospital, to identify what benefits the volunteers derive from this experience and to catalog lessons learned for others who are interested in establishing this type of program to serve others.

## **Methodology**

### **Study design**

This study was approved by the health system's Institutional Review Board and employed a cross sectional design using survey research methodology. An electronic survey was conducted that asks volunteers about their motivations to volunteer their time and talent in a pediatric hospital setting in which they are invited to bring their certified pet to visit pediatric patients. The survey items used in this study were taken the survey developed by Ferreira et. al. (2012) which explores their unique motivation for volunteering in hospital settings. Ferreira et. al. (2012) developed this survey by using a factor analysis Clary's (1998) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) which was developed to general motivations for volunteering.

The findings from Ferreira et. al. (2012) offer a comparison group which is compared with this studies data related to hospital volunteers who bring their pet as their primary asset in volunteering. This survey was divided into subsections designed to gather demographic and quantitative data. The survey items used in this study (Ferreira et al., 2012) explore constructs to four key themes for this unique volunteer group (development and learning, belonging and protection, career recognition and altruism). This data along with lessons learned are summarized and explored in the discussion section of this paper.

### **Intervention**

This study was conducted in a 95-bed pediatric hospital in Central Florida. The pet visitation program (PVP) engages pets to help patients and families reduce anxiety, distract from upcoming clinical encounters. These health care experiences can be fear inducing and often painful. In an effort to reduce fear and pain the PVP attempts to normalize the health care experience through distraction and direct interaction with animals in congregate areas, such as ambulatory and surgical waiting areas, as well as pet visitations conducted at the bed side of hospitalized and bed ridden patients.

All the pets in this program have successfully completed a structured certification process that involved training and testing of the dog/handler team, registration and insurance, and animal health and behavior screening. In order to participate in this hospital's pet visitation program, the hospital requires participation in an approved therapy animal program and American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen certification. The American Kennel Club requires successful training in ten domains to achieve Canine Good Citizen certification (<http://www.akc.org/dog-owners/training/canine-good-citizen/>). Further, this hospital requires a written statement from the dog's veterinarian stating the dog is in good health, has an unblemished record of good behavior,

and they attest to the animal's suitability to provide therapeutic emotional support. Once they have demonstrated that they are physically, emotionally and behaviorally safe for patient contact the volunteer and pet are gradually introduced to care stream to align the pets' unique characteristics with the needs in the pediatric health system.

### **Sample**

This study was conducted in a pediatric hospital in Central Florida and drew responses from the volunteer program that averages 120 volunteers a year. The volunteer program oversees the pet visitation program (PVP) that includes 30 dog/handler teams. All 30 PVP volunteers were invited to participate through an email invitation and in person group meeting in which a simple study description was shared, and procedures were described.

### **Data Collection**

An electronic survey was created using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). The online database services, and this electronic survey, was hosted by research team members at Saint Leo University. The research team sent three email messages to the cohort of 30 volunteers to recruit participation and all data collected was secured using password protected systems. The data was deidentified to ensure anonymity of responses.

### **Analysis**

Demographic data were compared to the established sample from Ferreria and colleagues to explore similarity of groups. Secondly, the mean scores from the Pet Visitation Program (PVP) sample were tested against the established motivations for the comparison group of volunteers across each of the key constructs (Table 1) using a one sample T test. These results were summarized and presented with an analysis of results and implications reviewed in the discussion.

Table 1. Volunteer motivational factors defined

Motivational factors	Definition
Development and Learning	enhance their understanding of society, develop social skills, gain new perspectives, increase self-esteem, and to remain physically and mentally active.
Belonging and Protection	making new friends and meeting people, appreciation of others, and social interactions.
Career Recognition	increasing one's welfare through tangible rewards or benefits, opportunities to network with potential business contacts, enhance their resume, and to develop skills which may benefit them for future employment.
Altruism	the pleasure the volunteers achieve through improving the welfare of others.

## Results

### Demographics

The descriptive data from the PVP sample is presented in table 1 with a side by side comparison with the established sample from Ferreria and colleagues (Comparison Group). These data suggest that both samples are highly similar along numerous axis but differ considerably in the areas of current work status and frequency of post graduate education. These data indicate that the study sample tends to be more likely to be currently working full time and to have a post-graduate education when compared with the comparison group. Implications will be discussed in later sections.

