

Understanding the motivations, benefits and barriers to volunteers in the Pets for Life project

Authors

Bianca Nord (BOccThpy, Hons Cand)

School of Health and Sport Sciences

Faculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering

University of the Sunshine Coast

Maroochydore DC 4558 Australia

Email: bmn001@student.usc.edu.au

Anita Hamilton (PhD(Cand), MOccThy(ContPrac), GCHE, BAppSc(OT))

Lecturer Occupational Therapy

School of Health and Sport Sciences

Faculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering

University of the Sunshine Coast

Maroochydore DC 4558 Australia

Email: ahamilt1@usc.edu.au

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Abstract

This study investigated the motivations, outcomes and satisfaction of volunteers in the Pets for Life project, Sunshine Coast. A modified Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) was developed to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Seventeen complete surveys were returned for analysis. Significant results highlighted personal values that include care for elderly persons and animals are strong motivating factors for people to volunteer at Pets for Life. Volunteer outcomes commonly reflected fulfilment of these personal values through the Pets for Life role. Difficult aspects of the volunteer role were highlighted as the potential for emotional stress. High satisfaction ratings and intentions to continue in the volunteer role were also found. These results highlight the strengths of the Pets of Life volunteer program and could be utilised by similar organisations to guide them in the development of quality volunteer programs.

Key Words

Volunteers, Motivation, Satisfaction, Community Service, Pets

Understanding why an individual or group chooses to volunteer is critical to ensuring appropriate recruitment and retention of volunteers (Jack, Kirton, Birakurataki, & Merriman, 2012; McLennan, Birch, Cowlshaw, & Hayes, 2009; Young & Passmore, 2006). A myriad of studies have found the benefits of volunteering to be far-reaching and to not only influence the volunteer, but also the recipient of service, be it person, animal, environment or organisation (Caplan & Harper, 2007; Mui, Glajchen, Chen, & Sun, 2013; Van Willigen, 2000).

Establishment and maintenance of a meaningful volunteer role which provides a sense of belonging to a community, role or place may promote individuals to experience self-actualization (Wilcock, 1999) and an increase in health and wellbeing (Van Willigen, 2000). With this in mind, it is understandable that finding the best fit between an individual and a volunteer role offers an opportunity for ongoing engagement in meaningful occupation and is essential for retaining volunteers (Cole & Macdonald, 2011; Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005; Young & Passmore, 2006). Similarly, understanding factors within volunteering organisations which contribute to negative experiences and dissatisfaction by the volunteer may highlight areas for improvement to minimise attrition (McLennan et al., 2009; Stukas et al., 2005).

Pets for Life is a volunteer program run through the Caloundra Community Centre (Sunshine Coast, Queensland). The aim of Pets for Life is to promote the independence of older Australians through providing volunteer in-home pet care services. Volunteers assist in caring for pets (primarily dogs) through pet walking, grooming, medication management and assistance with feeding. Volunteers are not required to take pets to veterinarian appointments or pay any expenses (be it pet-related or otherwise) for the pet owner.

The aims of this research were to gain an understanding of the factors which motivate individuals to volunteer for Pets for Life, the outcomes of volunteering, satisfaction with the volunteer role as well as potential reasons for cessation.

Australian Volunteers

There is a paucity of research concerning the motivations and experiences of volunteers in Australian organisations. Since the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009, much research has been published about the dwindling retention rates of volunteers in firefighting roles across the country (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; McLennan, 2008; McLennan et al., 2009). Although research into volunteer firefighters in Australia is of varying quality, research has provided insight into the challenges faced by this population of volunteers, as well as outlining tertiary recommendations to be made in regard to recruitment and retention of volunteers in this area. While research pertaining to the experience of volunteer firefighters in Australia is culturally and temporally significant, it is not generalisable to the broader Australian volunteer population because the demands of volunteer firefighting are unique from other volunteer roles (Branch-Smith & Pooley, 2010; Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2013).

Understanding Volunteerism

A phenomenological approach is valuable to understanding volunteers' motives and experiences, and has been frequently used throughout the world to investigate volunteer experiences in different organisations (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Jack et al., 2012; Takasugi & Lee, 2012; Timmons & Vernon-Evans, 2013). Law and Shek's (2009) study into the relationship of purpose of life and volunteerism in a sample of Chinese adolescents uses social theory to understand the motivations and beliefs around volunteering within this specific population. In this study it was shown that adolescents were more likely to volunteer

if they held prosocial beliefs (the belief that interacting with and considering others is more important than ones' own interests) (Law & Shek, 2009). .

