

## Paper Presentation

### Topic: Youth Development and Volunteering

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Ms. Siu-Ching LO **Elderly Volunteering as**

## **Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

Caritas – Hong Kong is a multi-service social welfare organization serving Hong Kong community since 1953. From then onwards, we have been emphasizing the volunteering in its mobilization of community resources to serve those with mishaps and deprivation. Under volunteering, empowerment is the major concept in reaching out the least, the lost and the last. Our service recipients, despite being healthy or frail, are also empowered to contribute as they can be.

Through the volunteering participation, the elderly are engaged in three kinds of service platforms, and four stages of empowerment process including intellectual understanding, awareness, identification and participation. Yet, these stages are not linear, they are inter-related and interactive. In brief, there were five functions in this empowerment process. This will be illustrated by, firstly, a case of healthy elderly who experience these processes, and secondly, a project with frail elderly to serve as volunteers so as to be empowered in the process.

### **One mission in volunteering**

Caritas–Hong Kong was founded in 1953 by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. Through persisted efforts, we aim at helping people strive for self-development and self-reliance. We have also been emphasizing the volunteering in its mobilization of community resources to serve those with mishaps and deprivation. In different stages of Hong Kong society, we have continuously developed and tailored-made different types of services in response to the changing social needs. Yet our main mission “Love in the Service of Hope” is upheld. We strive to enable people to network with other groups towards self-reliance, productive citizenship, and integrative human development on a continuing basis.

## **Two essential features of Volunteering**

One essential feature of volunteering is non-obligatory, unpaid and carried out for the benefit of others and taken place in an organized context (Dingle, 2001). Another feature is that the sources of volunteering may be initiated by individual or by group effort. All volunteers are welcome regardless of their gender, age and nationalities

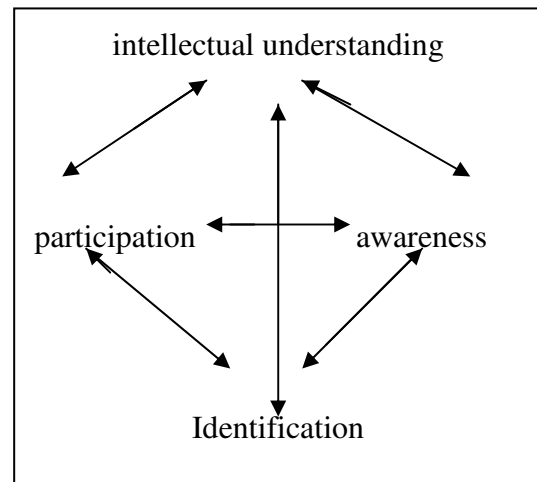
### Three kinds of service platforms

For elderly volunteers, there is a wide pool of energy, experiences and capacities that remain to be explored, re-develop and elaborated. The elders have to re-explore their life, re-develop their physical and artistic capacities, and re-elaborate their contributions to society. We have developed a variety of services that meets their capability and potential, energy direction and time. There are three kinds of service platforms, including centre service, art talent service and community service, and all these three platforms can enable volunteers to experience various form of volunteering.

The centre service platform is the regular centre based services such as reception service, health check, and library counter. With regards to elder talents development, there are varieties of artistic groups such as dancing, singing, handicraft and health excises. Some volunteers undertake the role of tutors and the participants were also encouraged to serve, e.g. home-bound elderly with their talents in seasonal events. Moreover, most of our volunteers have involved themselves in community services platform, including community health promotion, concern phone call and visit, escort and community care services as well as community research.

### Four empowerment process

Volunteer is basically an empowerment process including four stages, namely, intellectual understanding, awareness, identification and participation. Yet, these stages are not linear, they are inter-related and interactive. There is no clear-cut starting stage and end stage of the empowerment process. As such, the volunteers are involved with both mental dimensions and action, as well as affection and concern.