Table 2. Demographic data compared to the referenced comparison group

<b>Gender</b>		Frequency	Percent	Comparison Group	Variance
Valid	Masculine	7	26.9	11.2	15.7
	Feminine	19	73.1	84.2	-11.1
<b>Age</b>					
Valid	18-34 years	2	7.7	8.6	-0.9
	35-51 years	7	26.9	12.5	14.4
	52-68 years	9	34.6	47.7	-13.1
	69 and older	8	30.8	19.7	11.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
Valid	Caucasian	25	96.2	NA	NA
	Hispanic	1	3.8	NA	NA
<b>Current Work Situation</b>					
Valid	Full-time	11	42.3	13.2	29.1
	Part-time	1	3.8	2.6	1.2
	Unemployed	1	3.8	8.2	-4.4
	Retired	12	46.2	52.6	-6.4
	Other	1	3.8	11.8	-8
<b>Marital status</b>					
Valid	Married	17	65.4	53.3	12.1
	Widowed	1	3.8	15.8	-12
	Divorced	5	19.2	9.5	9.7
	Never married	3	11.5	13.2	-1.7
<b>Education</b>					
Valid	Graduated high school	5	19.2	20.4	-1.2
	Graduated college	8	30.8	25	5.8
	Post-graduate	13	50	3.9	46.1

## Outcomes

Analysis of the quantitative data from the hospital adjusted VFI compared average scores from study subjects to the respondents in the study by Ferreira, Proença and Proença (2012) on each factor (development and learning, belonging and protection, career recognition and altruism) with lower mean scores indicating higher motivational influence. Responding volunteers who brought their pets in for visitation scored significantly lower on the Development

and learning subscale ( $t(25) = -18.632, p = .000$ ), and the Altruism subscale ( $t(25) = -29.80, p = .000$ ) and significantly higher on the Career Recognition subscale ( $t(25) = 8.04, p = .000$ ) when compared with the hospital based volunteers described in Ferreira, Proença and Proença 2012 sample.

Table 3. One Sample T Test

Motivational factors	Control Mean (SD)	Pet Mean (SD)
Development	5.5 (1.1)	2.6 (1.1)*
Belonging	3.7 (1.4)	3.4 (1.5)
Career recognition	2.0 (1.4)	4.6 (1.9)*
Altruism	5.2 (1.6)	1.8 (0.7)*

\*Significant with p value less than .05

### Discussion

These data indicate that volunteers, involved in a PVP at a children's hospital, are significantly more motivated by themes of altruism and belonging than a comparative control group noted in the literature. It appears that these volunteers are highly motivated by the pleasure they receive through engaging others and belief they are improving the welfare of others. Similarly, they are driven by the opportunity to enhance their understanding of society, develop social connections, gain new perspectives, and to remain physically and mentally active.

These findings lend guidance to the effective recruitment and engagement of volunteers in this area of healthcare. It suggests that efforts to highlight the opportunities prospective volunteers will have to contribute to the welfare of the children they serve can be the most critical factor in the initial engagement of the volunteers. Another key finding is that the ongoing retention and engagement of these volunteers can be facilitated by highlighting the ways they have given back as well as creating collegial platforms for information exchange. These

two-way communication loops serve as an opportunity for volunteer and program level process improvement and can help to draw a straight line to how their efforts improved patient care.

Despite the compelling findings from this study it is important to keep several competing factors in mind when extrapolating these results. One of the fundamental limitations with this study is with the sample size and its representativeness. Though the sample response rate was considerably strong (93%) there was still a small group surveyed (n=26). A large sample taken from multiple sites may afford more generalizability for results. It is also important to point out that these data indicate that the study sample tends to be more likely to be currently working full time and to have a post-graduate education when compared with the comparison group. This finding may have an influence on the outcomes with older volunteers being more driven by altruism and younger by possible career advancement. Future research would benefit from exploring these findings with a broader sample to assess if these findings are truly related to being volunteers in a PVP or are they reflective of their work, education status or their developmental stage. An application of this knowledge could help to explore if younger volunteers are influenced by a different set of motivations lending them to a different recruitment and retention strategy.

Despite these limitations, the study explores the unique motivations found in a sample of volunteers who engage their pets as therapeutic agents in the care for children. Pet volunteers appear to differ from other volunteers. Their motivations center around altruism, personal development and belonging. In recruiting these volunteers, it is important to cultivate ways to promote their ability to give to others, invest in personal development and connect with others. Understanding that altruism ranks significantly high in their motivation is a key finding that

should help to cultivate a synergistic relationship between volunteer and patient especially when done with mindfulness of their development stage.

