

Paper Presentation

Topic: Innovations and Good Practices in Volunteering

Development of Youth Volunteerism in Hong Kong

Ms. Pui-Wah WU

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

pwwu@hkfyg.org.hk

Abstract

Young people are our future and volunteerism is an important component leading to social development. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) dedicated to the all round development of young people established the first Youth Volunteer Network (VNET) in Hong Kong to promote youth volunteerism. Since its establishment, the number of youth volunteers increased in multiples. As compared to developed countries, Hong Kong still has room to develop youth volunteerism. By examining the current social environment, we see the opportunities at which effort can be put to flourish the growing youth volunteerism, arising from the recent education reform, the emerging ageing problem, Hong Kong's worldwide connections and the hosting of Olympic Games firstly in China.

Introduction

The spirit of volunteerism, which energizes young people to serve others, is one of the most visible demonstrations of care for the community. Young people are our future and to encourage them to join the volunteer force will bring about long-term benefits and contribute to the building of a caring society. Having the conviction to help young people and prepare them to be leaders of tomorrow, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) put every effort in promoting youth volunteerism and established the Hong Kong first ever Youth Volunteer Network (VNET) in 1998. With the launch of IYV in 2001, volunteer development has made a great leap in Hong Kong. The number of people registered as volunteers is constantly on the increase. Currently the number of VNET volunteers has reached over 90,000 and the total accumulated number of service hours is over 2,800,000. Recent social concerns attributed to the prospective new academic structure introduced in education reform and the emerging problem of ageing, as well as the opportunities arising from the worldwide connections of Hong Kong and the coming of Beijing Olympics have put forth an environment conducive to the development of youth volunteerism. By sharing our experience and put forward our suggestions on these concerns, we hope will bring in new dimensions and inspire new ideas in youth volunteerism.

Education Reform: an opportunity to promote a volunteering culture

Findings from the USA and Canada supported that adult who began volunteering as youth were more likely to volunteer than those who did not volunteer when they were younger. These findings suggest that early volunteering experience helps to foster a volunteering culture. Another study conducted by the HKFYG on volunteering revealed that 23.1% of people aged 15 or above took part in volunteering through organizations;

while in the students' category the percentage is as high as 56%. Therefore we suggest that youth volunteerism should be started as early as possible in school.

The recent education reform proposed a new academic structure, which suggests the inclusion of "involvement in social services" in the curriculum has opened up a straight road for youth volunteerism development. We can envisage increasing demands from schools for support relating to the education on volunteerism.

Despite the lack of comprehensive data about the strategies by which schools employed to promote volunteerism, the support from the sector is positive and their effort cannot be undermined. The HKFYG has diverse strategies to meet the different targets that schools plan to attain at youth volunteerism. There are mainly four modes:

1. Schools register as affiliated organizations of VNET

The registered schools will adopt the VNET 5-badges awarding system to recognize the contribution of students. VNET also provided schools with up-dated services opportunities information and offer talks promoting youth volunteerism. This mode is simple and does not demand extra workload on the teachers and resources implication is low to the school.

2. Schools collaborate with HKFYG in the neighbourhood level.

The HKFYG will offer tailor-made community services package and provide professional human resources in the course of delivery. This mode will best meet the need of the schools and save schools' manpower on the preparation, organization and implementation. Besides, school can receive professional consultancy on the development of volunteerism. In this mode, the schools usually bear the expense incurred.

3. VNET constantly applies for external funding to implement new initiatives and invite schools to join.

Out of the several new initiatives carried out, one of them is, under the sponsorship of the Quality Education Fund of the Government in 2004. It is a two-year Service Learning Project, aiming at integrating voluntary work as part of the regular school curriculum. Notwithstanding that new initiative always calls for commitment and extra workload, joining schools do share and benefit from the project. The teachers learn the teaching elements, method, process and skills in service learning. By tapping in the resources from the parents to serve as group facilitators, the schools also develop valuable human resources from the parent volunteers.

4. Production of teaching aids and organization of "train the trainers" workshops

VNET regularly produces teaching aids e.g. volunteer storybooks,

volunteer training manuals, to assist teachers developing their own teaching materials. Besides, VNET also conduct training workshops to train volunteer managers including teachers.

To stand by our education partners, we not only providing support to schools but also allowing young people to begin their exploration of voluntary work in early age.

Ageing Society: From threat to opportunity

By official projection, people aged 65 or above will account for more than a quarter of our population in 2033. The contemporary nuclear family structure has weakened social relationship and limits the chance young people to interact with elderly. The negative stereotype of a dependent, fragile, boring elderly image persists in the young's mind and the Chinese tradition of showing respect to the elderly is undermined. Discussion tends to focus on financial assistance that making the elderly out to be a burden on society. How can we promote all sectors especially the diminishing younger population to share the responsibility to take care of this expanding elderly?

