

Workshop Presentation

Topic: Volunteering of Youth

Service and Learning–

Blossoming of the Youth Volunteerism in Nantou, Taiwan

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Abstract

Due to the experience of Nantou Youth Volunteer Center established after the 921 earthquake, it is suggested that volunteer efforts help transforming the youth's motivation to action and lead the youth toward achievements and self-awareness. Through serving and caring people around, volunteerism is the most effective way to encourage the youth to learn, to grow and to develop themselves, so as to reshape, to rebuild and to empower the communities.

I. Introduction of Nantou Youth Volunteer Center

September 21, 1999, the 921 earthquake seriously devastated central Taiwan, Nantou county in particular, that lots of buildings and properties were destroyed. During the disastrous period, tremendous volunteer efforts from both domestic and overseas influxed into Nantou county. A strong wave of youth volunteerism was aroused and developed vigorously at the same time along with the recovery in the hit area. In order to organize these youth volunteer efforts in perpetual and persistent patterns, the Nantou Youth Volunteer Center (NYVC), one of the six centers around the island, was established with the support and under the supervision of ministry level National Youth Commission (NYC). Among the six centers, NYVC is the only one covers a single county due to the flourish volunteer efforts since the 921 earthquake.

Because of the earthquake, the youth volunteer works got public exposure and received supports from not only Taiwanese government but also major international organizations, such as International Association of Volunteer Efforts (IAVE). Consequently IAVE Taiwan established in 2001. Since then, two IAVE presidents – Dr. Allen and Ms. Burns – visited Taiwan to publicize the ideas of volunteerism, and

to encourage the activities of volunteer works. Dr. Allen visited the most seriously damaged ground to encourage the reconstruction with voluntary spirit. Ms. Burns traveled all over the island, including Taipei, Koushong and Nantou to initiate the awareness and participation of volunteerism of the youth. The two Chairpersons from IAVE brought the seeds of “helping people” to plant in the soil of Taiwan. Due to the fertile land of volunteerism in Taiwan, it is not surprise to see the booming of youth volunteer efforts in a very short time.

The major task of NYVC is to advocate youth volunteerism across all campuses and communities, and exchange volunteer ideas with foreign organizations. Over the past four years, NYVC has held more than 50 general training camps and 20 advanced training courses for volunteer candidates at various schools and organizations with financial and technical supports from both NYC and IAVE. There were more than 200 teams to join the Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) projects between 2002 and 2004 under the monitoring of NYVC. The service projects of these GYSD projects cover every kind of community services, such as elementary school students tutoring, community reconstruction, campus services, etc.

Coinciding with the trend of volunteerism after the quake, campus voluntary work has been at the ascendant since 2000. NYVC works hand-in-hand closely with schools to promote youth volunteerism and has obtained significant accomplishments. NYVC cooperates and coordinates all levels of educational institutes, from junior high schools to university, to promote the idea of volunteerism. Beginning from this year, NYVC has been trying to introduce economic recovery and industrial development into volunteer work by merging volunteer efforts with after quake reconstruction in Nantou county. With all these exertion on all kinds of activities, NYVC has become one the most prominent center across the island in promoting youth volunteerism.

After this brief overview of NYVC, the remaining part of this report is organized as follows. Section II is the main theme of NYVC, section III describes the partnership between NYVC and Chi-Nan university in advocating volunteer works. The ideas and methods to encourage the volunteer efforts from motion to action are explained in section IV, follows the concluding remarks in section V.

II. The Main Theme of NYVC

The target group of NYC is the youth that includes juvenile, adolescence, and adults under age 45. NYVC focuses on the same group to promote the deep rooted volunteerism. The main task of NYVC is to coordinate the government financial supports with the need of volunteer groups to launch all types of voluntary projects.

Under the strong support of NYC, the NYVC coordinates 26 NPOs and NGOs to work with educational institutions leveled from junior high school to university within Nantou to urge the youth volunteerism. In accordance with the belief of “the youth can change the world”, NYVC emphasize on fostering the earnestness of volunteerism in the youth by all means of lectures, training campus, GYSD projects, newsletters, and so on.