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Integrated Review of Volunteer Retention and Implications for Training

Kylie Lowenberg-DeBoer\*  
Research Assistant  
Department of Technology Leadership & Innovation  
Purdue University  
West Lagayette, IN 47807-2021  
Tel. 765-494-1213  
[klowenbe@purdue.edu](mailto:klowenbe@purdue.edu)

Mesut Akdere, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Purdue University  
West Lafaeyye, IN 47907-2021  
Tel. 765-494-1213  
[makdere@purdue.edu](mailto:makdere@purdue.edu)

\* Corresponding Author

**Abstract**

Nonprofit human service organizations rely heavily on volunteers, and the expenses incurred through the volunteer training process amplifies the importance of retention. A review of the literature on human service volunteer retention shows three key factors recurring around the globe and across fields of research: motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. This paper explores these factors and their interrelationships as well as implications for training program design. The small number of studies focused specifically on retention as it relates to training illustrates a gap in the recent research and may be an appropriate avenue for future research.

*Keywords:* human service, nonprofit, volunteer retention, training

## Introduction

Nonprofit human service organizations provide underserved populations with services that fulfill basic human needs, such as food, shelter, and medical care, or services that allow people to fill those needs for themselves (i.e., adult literacy, child care, after school programs). The services are crucial to the health of communities and the well-being of its residents, particularly in countries with privatized care. Volunteers are a necessity for many nonprofit human service organizations because of the financial realities in the nonprofit sector. For example, there are 62.2 million volunteers in the U.S. with an estimated annual value of \$184 billion (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2016), whereas over 11 million people are employed by nonprofits in the U.S. with total annual wages of \$532 billion (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Budgets are tight, grants carry stipulations about how funds can be spent, and staffing is a major expense for any type of organization. Volunteers ease some of the financial burden, but high turnover coupled with expenses inherent in training remain a constant strain (Pichler, Varma, Yu, Beenen, & Davoudpour, 2014; Selden, Lee, & Thompson, 2013; Selden & Sowa, 2015). Training volunteers is costly, and because human services, including those operating through heavy use of volunteers, save lives and improve the quality of life for those in need, it is important to consider retention during the training and development process.

Though the relationship between retention and training is intertwined (Skoglund, 2006; Claxton-Oldfield, 2016), little research has been done in recent years to connect the two in either a practical or theoretical way. The connection between training and short-term retention is clear, and most of the available literature links the two at this early stage (Bright, Shovali, & Cooper, 2016; Zhou & Shang, 2011). Conversely, the research has not explored fully the relationship

between long-term retention and training or the continuing effects of initial training, retraining, and cross-functional training, which may remain relevant to volunteer retention regardless of duration of service.

Although the literature has not fully developed theories on training's effect on volunteer retention in nonprofit human service organizations, a significant amount of research has found a few key elements that are crucial to retention: motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. In addition to an investigation of training-specific research findings, this review of available literature will include the motivation, satisfaction, and socialization retention factors and their implications for the design of training programs.

### **Search Methods**

The search performed for this review utilized online databases of scholarly content, consisting primarily of by-proxy searches through Google Scholar. Results were pulled from more than 300 online information services through libraries at University of Phoenix as well as all available resources at Purdue University libraries. The method provided full text journal articles as well as dissertations, theses, and other peer-reviewed content. Additionally, searches of related journals were performed, including *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *Journal for Nonprofit Management*, and *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. Key words included "human service", "volunteer retention", nonprofit, non-profit, not-for-profit, training, learning, and/or "learning theory". As the primary interest was recent research, results were limited to content published between 2006 and 2016. When possible, only human service-specific information was considered, though

research that encompasses other types of nonprofit organizations may have been included if particularly relevant.

### **Scope of Literature Review**

In total, the literature search resulted in 50 sources. Medical and sports volunteerism are the two most prominent and frequent fields, several of which have been included, though the intent of this review is not to highlight particular fields of research. Popular topics in the literature include burnout and retention of certain age groups, both of which have been included peripherally. The sources also offer insights from around the world. Many have a global focus while others provide case studies from particular countries. All appear in the review because motivation, satisfaction, and socialization cross cultures. The primary focus of the review, however, is the underlying reasons for an organizations' success or failure to retain volunteers and the implications for training.