VNET has carried out a project named "Project Relay". The project was initiated by a group of enthusiastic persons who showed concern about the vulnerability of the elderly when Hong Kong was recovered from the attack of SARS. They raised donation for the Project and helped over 480 elderly through 330 youth volunteers. In the project, youth volunteers were paired up with elderly. In the six-month service period, youth volunteers visited their elderly partners, chatted with them and most important tried to understand their need. After identifying the needs, the volunteers would use the donation to buy the needed furniture or equipments, medical aids, daily outfits, or carry out minor household repair work so that the elderly would have a better living.

The project did not give the donation directly to the needy elderly. Alternatively youth volunteers were entrusted to make assessment on the need of the elderly. After identifying the need and secured the agreement from the elderly, youth volunteers would execute the improvement plan and reflect on what difference they had brought. The whole process allowed the volunteer to scrutinize the elderly poverty problem and their needs in friendly but real circumstances. Most of the volunteers reflected that they had learnt a lot from their elderly partners, whom they had no acquaintance. Through the causal conversations, the elderly taught them to live positively in adversity. Their life wisdom further motivated the youth volunteers to examine their own life pattern and aroused their awareness to show care to their senior family members. All these show that if the younger generation understand the elderly and honour their life wisdom will lead them to respect and assume the responsibility of taking care of the elderly.

The gist of the project was to connect the elderly with the young through volunteerism and encourage youth to convey care to the elderly in a reciprocal context. Not only the youth volunteers give their time to visit the elderly but also the elderly offers their time to share their life wisdom with the volunteers. The elderly is not solely a passive service recipient but also an active service provider in the process. This is that accent on the reciprocal relationship between the two generations, which introduce a new dimension for youth volunteerism in the threat of our ageing problem. In

addressing the problem, youth work and elderly services organizations should seize this opportunity to rebuild young people's respect to our senior citizens by actualizing this reciprocal relationship between the two. To magnify the impact, the theme "To serve the elderly with respect from young people" should be appealed for public endorsement.

Asia's World City: Bringing youth volunteers from community to the world

Hong Kong is building her position as Asia's world city, which is famous for her worldwide connections and top class facilities. Event organizers worldwide like to choose Hong Kong to host their conventions and meetings. VNET sees these as opportunities for young people to serve on behalf of Hong Kong and provide hospitable services to overseas visitors. We also see these as learning opportunities for young people to gain exposures, to practice their languages, to improve their communication skills, to learn to cooperate with people of diversity background and to enhance their self-confidence. Because of the government's policy to enhance the biliterate and trilingual competency in the basic education, we are glad to have a large pool of young people who are proficient in both English and Putonghua, which VNET regards as a strong human support resource to any large-scale international events. Since 2002, VNET started expanding youth volunteer's horizon from the community to the international level actively joins hands with partners from all sectors to involve them in Hong Kong held international events e.g. the 5th Asia Pacific Harmonica Festival in 2004 and the 88th Lions Clubs International Convention in 2005.

Since the success of these events means a lot to the host and the reputation of Hong Kong, it is of extreme importance for volunteer providers to serve as an agent that can provide volunteers who can satisfactorily perform the required task as well as assist in managing them. To ensure providing the right person to serve at the right duty position, VNET adopts a 6 steps quality management process:

1. Assessment---VNET firstly examines the needs of the host and assesses which positions are suitable for the volunteers to participate and the number required.
2. Generate the logistics flow-map---with the assistance from the host, VNET draws up detail logistic flow-map of each volunteer position and develop service manual for the volunteers.
3. Matching---criteria for volunteers will be set and registered volunteers will be invited to attend selection interview so that their expectation can be understood and matched as far as possible.
4. Training--- selected volunteers will be given usually one day training focusing on the orientation about the event, the general service skill and the specific skill for each volunteer position and information about the service venue.
5. On-site supervision and support---changes and unexpected things always happen in these large-scale events. Volunteer leaders will be appointed to station on-site with the volunteers to handle any unforeseeable matters as well as to observe the performance of the volunteers. Sometimes, volunteers may encounter not very good experiences that need immediate support and ventilation.
6. Feedback and recognition---daily feedback from the host and the volunteers are collected. Sometimes these feedback lead to changes that bring about desirable outcomes. Besides, it is a prerequisite of the host to issue appreciation

certificates to those volunteers who have fulfilled the services requirements and perform satisfactorily.

By following the 6 steps process, VNET proved to provide quality volunteer service and won many partners and visitors' praise on the performance of the volunteers.

Although youth volunteers' specific professional knowledge is limited, they are full of zest and willing to undertake humble positions. Volunteering in these international events, youth are able to serve visitors coming from different parts of the world, being offered the chance to practice their second languages and enhance their language proficiency; observe the operation of some of the world's most important events and learn about cooperativeness and the organizing of human resources; and offer a cordial welcome to our visitors that represents Hong Kong; relate themselves with this small renowned cosmopolitan city and enhance their sense of belonging.

VNET joining youth to volunteer in international events expands the scope of youth volunteerism beyond the traditional community services. The engagement also on one hand facilitates the volunteers gain positive experience, enhances their competency and develop global vision; on the other hand, impresses our worldwide visitors the good service of Hong Kong. We are inspired that increasing opportunities are opened up and many event organizers consider including youth volunteers in their agenda.