Why do people volunteer? Clary (1998) states that the motivation of volunteers is classified into six categories, including values (people act to express important beliefs, such as altruism and helping the less fortunate), understanding (people see voluntary work as an opportunity to learn, increase their knowledge or develop and practice new skills), social (people want to be accepted and fit in social groups they value or gain social approval), enhancement (people engaging in personal development and to enhance their self esteem),

protection (volunteering may help people cope with inner anxieties and conflicts), and career (people want to gain experience useful for their job or career). The empowerment process in volunteering is in fact helping people to pursue the above driving dimensions.

### **Five functions of empowerment**

Volunteer services focus on five levels of concern. First of all, it concerns with the service recipients. Most are vulnerable people and special need groups who lack resources and self care ability to live in the community. Voluntary activities are activated to reduce social exclusion and isolation.

The second concern falls on elders volunteer themselves, to help them to enhance their self-respect by re-positioning themselves, re-develop relations due to termination of occupational role and re-explore their meaning of life.

The third concern touches on the agency in which they are strengthened in manpower resources and in capturing the community profile and needs.

The fourth concern involves the necessary community building and improvements. Voluntary work is conducive to social cohesive and community building because it promotes the common good. When different walks of citizens share their love and care to improve the target group's quality of life, it helps to promote the spirit of social integration.

Finally, the fifth function ends with change of society and social policy to meet with current needs as new situations arise. In this function, volunteering is part of political involvement and is an opportunity to uphold social justice. Voluntary services have evolved through time in response to social conditions as well as to strengthen the spirit of care and civic participation contributing to social change.

Through the empowerment process and functions, we truly believe that elderly volunteering helps to enforce productive aging and a thriving society.

### **Six scope of Elderly service arena**

Caritas Service for the Elderly was established in 1979 to provide community care and supportive services for the elderly aged 60 or above. We endeavor to help them to maintain their general well-being and quality of life as well as to uphold their self esteem and ability to live actively in the community. These are achieved through a comprehensive range of services, including

1. District Elderly Community Centres,
2. Neighborhood Elderly Centres,
3. Day Care Centres,
4. Enhanced Home and Community Care Service / Integrated Home Care Service
5. Care & Attention Home,
6. Carer Services

## Case of John

John had retired for a few years and he joined as a member in one of our neighborhood elderly center. He seldom joined activities and did not have many friends. He has ample leisure time but has no plan after his retirement.

### Stage of Awareness

The social worker found that he had great potential to develop himself and serve the community at large. He was then invited to join a male group to share their views on current news. Gradually he built up some friendship and social linkages within the centre. He started to have reflections of his role, the needs of other members and the centre as well.

### Stage of Intellectual understanding

Intellectual understanding refers to understand the need of one's own self, service recipients and service content of centre. In the process, John began to rediscover his potentials, resources and opportunities to help out centre functions. Gainful knowledge has become his power and a resource to cope with living. When he understands more about real situation, needs and values, he gains capacities to adjust one's own situation. The social worker also gave him some training on routines like how to conduct meetings and deliver public speeches. Empowerment is developed at the individual level that awakes his deepest abilities and potential. He further participated in concern visit for other group members and got more involved in voluntary work.

### Stage of participation

Starting from the male group, he tried to explore different kinds of services. He also learned more about the needs of the deprived and ways to help them. Voluntary work is teamwork. He then started to join with others to provide multi-level services. Such cooperation in the group strengthened his awareness of the fact that an elder may believe that he experiences a unique situation, but soon learn that others also share such experience too. The group also provided the opportunity to practice skills and gained knowledge. He also gained power to create networks among group members and to support each other. In empowerment process, people like John develop resilience, ego strengths, assertiveness, self-healing, mutual-aid networks, activism, and other coping devices. (Judith Lee, 2001). Through participation, John learned to gain relative control of his life and destiny. On the other hand, he gained recognition from other members with more self-confidence.

### Stage of Identification

Volunteering is defined as doing work voluntarily with no pay. John developed enthusiasm in continuing the service without pay and felt meaningful in doing such work. He was so

delighted to receive recognition from service recipients, social worker, other members and his family members. Identification with a mission turns into power to mobilize his participation and self-actualization. Productive aging is fully actualized in this case.