### **Training**

Researchers agree that initial training is crucial for volunteer retention (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001). The effects of training can be far reaching because volunteers expect to receive training and gain new abilities in return for time donated to an organization (Stirling, Kilpatrick, & Orpin, 2011). Furthermore, "organizations attempt to address their needs for learning through developing and implementing training programs or providing such opportunities to their employees in other venues through outsourcing them" (Azevedo & Akdere, 2011, p. 399). Opportunities for professional growth and development through charitable pursuits are expected to such a degree that even for-profit businesses sometimes encourage employee involvement in philanthropic activities to improve the hard and soft skills of their workforces (Perigo, 2010). In the nonprofit sector, role mastery leads

volunteers to feel committed to organizations and their roles within them (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008), but this mastery requires support from the institution as well as a strong training program. As might be expected, the complete or partial absence of training can be problematic, particularly where retention is concerned. If training consists primarily of on-the-job and hands-on training with supervision from staff or long-term volunteers, trainees may feel overwhelmed and unsupported (Haski-Leventhal & Bargel, 2008). If training is insufficient for the tasks required, volunteers will struggle to fulfill their roles and burnout more quickly than their well-trained counterparts (Zhou & Shang, 2011).

Initial training is inarguably important, but continued learning is also essential and may become necessary as volunteers reach the critical burnout stage, as training has shown to be an effective means of combatting and/or preventing burnout (Worthington, 2008; Claxton-Oldfield, 2016). Improved skills and experience enrichment are both benefits of providing opportunities for learning long after a volunteer begins service, and one study showed the practice to be a “very important factor” for 59% of those who continued working with an organization (Stamer, Lerdall, & Guo, 2008). Claxton-Oldfield (2016) suggests ongoing workshops and other educational activities to reduce stressors that lead to burnout as well. Conversely, a lack of training and learning opportunities may lead to high rates of attrition. Burnout may begin to occur for volunteers who have worked at an organization for 10 hours or more per week for 10 months (Jansen, 2010). The stress and emotional costs begin to decrease satisfaction and lead to feelings of burnout, especially for those involved in social work. For example, an empirical study by Andrea Galiette Skoglund (2006) found that inadequate training was the most common reason for burnout among grief counselors.

### **Retention Factors**

The literature highlights many key elements involved in the retention of volunteers. However, the three most common and, seemingly, most fundamental are motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. There is a considerable amount of overlap for the three factors as well. Satisfaction relates strongly to motivation. If the realization of a volunteer's motivation is not met, he or she may become dissatisfied with their volunteer experience (Hyde, Dunn, Wust, Bax, & Chambers, 2016). Conversely, if the motivation is realized, volunteers will be more satisfied with the experience (Ferreira, Proença, & Proença, 2015). Self-satisfaction also appears as a motivational factor (Phillips & Phillips, 2011; Waikayi, Fearon, Morris, & McLaughlin, 2012). A number of studies have linked satisfaction levels with socialization as well (Huynh, Metzger, & Winefield, 2011; Hyde et al., 2016).

### **Motivation Factor**

Motivation is possibly the most common factor studied in retention research, and the motivational elements that occur most frequently are altruism, social, and learning. Although stated in countless ways, "altruism" generally relates to an individual's values and desire to help people or their communities. Social motivations may include intrapersonal relationship building, strengthening ties to the community, and third-party encouragement to participate, while learning relates to skills and experiences that could enhance a volunteer's life or career.

At times, the literature makes a distinction between motivation to volunteer and motivation to continue volunteering (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009). The motivation behind the initial decision to volunteer is an important consideration for recruitment and retention, but a volunteer's motivation to continue providing volunteer services also may be essential to understanding training's role in retention, as

opportunities to learn new skills have been shown to play a role in duration of volunteer service (Stirling et al., 2011). For this reason, motivations for both initial and continued volunteerism have been included.

### **Motivation to be altruistic**

Altruism is likely the first motivational factor that comes to mind in relation to volunteerism, and for good reason: It is one of the most frequently cited and studied reasons for volunteering, though terminology may differ. The desire to “make a difference” is a primary reason for volunteers’ involvement in a nonprofit organization (Bright, et al., 2016). One empirical study found that values, including the desire to improve the community and help people, were the top motivation for 94.8% of volunteers surveyed (Phillips & Phillips, 2011). The self-satisfaction and deeper connections with the community gained from helping others, however, is often viewed as a personal gain as well (Bright, et al., 2016), which creates overlap with other categories of motivation. Based on the literature (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001), volunteer training programs will be more effective if they address altruistic motivation by clarifying who will be helped, how they will be helped, and the magnitude of the work’s importance.