Beijing Olympics: Prime time for the development of youth volunteerism

China started off its volunteer service and volunteer development by the end of the 80's. The Chinese expert Dr. Ding Yuanzhu, Director and Professor of the Research Centre for Volunteering and Welfare Peking University's opined in one occasion "... first, the voluntary organizations ...need to be more in tune with attitude and values of people today and tendency of worldwide... Second, government should play an important role in policy-making....for guaranteeing the volunteers and voluntary organizations to have an enabling environment. And third, establishing volunteering information system and information network....." To conclude, China is still way behind many developed countries in the development of volunteer service and voluntary organizations.

Beijing will host the 2008 Olympics and the Beijing Organizing Committee sees the Games as an opportunity to raise the profile of volunteering and engage young people in volunteer action. The Committee is expecting 100,000 volunteers while the Sydney and Athens Games both attracted millions of volunteers 75,665 and over 160,000 application submissions respectively. The Games' success relies strongly on the effective organization of this enormous helping force. It demands for detail workforce planning and analysis, comprehensive training, good management and recognition. While the Games is over, it results in a pool of well-trained personnel specialized in volunteer development, which always a significant legacy to the host country.

Hong Kong has a longer history in volunteer development and accumulated knowledge, experience and substantial best practices that can share with Mainland's volunteering services organizations. Olympics volunteers statistics showed that young people (18-24), which comprised 24% in Sydney and 41% in Athens, were the most

enthusiastic to volunteer. In order to make the greatest contribution to the coming Olympics and flourish our youth volunteerism, organizations in Hong Kong should initiate participation in the Beijing Olympics well in advance.

Volunteering can be differentiated into two categories—informal, and formal through organizations. The difference between the two is the latter usually provides more structure and organized volunteer programmes and is delivered with professional personnel. Professional personnel involvement emerges as a quality assurance, which necessitates the volunteer programme going through the key processes e.g. matching of expectations, training, evaluation, recognition, accountability, etc. In Hong Kong they are mostly social work trained workers, who are experienced and competent volunteer organizers, trainers as well as managers.

Pertaining to the participation in the Olympic volunteer programme, the best Hong Kong can contribute lies in the section on training and youth participation. A quality volunteer programme will not go without training. There are two aspects in the training section that Hong Kong can assist. Firstly, Hong Kong workers with respect to their experience and expertise can contribute in developing the training materials and training modules as well as the implementation of training. Secondly, document the volunteer programme experience into teaching aids so that voluntary organizations and schools in the Mainland can have hands-on volunteer training packages after the Games.

For the youth participation, there are several favourable factors that encourage them to volunteer. Firstly, it is the Olympics first hosted in China and Hong Kong like Chinese all over the world share the pride. Secondly, Hong Kong is close to Beijing makes it convenient to participate. Thirdly, the language proficiency and international exposures of Hong Kong youths are essential competencies that help in serving guests worldwide. Finally, youth volunteers can act as ambassadors and exchange their volunteer experience with their Mainland counterpart. To build up the momentum, organizations should launch a series of awareness programmes at stages to senior secondary and university students, making them understand the value it means to the development of China, the vision of the Olympics and the difference that made by volunteers. Besides, producing teaching guides and organizing training courses for teachers on the topic “Olympic Volunteering” also help to boost up the motivation of young people to volunteer. All these works will promote young people joining the volunteer force in the hopes that they too might make their small contribution to this global event.

Conclusion

“The experience is really fulfilling!” “I learn a lot from my service.” “I realize my help means a lot”--- all these reflections demonstrate how wonderful is the positive turning force of volunteering. We hope every young people can have the privilege to journey through this magnificent venture and instill a heart that brings care to others.

References:

1. Independent Sector & Youth Service America, 2001, Engaging Youth in Lifelong Service, <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/engagingyouth.html>
2. Michael Hall, Larry Mckeown and Karen Roberts, 2001, Caring Canadians, involved www.volunteerlink.net Innovations and Good Practices in Volunteering 6

-
- Canadians: highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating
3. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2002, A study on Social Capital with regard to Giving, Volunteering and Participation, *Youth Study Series*, Issue No.26
 4. Information Services Department(Hong Kong),2004,Press Release on Population Projection
<http://www.news.gov.hk/en/category/administration/040630/print/o4o63oen01003.htm>
 5. Athens Olympics, 2004, Press release on the Record of application at end of Olympic Volunteer Programme
<http://www.athens2004.com/en/PressRelease/newslst?items=950a75cf1713cf004gnVCMServer28130b0a>
 6. Sydney Organizing Committee for Olympic Games, 2001, Sydney 2000 Post Games Report, *Volume I*
http://www.gamesinfo.com.au/postgames/en/volume_en.htm
 7. Ding, Yuanzhu, 2002, Measuring Volunteering Service in China, *ISTR Fifth International Conference Abstract*
<http://www.istr.org/Conferencs/capetown/abstracts/ding.html>