### **Empowerment Project**

While empowerment is the major concept utilized in reaching out the least, the lost and the last, we also mobilized our service recipients to contribute to society despite their being healthy or frail. As recognized above, volunteer service provided a new source of self-respect and process to enhance the meaning of life.

“Network with love” was a joint project that had launched by four integrated home care services teams in Sai Kung and Wong Tai Sin district. This project aimed at assisting frail elderly to establish mutual support network, to foster positive life attitudes as well as facilitate their participation in voluntary services to reinforce their self-image and self-esteem.

Frail elderly could be empowered through participation as well. We believe that both healthy and frail elderly have their ability and potential. Yet, somehow frail elderly are negatively reinforced in the receiving help process and the attitude of community towards them. They are depicted as unworthy or unproductive people dependent on government funding. Indeed, they have limitations in various aspects and lose confidence to cope with living condition and make life decision. There they have difficulty to find meaning and self worth, and feel powerless. In brief, such powerlessness is fostered by few factors including economic insecurity, absence of experience in the political arena, absence of access to information, lack of training in critical and abstract thought, physical and emotional stress(Cox 1988). This project aimed to help frail elderly regain some power in controlling their lives and their worthiness in the community.

Social workers invited frail elderly who held positive attitude to act as “Concern Ambassador”. They received voluntary training such as understanding community resources and effective communication. Through the picking up of new resources and knowledge, they started to regain their power. On the other hand, empowerment cannot be achieved without having participated as precursor. Participation was defined by Baxter (1996) “.....an active process by which client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well being in terms of income, personal, growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish.” Therefore, they are arranged to provide service to other frail elderly.

They are matched with frail elderly who have negative self-image and inactive to participate activities. The content of the project included small group gathering, concern visit, phone contact and outdoor activities. Small group gathering was held in one of member's home for all members were living in same estate or same block. The arrangement intended to foster frail elderly participate. The concern ambassadors provided emotional support to target members. They built up close relationship and become willing to share their unhappy feeling since they had similar experience or similar situation. They established a mutual support group to collaborate energy to overcome their frustrations. Beside emotional support, concern ambassadors also provided the tangible services such as escort, health exercise sharing, sharing service resources and community issue.

The project brought about two important changes. The first was to eliminate the negative estimation of frail elderly. Through the participation, they demonstrated their ability to contribute and took some responsibility in society. The second change was to undergo the experience of productive aging, to get a sense of personal power and to attain heightened feelings of self-esteem.

### **Concept of Empowerment**

Empowerment refers to both process and goal. As a process, empowerment relates to people regaining power to exercise psychological control over personal affairs, as well as exerting influence the course of events in the socio-political arena. As a goal, it defines the result of obtaining either personal or political power. People may experience the uplift of feeling of worthiness, competence and control; and he/she may in fact achieve reallocation of power that results form modifying social structures (Swift and Levin, 1987).

Empowerment is a process that aims to reduce such feelings of powerlessness. It implies access to power. Gutierrez (1991) describes power as: “the ability to get what one needs; the ability to influence how others think, feel, act, or believe; and the ability to influence the distribution of resources in a social system”.

Base on the above definition, we have fostered elderly to involve voluntary work and to enable them to obtain greater control over their own lives as well as a larger role to play in decision-making processes. Through the empowerment process, elderly experiences four stages including intellectual understanding, awareness, identification and participation.

### **Conclusion**

We will continue to develop volunteering as in elderly empowerment. Certainly the concept



of empowerment provides opportunities to help elderly transform attitude of their own life and capacity to act. It is necessary to expand the scope of volunteer services, and all sectors of the community should take strategic steps to promote volunteering effectively. Our volunteering database system had been designed and hoped to facilitate the retrieval and matching with appropriate information for volunteer services. “Outstanding Volunteer Award Scheme” had been started since 2003 and held yearly to affirm the contribution and meaning of volunteering. All in all, volunteering should become part of our life.

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