### **Motivation to socialize**

Social opportunities provided by voluntary human service is another strong motivator for many volunteers. The social factor consists of groups including fellow volunteers, the organization’s staff members, and community leaders. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) found that social and altruistic reasons were two primary motivations for the first stage of volunteering (i.e., the application stage). Building new friendships and romantic relationships were both connected with the desire to begin the volunteer signup process. Developing soft skills and

experience in working with people who have diverse backgrounds and cultures also is appealing to many volunteers (Waikayi et al., 2012), especially younger volunteers who have had fewer life experiences. In addition to socializing with the aforementioned groups, the prospect of building relationships with those in need is a social motivator that overlaps with altruism. Volunteers may want to help, “save”, or make a difference in the lives of the people receiving aid from the organization (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Orientation training programs that emphasize relationship building and provide means to socialize with other volunteers and staff members may address the social motivation at the earliest possible stage in the volunteer process, leading to improved retention rates (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007a).

### **Motivation to learn**

The opportunity to learn is the motivational factor that has the most obvious connection to training, as learning is a fundamental part of training and development in general (Noe, 2016). The desire to learn new skills attracts not only individual volunteers (Waikayi et al., 2012) but also private sector companies looking to further develop employee skills through volunteer opportunities (Perigo, 2010). Organizations that allow volunteers to develop relationships with mentors and match career interests with service tasks retain more volunteers (McBride & Lee, 2012). According to Waikayi et al. (2012), this is particularly true for younger volunteers, for whom a key reason for volunteering is the ability to learn new skills that may be useful for their future careers or studies. In fact, for volunteers under the age of 25, simply experiencing a work environment can be a major motivator. Young volunteers seeking to gain work experience and skills may have shorter lengths of service than older volunteers, which has led to recommendations of student volunteer tracks of shorter duration (Bright et al., 2016). Despite the shorter service durations, opportunities to learn is a deciding factor in whether young volunteers

remain with an organization. While older volunteers may be satisfied with short training, their younger counterparts prefer a deeper understanding of their tasks (Stirling et al., 2011). The depth and quality of training may differ among volunteers across a range of ages, but offering thorough skills training and future development opportunities, particularly as elective options, will aid in both short- and long-term retention.

### **Self-fulfillment and personal satisfaction factor**

Self-fulfillment and personal satisfaction is a retention factor that relates strongly to training as well as both the motivation and socialization retention factors. Existing literature indicates that high levels of satisfaction may be achieved through a focus on enjoyment and social opportunities in the organization (Hyde et al., 2016; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001) as well as task-related traits like increased job autonomy (Ching-Fu & Ting, 2014; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001). Another frequent finding is the need for volunteers to know what to expect when service begins, both environmentally and their roles in the organizations. Role specificity in the form of requirements, responsibilities, and role boundaries may be viewed as essential requirements of training (Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009) but have the potential to be overlooked in an organization's haste to put volunteers to work. Burke (2015) takes the philosophy a step further, stating that both establishing expectations and "creating routines" during training helps to sustain a volunteer program (Burke, 2015). There is some risk in creating fun, social, and entertaining orientation experiences for volunteers because of the potential for creating an upbeat tone contradictory to the magnitude of the services provided. However, orientation programs designed to encompass structural elements related to the work performed as well as fun and social aspects may provide balance and lead to higher retention rates.

Imparting the importance of the service provided by volunteers is crucial to high levels of satisfaction as well, which relates back to the altruistic motivation. Volunteers want to help people and will be more satisfied if they perceive their work as useful. As such, it is important to communicate to volunteers the significance and value of their contributions. In addition to providing further balance to a “fun” orientation program, explaining the value and importance of services provided fosters stronger commitment to the organization as a whole and functions as part of socialization during training (Ching-Fu & Ting). This finding is illustrated by the five stages of volunteer service researched by Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008). These stages include *nominee* (one to two months prior to volunteering), *newcomer* (entrance to three months of service), *emotional involvement* (four to eight months of service), *established* (after one year of service), and *retiring* (between one and two years of service). Satisfaction is lowest during the application period and first few months of service (the nominee and newcomer stages, respectively) because volunteers have not yet witnessed the positive effects of their work. The emotional involvement stage has the highest satisfaction rate, as volunteers have a deep connection to the organization and have developed relationships with the service recipients, increasing the perceived meaningfulness of the volunteer activities. However, it is important to note that the high satisfaction rate in the third stage comes with high emotional costs as well. Taking into account these findings, human service organization’s volunteer retention rates may be improved by bolstering satisfaction levels during initial training and offering later training and development for stress reducing techniques.