Motivating Factors for Volunteers

Research has shown that numerous factors motivate individuals to volunteer and these factors fit into two broad categories: self-serving beliefs and other-serving beliefs (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Law & Shek, 2009). Self-serving beliefs include increasing skills and employability, and have been shown to be more common among younger, Western volunteer populations (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Timmons & Vernon-Evans, 2013). Other-serving beliefs are largely synonymous with altruism, and have been found to be a strong motivational factor for volunteers in many different sample populations. Other-serving beliefs have been categorised as: wishing to improve the standard of living in the local community (Takasugi & Lee, 2012), giving back to the community (Timmons & Vernon-Evans, 2013), wanting to help others ease the pain of dying (specific to palliative care) (Jack et al., 2012), and wishing to restore the natural environment (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007).

Benefits of Volunteering

Maintaining a volunteer role has been shown to have positive effects on mental health and well-being in a number of populations, particularly for older adults retired from paid work (Black & Living, 2004; Schwingel, Niti, Tang, & Ng, 2009; Van Willigen, 2000). Schwingel, et al. (2009) examined a large population of older adults in Singapore and found strong correlations between productive role (either volunteer work or paid employment) and maintenance of cognitive function and well-being in late adulthood.

Social interactions have been found to closely relate to psychological health and life satisfaction. Schwingel, et al. (2009) suggested that the cognitive and mental health benefits

found through volunteering are commonly a result of the socially rich activities volunteering allows, as well as the social resources which become available through engagement in this role.

Considering the results of a national survey on mental health in Australian retirees (Butterworth et al., 2006), the social benefits of volunteering become particularly evident. This extensive survey conducted by Butterworth, et al. (2006) found that men and women who were retired from paid work experienced a higher percentage of common mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, than those still in regular, paid employment.

Barriers to Effective Volunteerism

The specific issues faced by volunteers within different organisations are variable. Cole and MacDonald (2011) highlighted disorganisation, conflicts of personality and negative attitudes, and lack of appreciation as some of the most frequent issues found to exist within volunteering organisations. Similar trends are reflected in several studies exploring the experiences of volunteer firefighters in Australia, with discrimination, ineffective leadership and communication issues highlighted as common problems within such organisations (Branch-Smith & Pooley, 2010; Huynh et al., 2013; McLennan et al., 2009).

Outright costs and limited reimbursements have also been found to be barriers to effective volunteerism and contributing factors to cessation of the volunteer role. A survey of Australian volunteers, volunteer organisations and not-for-profit organisations conducted in 2005 found 84% of participants saw rising fuel prices as a barrier to volunteering. This survey also revealed that there were disparities in volunteers' knowledge of available reimbursements between different organisations, including fuel reimbursement processes ("Impacts of petrol prices on volunteering," 2005).

Methods

Design

A mixed methods approach was utilised for this research project. The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) was selected as the survey tool as it has been shown to have strong reliability and validity in researching the motivations of people to volunteer and outcomes of volunteerism in community service roles (Clary et al., 1998). The standardised categories of the VFI include: Motivation (to volunteer), outcomes (of volunteering), and satisfaction (in the volunteer role). Additional categories were added to the standardised VFI by the researchers. The additions included a demographic profile and five open-ended questions that examined the motivations, positive aspects and negative aspects of volunteering for Pets for Life, potential reasons for cessation, as well as an opportunity for general feedback. Approval for the research was obtained through the University of the Sunshine Coast Ethics Committee.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from within the population of Pets for Life volunteers. Inclusion criteria for potential participants were: Pets for Life volunteers with a minimum of 4 weeks experience in the role, or whom had ceased volunteering less than 8 weeks prior to participation in research, verbal and written comprehension of the English language. Non-English speaking participants were excluded from research as the survey was not able to be translated. Formal permission to approach participants was obtained from the Director of the Caloundra Community Centre.

Procedure

Recruitment was conducted by project workers from the Pets for Life project (Caloundra Community Centre) who delivered information about the study by email or post, using the contact method usually used between the project worker and the volunteer. Recruitment material was sent to all potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. Recruitment material included: Invitation to Participate in Research, Research Project Information Sheet, Consent to Participate in Research, and an adapted VFI (as described earlier). One Project Worker sent a preliminary email to her group of volunteers alerting them to the opportunity for involvement in research prior to the formal invitation being sent. Volunteers who indicated that they were interested in participating in the research were given the option of completing the adapted VFI online via SurveyMonkey™ or by completing a paper-based survey and returning it by reply-paid post.