Consistently cooperating with organizations and schools in Nantou, NYVC has been promoting volunteerism to help the youth in Nantou to realize their ideals associated with the re-building activities of their own communities in directions as following:

1. **Inspiring the spirit of volunteer efforts:** through regular workshops and training courses of volunteerism, NYVC conveys the kindling of volunteerism in all levels of educational institutes within Nantou county, from middle school to college. NYVC maintains a team of professionals and trainers who are specialized in providing lessons and training courses to initiate student volunteerism. Over the years, NYVC has held over 70 workshops and training courses and directly benefited more than 10,000 students and the youth. NYVC also publishes volunteer newsletter and setups voluntary website to broadcast the information of volunteerism.
2. **Promoting service-n-learning projects:** NYVC initiates inside campus and outside campus volunteer works to encourage students to learn from to serve. In spite of the service works during semester, every year NYVC supports substantial amount of internship that is provided by NYC for native Nantou college students who study out-of-Nantou to join the back-to-hometown service projects over winter break and summer vacation. During the working period, college students devote to re-construct and empower their own communities through various kinds of intern service works, such as tutoring the young kids of dis-advantaged groups, community cleaning, remote community services, etc.
3. **Hosting annual Global Youth Service Day projects:** Since the new millennium, GYSD has become the most popular volunteerism promotion annually. From then on, NYVC has coordinated thousands of students with a hundred teams every year to participate this annual project. NYVC also designs an evaluation system to select the best team to join the national contest. Since 2002, a couple of GYSD teams from Nantou joined the national contest and won the service awards.
4. **Empower local youth volunteerism with international exchange:** volunteerism concepts in Taiwan is as advanced as other countries, but the ways to implement volunteer efforts need to learn new ideas from successful experiences. Since the

establishment of NYVC, two IAVE presidents and many pioneers on volunteer works from foreign countries had come to visit NYVC to advise the future directions of youth volunteerism. NYVC has also dispatched a delegations to pay a visit to Tokyo Volunteer Center and Association for Aid and Relief, Japan in year 2001 to have exchanges. Additionally, many of NYVC consultants are educated and trained in western countries. These international exchanges experience help NYVC to have more new ideas in designing volunteer works.

5. **Rebuilding the homeland by the youth:** Nantou is an agricultural county full with mountains that is vulnerable to natural disasters such as typhoons and tropical hurricanes during summer season. Over the past years, Nantou was affected by a couple of terrible typhoons and suffered from serious damages. NYVC had organized the youth volunteers right after the disasters to transport foods and medical aids to farther communities to help the victims. Aiming at actively helping the remote mountain-side aboriginal communities that are relatively slower-developed and incomplete-rebuilt within Nantou, NYVC designs a compound project to combine economic development with youth volunteer efforts in a tour package. In the project, the youth play key roles as not only tour guides but also missionary volunteers to help improve the communities' public sanitary, education, marketing on recreation industry and agricultural products. This project is going to serve as a prototype for NYVC to extend the power of youth volunteers in rebuilding the communities.

With the five directions of exertions on promoting volunteerism, NYVC connects demand and supply of volunteer efforts to the most efficient usage as well as constructs the vision of service as life goal for the youth in Nantou.

III. The Trustworthy Partnership of NYVC and National Chi-Nan University

National Chi-Nan University is the only higher education institution in Nantou County and she plays a crucial role in promoting youth volunteerism with NYVC. The university provides not only the professional faculties served as trainers on every fields that apply to volunteer works, but also the facilities and space for all kinds of training courses. In addition, the undergraduate and graduate students on campus are the main body to support youth volunteerism as they have dual roles of both trainees and voluntary workers. The solid partnership between volunteer center and university is proved to be an effective way to promote volunteerism.

Beginning from year 2000, Chi-Nan University was one of few campuses that pioneered to start a required class of zero credit for the first year freshmen to have two hours campus service work every week for the whole school year. This service class is

an innovative way to inspire the spirit of volunteer works. After taking the campus service classes, most of the college students retain the idea of volunteerism and are more willing to further realize the idea of volunteerism in joining outside campus NGO to work for voluntary works during breaks and vacations.

In year 2005, the University received a substantial amount of extra funding from the Ministry of Education to improve educational quality. The school administrative has make use of part of the funds on promoting voluntary efforts by further require the freshman volunteers “to serve the community”. Students took the required service class have to design their own service projects in providing volunteer efforts to the need of the community and the university provides the expenses for the students’ insurance and necessary costs. The university also provides training courses for these freshmen by inviting experienced volunteers to give lectures and training camps. Every students taking the class will be granted a volunteer passport that records the service hours in class and out of class. Students with the volunteer passports will be benefited on applying schools and jobs in the future.

It is worth to note that Nantou county is a special area that there is the highest density of aboriginal people in Taiwan. Chi-Nan University resides in the small town – Puli – which is the intersection of aboriginal tribes and Han people (Chinese immigrants over the past few centuries). To provide aids to the relatively disadvantaged aboriginal youth in mountain area, the University has launched many projects to help the school kids in remote mountain area. The varieties of these youth voluntary projects cover from computer skill lessons to after school learning enhancement.