### **Socialization Factor**

Socialization has been defined as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979;

p. 211). Providing volunteers with an understanding of the organizational culture is crucial to the socialization process. A study conducted on reasons for volunteer attrition in Oregon's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program found that 34% of the most discouraging factors to the continuation of volunteer activities related to the organization itself (Nelson, Netting, Borders, & Huiber, 2004). Of the organization-related factors, "poor program support" and "conflicts with the central office" had the highest response rates. By comparison, personal factors, such as health issues and a lack of time or transportation, were chosen only 10% of the time. Some of the issues can be resolved before they begin by allotting time during orientation training for explaining proper lines of communication, including who volunteers report to during regular service activities, who to contact during emergencies or for special circumstances, and how the volunteer roles relate to the organizational structure.

Though training should explain communication and organizational structure, the flow of information and development should continue long past orientation. Support from the paid staff and/or the organization itself, which may take the form of constructive feedback, strong lines of communication, and other work resources, appears frequently as criteria for retention (Sellon, 2014; Ching-Fu & Ting, 2014; Studer, 2016). These factors are necessary to build organizational commitment, which is essential to volunteer retention, particularly for long-term volunteers. Long-term volunteers need strong ties to the mission and values of the organization to maintain volunteer status, whereas engaging volunteers for short periods of time requires increasing satisfaction through emphasis of social and enjoyment motives (Hyde et al., 2016). This appears to be true across situations and countries. In an examination of high-turnover through the European Voluntary Service (EVS) program, which provides volunteers to organizations for one year or less, Burke (2015) argues that preserving institutional memory is necessary for improving

volunteer commitment. Essentially, if the more established volunteers embrace the organization's culture and share their collective skills and experiences, it could aid in retention and provide needed stability. All further training and development programs for volunteers should reemphasize the organization's values and explain how the new skills or information will support its vision, mission and goals.

If an organization's processes are not compatible with inspiring commitment, changes may be required. Increasing institutional capacity, an organization's ability to create roles for volunteers, is the most effective method for maximizing the benefits of volunteerism (Hong et al., 2009). Increasing institutional capacity may involve changes to training programs, increased job flexibility, and the provision of resources to create a better fit for the volunteer. Resources alone may not be enough, however. A feeling of connectedness with the organization has been shown to mediate the relationship between resources and satisfaction as well as resources and the desire to continue volunteering (Huynh et al., 2011). Connectedness and commitment may be gained by incorporating management styles that are friendly and positive toward volunteers (Waikayi et al., 2012). It may be useful to provide volunteers with a glimpse into the daily activities of staff members working in high-stress environments because empathy may help to offset perceived negativity.

### **Implications for Training**

The literature on training suggests that orientation training should not be skipped or shortened. Retention rates may improve through provision of an in-depth orientation training program to explain who will benefit from services provided and to provide clear expectations before beginning on-the-job training. Because satisfaction levels are strongly tied to altruistic motivations, there may be advantages inherent in explaining who volunteers will serve and how

the community will benefit from their service. The relationship between satisfaction and socialization is supported as well. Ensuring that role specifications are communicated before on-the-job training begins may allow trainees to feel less overwhelmed and better supported, which may prevent early burnout. Organizations also may want to consider inclusion at orientation sessions of a volunteer who has worked for several months. The freshness of their own training may help the experienced volunteer to better prepare trainees for environmental expectations.

A thorough orientation period also will provide an opportunity to introduce new volunteers to the organization, which aides in socialization of volunteers and may increase satisfaction levels (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007b). The orientation period allows an organization to begin the on-boarding process needed for commitment. The mission and vision should be communicated in a manner that may serve as a foundation for volunteer buy-in, increasing the desire for involvement. Explicit descriptions of the volunteers' roles in accomplishing the mission and vision also may strengthen connectedness with the organization and cause (Schmidt & Akdere, 2007). Additionally, orientation is a reasonable time to explain the organization's lines of communication. If volunteers know how to get help or feedback from the onset, they may feel more accepted and supported in the organization.

All forms of training, including orientation, on-the-job, cross-functional, and retraining activities, may be most effective at reducing retention if done in teams. Because one of the primary motivations for volunteerism is social, group training may provide interactions from the onset in addition to ensuring that volunteers will not feel alone when they begin on-the-job training (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007c). Similarly, retraining or preparing volunteers for different roles within an organization may be perceived as more "fun" and less stressful if provided in a team training environment. Some 'team-building' and 'get-to-know-your partner' activities could

be useful during these training sessions and may serve as the foundation for long-term relationships that could increase organizational connectedness. The motivation to learn is, perhaps, the easiest to support and accommodate through training. In addition to helping volunteers learn more about the roles they will serve in the organization, it may be beneficial to explain what skills the trainees will learn immediately and to describe what continued learning opportunities are available to them, particularly if future opportunities align with the volunteers' interests (Saksida, Alfes, & Shantz, 2016). Furthermore, engaging volunteers in continuous learning presents unique development opportunities to volunteers, which supports the enhancement of service quality, provides a sense of belonging to the organization, and increases volunteer intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