Hard-copy responses were mailed to the supervising researcher and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Hard-copy responses were then inputted into SurveyMonkey™ to ensure all responses were stored in one database. This allowed for the complete data set to be exported from SurveyMonkey™ for data analysis. All responses were de-identified.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

Quantitative data was analysed using both IBM SPSS Statistics 21 (for Windows Version 7) and data analysis tools available within SurveyMonkey™. Analysis of demographic data was performed using the data analysis tools available within SurveyMonkey™, and all other descriptive statistics were computed through SPSS. Parametric (Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient, 2-tailed) and non-parametric (Kruskal-Wallis Test) computations were performed using SPSS with the assistance of a third party researcher from the University of the Sunshine Coast. Results were analysed in relation to the six functions of

the VFI within the topics of motivation to volunteer, outcomes of volunteering and satisfaction with the volunteer role, as set by the standardised VFI.

Qualitative

Each of the open-ended responses were individually reviewed and coded by the student researcher to identify, cluster and categorise the information into themes. Themes were categorised under the six functions set by VFI (see Table 1) and were distinguished into areas of motivation for volunteering and outcomes of volunteering. Data analysis was completed through a process of coding verification by the supervising researcher. This strategy was used as a means of improving the dependability and confirmability of qualitative results (Krefting, 1991).

The supervising researcher examined each qualitative statement and agreed or disagreed with the category assigned by the student researcher. Themes were discussed by the research team until consensus was achieved. The questions that related to potential reasons for cessation of the volunteer role were not categorised within the six functions of the VFI. This topic is not included as part of the standard VFI and was a component of the extended qualitative questions explored by the researchers. The majority of the data was able to be categorised using the existing VFI categories, thus data analysis was straightforward. All themes were agreed upon for final findings and no further triangulation of qualitative data was necessary.

Investigator responsiveness is a key aspect of qualitative data analysis which, if lacking, can greatly impact the trustworthiness of data (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Investigator responsiveness of the student researcher was maintained through the use of reflexive journaling and supervision.

Researchers had initially planned to conduct focus groups to gather further qualitative data, and to confirm and build on themes that emerged through the open-ended responses in the modified VFI. As only one participant expressed interest in participating in a focus group, the focus groups were not conducted.

Table 1

VFI functions (adapted from Clary, et al., 1998)

| Function | Definition |
|---------------|--|
| Values | Express ones altruistic and humanitarian values |
| Understanding | Gain knowledge, skills, and abilities |
| Enhancement | Help the ego grow and develop |
| Career | Improve career prospects |
| Social | Develop and strengthen social ties |
| Protective | Protecting the ego from the difficulties of life |

Quantitative Results

Demographics

Seventeen complete questionnaires were returned. Forty-one percent of participants were aged over 64 years, and 47% reported being in a registered marriage. Sixty-five percent of participants were female. All participants were current volunteers of Pets for Life. See Tables 2-4 for a full summary of demographic data.

Table 2

Gender distribution

| Gender | Number of participants (total =17) |
|--------|------------------------------------|
| Male | 6 |
| Female | 11 |

Table 3

Age distribution

| Age range in years | Number of participants (total =17) |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 18-22 | 1 |
| 33-37 | 1 |
| 43-47 | 3 |
| 48-52 | 2 |
| 53-57 | 2 |
| 58-63 | 1 |
| 64+ | 7 |

Table 4

Marital status distribution

| Marital status | Number of participants (total =17) |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Married (registered) | 8 |
| Never married | 3 |
| Divorced | 3 |
| Widowed | 1 |

De facto relationship 2

Motivations

All motivation questions of the VFI were rated on a Likert scale of zero to seven; with zero being the lowest score and seven being the highest score. A score of zero corresponded with the response “N/A”. All mean scores discussed relate to this Likert scale. Descriptive statistics showed the Career function to have the lowest mean score for volunteer motivation at 1.16. The Values function had the highest mean score of 5.95. See Table 5 for a comparison of function mean scores for motivation to volunteer.

Table 5

Mean scores for motivation to volunteer by VFI function

| VFI function | Mean score (scale 0-7) |
|---------------|------------------------|
| Values | 5.95 |
| Understanding | 3.7 |
| Enhancement | 2.9 |
| Career | 1.16 |
| Social | 1.93 |
| Protective | 2.26 |

A significant correlation (Pearson, 2-tailed) between motivation questions within the same function was found for all six of the VFI functions. This suggests that participants consistently ranked motivation questions within a given function with similar scores, an indication that questions consistently related to the intended function for Pets for Life

volunteers. These results indicate moderate internal validity for motivation questions within all functions of the VFI for this population.