IV. Encouragement of Youth Volunteerism: From Motivation to Action

Nowadays, most of the youth lacks life goal to pursue. Before move them toward action, we have to first give them motivation. The youth are born with powerful motives for caring and helping people. The problem is, if we didn’t provide them information to invoke their ideas through realization, to convey their motives toward action, these ideas and motives will fade out as they age, and finally vanish. Due to the experience of NYVC, if we can combine the support of the government, school, communities and NPOs all together to jointly work with the youth. It is like to plant seeds of volunteerism in the youth’s heart, the seeds will sprout, blossom, and flourish.

Since it is effective to inspire the volunteerism at young age, to cultivate the youth volunteer on campus is the most efficient way to promote the idea. It is reciprocal that the youth help providing volunteer works and the service works

feedback the youth to have healthier attitudes and life goal. NYVC keeps encourage the youth get involved in volunteer efforts by coordinating supply and demand of youth volunteer efforts, and both the giver and receivers gain from the service works.

As my own experience in activating the voluntary efforts at school, I can tell that volunteerism does change the youth both externally and internally. In year 2000, as the advisor of undergraduate students, I encouraged the students at my department to extend the inside campus service to outside campus as cleaning the park of the community. This project did not make any economic sense since the services cost a lot more than if hiring a janitor to do the job. Nevertheless, after the first semester, those college students came to me and told me that they want to have more active services than just cleaning the park. Therefore, I encourage them to search funding from NYC and NYVC, and they have designed a “helping the young kids in remote aboriginal tribe” project. Those college students set up an agenda to teach the aboriginal elementary school students during the weekend. Joint with the GYSD project at the same year, their project was “elementary school students visit the university” that they invited the aboriginal kids to come to our campus. The purpose to show those kids how university campus looks like is to encourage the relatively disadvantaged kids to pursue higher education.

It is interesting to observe the changing process of the youth joining volunteer works. Those college students at my department are like the youth of today elsewhere – lazy, late to come to class or even absent, get flunk at some tough subjects, can’t concentrate at school but hang-on the computer in the whole night, etc. When these immature college students dealt with the over-energetic aboriginal kids, they suddenly turned out to be mature young adults. This live example evidently shows the effectiveness of “learning from service” as well as “growing from services” applies on the young students’ volunteer working experience.

V. Concluding remarks: It Pays to Invest the Youth on Volunteerism

From the above discussions, it suggests that youth volunteerism does provide an effective way to guide the youth toward successful life. In promoting volunteerism, educational institutions play an important role as both supplier of volunteers and demander of voluntary workers. It is believe that to inspire the idea of volunteerism in the youth should be considered as part of formal education. The problem is, how we can inspire the youth to setup a lift-time goal to pursue volunteer service? As mentioned in section III, a solid partnership between volunteer center and schools is the fundamental to promote youth volunteerism. Educational institutes are actually the incubator to nurture the idea of volunteerism in students. Not only the students in high

school and university are mature enough to expose to volunteerism, it is worth to note that junior high and elementary schools also take crucial part in youth volunteerism since underage students are the best objectives for the youth to exercise voluntary works. In Nantou area, Chi-Nan University takes the lead in all types of campus volunteer work and extends gradually to other schools. It is expected that voluntary class on campus is becoming an official requirement, and all schools can be integrated under the network of volunteerism.

Based on the close relationship with schools, NYVC will extend youth volunteerism under the concept of service network and hope to induce more schools and students to joint volunteer efforts by channeling resources from both the public and private sectors and coordinating demand and supply of volunteer efforts. To pursue this goal, NYVC has designed a step-by-step agenda to promote youth volunteerism. In the short run, NYVC will on the one hand appeal to more schools for joining the GYSD projects to spread the idea of services. On the other hand, NYVC keeps advertising the students volunteer works through around-the-campus propaganda. The mid-term objective of NYVC is to connect the local youth volunteer efforts with that in other areas in the island. Coordinating inter- and intra-county service works cooperation with the exchange of ideas will result in mutual benefits of all groups that join the services. Finally, the long term goal is to drive these youth efforts participating international activities and services. Looking forward to the future, youth volunteer will be one of the most precious assets owned in Nantou county.

The youth is the building blocks of the society and the hope for tomorrow, and the youth can change the world if they have better idea of volunteerism. The youth are full of ideals and dreams to realize, and voluntary works help transforming the youth's motivation to action and lead the youth toward achievements and self-awareness. Therefore, it pays to invest the youth on vulnerary works definitely!