### **Conclusion**

There is a need for further research to support the development of best practices for reducing attrition rates through the training of nonprofit human service volunteers. The absence of literature on continued training for long-term volunteers is particularly noteworthy. As learning repeatedly has been found to be a key element of motivation, an absence of further training has the potential to increase the levels of attrition and burnout in human service organizations. Building on the work of Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), research that might aid in the creation of learning programs for each stage of volunteering could be beneficial. Other elements with infrequent inclusion in the literature are the learning theories associated with retention and the phenomenon of volunteers quitting immediately after the completion of initial training. Future research on any of these topics could provide a more solid foundation for the design of human service volunteer training programs.

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Confessions of Three (over) Achievers, Programming for Affiliation-Motivated Volunteers

Ken Culp, III, Ph.D.\*  
Principal Specialist for Volunteerism  
Department of 4-H Youth Development  
University of Kentucky  
Lexington, KY 40546  
Tel. 859-218-0899  
[ken.culp@uky.edu](mailto:ken.culp@uky.edu)

Harriett C. Edwards, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor and Extension Specialist  
North Carolina State University  
Raleigh, NC 27695  
Tel. 919-515-9548  
[harriett\\_edward@ncsu.edu](mailto:harriett_edward@ncsu.edu)

Jenny W. Jordan  
Navy 4-H Youth Program Specialist  
University of Tennessee  
Tel. 706-340-6637  
[jjorda51@utk.edu](mailto:jjorda51@utk.edu)

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\* Corresponding Author

We began conference planning with the best of intentions. With more than 80 years of combined service at six land-grant universities, we were, after all, a trio of the most highly tenured Extension volunteerism specialists in the country. We were motivated; okay, we were driven. Perhaps our zealous drive caused us to lose sight of our real purpose; developing volunteers through a regional conference.

We were “the good guys.” We wore white hats. We were knights in shining armor, riding white chargers. We were ready to do battle, slay a dragon, and rescue the damsel in distress. Unfortunately, we didn’t recognize the real dragon.

There were rumblings and concerns about the direction of the 50-year old conference. Four days in duration, the conference required a major time commitment. Volunteers were busy people. The average age of conference attendees continued to creep up. We were reaching the same traditional, aging audience. We needed to update with a new approach.

Achievers are, by nature, optimists. Thinking that we’d need to create a different battle plan to conquer another kingdom, we saddled our chargers and rode off to the conference, planning to develop a new, improved conference strategy, and conquer another kingdom. We would rescue the damsels in distress (our volunteers), expand our kingdom (an improved conference), then celebrate with a feast of wild boar and ale.

We started well, with the best of intentions. Strategizing as would any achievement oriented, experienced volunteerism specialists. We convened a focus group of volunteers. We brainstormed ways to create an innovative and contemporary event. We programmed for younger volunteers. We planned sessions, designed to build skills and develop competencies. We created a leaner, fresher look. We programmed for measurable impact at the expense of everything else.

We created a regional event, where individual states once had gathered. We fostered unity with one conference shirt and specific branding. Lunches became quick affairs, with randomized, assigned seating, to facilitate evaluation sessions. We offered educational workshops, presented intensive learning labs, and featured engaging keynote speakers.

We identified programmatic outcomes and evaluated the conference using a quantitative questionnaire; measuring knowledge gained and conference impact. We created new traditions, introducing story-telling, reflective journaling, graffiti walls, and illustrating scrapbook pages.

At our third “new” conference, a national leader remarked that there wasn’t another 4-H event that gathered as much data and evaluated as comprehensively as we did. We accepted that as a compliment. We were winning the battle! We were knights in shining armor. We had slain the dragon and rescued the damsel in distress, or so we thought.

Conference participation continued to decline steadily. Volunteers consistently told us that they missed the old traditions. They didn’t enjoy devoting their mealtimes to focus groups. They missed the social activities that we had eliminated, believing them unimportant.

The volunteers appreciated our well-intentioned, zealous drive to create a new conference. But they were so busy giving input, attending outcome-oriented, skill- and competency-building workshops, and participating in a host of evaluation activities, that they didn’t have time to network. They saw old friends but didn’t have time to talk with them. The informal sharing of ideas and exchange of information that had once been a hallmark of the conference was gone.

We reexamined our reams of data; we’d accomplished what we’d set out to do. We’d ensured that volunteers had input and voice, using the regional volunteer advisory group to

obtain volunteer perspective. We had identified the expected benefits, measured the outcomes, and shared the impact. We had met *our* goals. Had we truly met the volunteers' needs?

The light began to shine and reflect on our lances. We realized that volunteers liked activities that we believed were unimportant. We were a troika of specialists, motivated by achievement, programming for volunteers, largely motivated by affiliation. We'd been so busy preparing for battle that we'd overlooked the needs and wants of volunteers. We'd slain the wrong dragon.

We realized that social interaction, (belonging) drew volunteers to the conference. Both formal and informal opportunities allowed them to share ideas and exchange information. Activities that we saw as unimportant were networking opportunities in disguise. Volunteers shared and exchanged information while they decorated cabins, traded pins, ate meals, and crafted at "fun-shops." Volunteers wanted to relax, renew, and re-energize in a tranquil location, surrounded by people who shared similar experiences and would be glad to chat, visit, and share together.

We thought that they wanted prepackaged, ready-to-use lessons they could use the moment they returned home to their 4-H clubs. To an extent, they did. However, these are 4-H volunteers, motivated by affiliation (Culp, 1997; Culp & Schwartz, 1999). They affiliate with youth, the organization and its emblem. This group affiliated with conference attendees, the facility, and learned from interacting with others. The group didn't want handouts; they craved interaction.

Through an endless number of innovative, creative, qualitative methods, we had asked the volunteers what motivated conference attendance. We expected to hear that they wanted to learn, to gather information, gain new ideas that they could use back home in their volunteer

roles. We weren't disappointed; those were their exact responses. However, what we realized is that what they learned and how they wanted to learn were two different things. It wasn't the learning outcome but the learning process that mattered most to them.

This realization gave us hope and provided direction. The volunteer's voice that we had intentionally included rang more loudly; this time, we listened.

Participants indicated that focus on learning from experts, sharing through networking, and face-to-face interaction were critical conference components. While education is the hallmark of a successful volunteer development activity, there are many ways to engage adult learners. We began programming in ways that facilitated the exchange of information among and between volunteers. Our strategy began to change.

In short, we created opportunities for volunteers to engage in conversation informally. We suggested lunchtime table topics and encouraged presenters to include small group discussions in workshops. We scheduled 30-minute networking breaks, encouraging people to chat and share information. We redesigned learning opportunities. We intentionally designed programming around formal and non-formal interactions.

Everywhere volunteers gathered, and wherever lines formed, graffiti walls popped up. The volunteer advisory group was invaluable in suggesting graffiti wall questions. When the responses were grouped categorically by motivational categories (Culp & Schwartz, 1999; McClelland, 1955), affiliation motives were listed most frequently, followed by achievement.

Volunteers loved the graffiti walls and shared feedback that was insightful, honest, and frank. Every single person participated in designing scrapbook pages; each page told a personal story. The reflective journals were a gold mine. They took weeks to code and decipher using a method of three raters (Culp & Pilat, 1998) but contained the richest data.

The findings from reflective journals were illuminating. We learned volunteers came to the conference, not only to learn, but to relax, renew, and share. The reflective journals shared the volunteers' stories, stories written by affiliators.

Conference attendance rebounded. We realized that volunteers primarily motivated by affiliation might also be achievers who simply viewed achievement differently than did we. We saw achievement as *learning* new skills, competencies, and ideas. Conversely, volunteers experienced a sense of accomplishment when they *shared* ideas, networked, and succeeded in feeling refreshed and renewed.

The realization didn't stop there. While we experienced a sense of accomplishment from completing intentional tasks, the volunteers felt accomplished when they networked. To integrate more networking activities, we introduced an integrated educational approach, including curriculum sharing, service learning stations, and structured group activities.

We'd begun with the best of intentions. We had. We thought we were doing the right thing. We were dedicated, driven, experienced, achievement-motivated volunteerism specialists, intent on presenting a meaningful, high-quality, educational volunteer conference. We'd made revisions; created a successful battle plan. We were the good guys, knights in shining armor; we wore white hats.

Vindicated and satisfied, we saddled our chargers and rode to our ivory towers. We were the victors. We'd created a battle plan, slain the dragon, and conquered a new conference kingdom. We had rescued the damsels in distress (our volunteers), and expanded our kingdom (improved the conference). We removed our armor, celebrated the conference with a banquet of wild boar, and toasted with ale. But sometime, amid the feast, the boasts, and the toasts, a

thought emerged, “had we rescued the volunteers, or had the volunteers rescued us?” One thing we knew, we wore white hats.

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