Outcomes

All outcome questions of the VFI were ranked on the same Likert scale of zero to seven. The Career function saw the lowest mean score for volunteer outcomes with a score of 0.97. The Values function showed the highest mean score of 5.62 for volunteer outcomes. Refer to Table 6 for comparison of function means for volunteer outcomes.

Table 6

Mean score for outcomes of volunteering by VFI function

| VFI function | Mean score (scale 0-7) |
|---------------|------------------------|
| Values | 5.62 |
| Understanding | 3.44 |
| Enhancement | 2.94 |
| Career | 0.97 |
| Social | 2.35 |
| Protective | 1.56 |

Data analysis using a Pearson, 2-tailed test showed significant correlations between outcomes questions in the Understanding, Enhancement and Protective functions. There were no significant correlations found between outcome questions in the Values, Social and Career functions.

Satisfaction

Questions relating to satisfaction of the volunteer role had a combined mean of 5.99 on a Likert scale of zero to seven. Statistically significant correlations using a Pearson, 2-tailed test were most commonly found between outcome scores in the Values function and satisfaction scores (refer to Table 7). These correlations indicate higher levels of satisfaction for volunteers with high scores in the Values function for the outcomes of volunteering component of the VFI.

Table 7

Significant correlations between volunteer outcomes as set by VFI functions, and volunteer satisfaction ratings

| Function as correlated with satisfaction | Pearson, 2-tailed correlation value |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Values-satisfaction | p=0.008** |
| | p=0.000** |
| | p=0.000** |
| | p=0.000** |
| Understanding-satisfaction | p=0.047* |
| | p=0.015* |
| | p=0.036* |
| Enhancement-satisfaction | p=0.045* |
| Career-satisfaction | p=0.022* |
| Social-satisfaction | p=0.032* |
| | p=0.017* |
| | p=0.034* |
| | p=0.016* |
| Protective-satisfaction | Nil significant values |

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

Qualitative Results

Motivations to Volunteer

Values function: “a way to express ones altruistic and humanitarian values”

(Clary, et al., 1998). Themes relating to motivation most commonly fell within the Values function. Personal values expressed as motivating factors by participants mostly related to caring for people, and caring for animals. Some comments highlighted values relating to both people and animals: “...this gave me animal contact as well as helping others” (Participant 17). However, most responses clearly highlighted particular concern for one party (people or animals).

Several comments emphasized particular compassion for the elderly, as opposed to people in general. Interestingly, three responses specifically mentioned restrictions to pet ownership in their own life as a motivating factor, as this volunteer role facilitated animal contact.

Understanding function: “a way to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities” (Clary et al., 1998). One participant’s comment fell within the Understanding function for motivation to volunteer. The participant indicated that he/she wished to utilise skills previously gained from a volunteer role involving animal care: “Having served as a volunteer at the Sippy Creek Animal Refuge... for 8 years, this, to me, was a natural follow-on to use my experience at the refuge” (Participant 15). The theme of continued skill use was unique to this respondent.

Protective function: “a way of protecting the ego from the difficulties of life”

(Clary et al., 1998). Several comments about motivation to volunteer fit within the Protective function. These comments implicitly reflect the desire to reduce feelings of guilt by improving the lives of others. For instance:

My mother is now 82 and I know the importance of her having her dog as a companion as she lives on her own and as I live quite some distance from her, I would be extremely grateful that someone would assist my mother like I am assisting my current Pets for Life companion and dog (Participant 8).

All comments relating to the Protective function could also be categorised within the Values function. These comments all related to personal values such as providing care for others, as well as the role providing care for others plays in reducing negative feelings for the volunteer themselves.

Social function: “a way to develop and strengthen social ties” (Clary et al., 1998).

While no motivation comments explicitly stated the intention to develop or strengthen social ties through volunteering at Pets for Life, several comments used terms such as “spending time with” (Participant 4; Participant 12), “working and being with” (Participant 11), and “contact” (Participant 17) which relate to social intent. Of note, all examples provided specifically relate to contact/ time with animals. One motivation comment more explicitly stated social intent through volunteering “I like spending time with dogs and pet friendly people” (Participant 12).

Outcomes of Volunteering

Values Function: “a way to express one’s altruistic and humanitarian values” (Clary et al., 1998). A large proportion of comments relating to volunteer outcomes strongly related to the Values function. Comments within this function all relate to the fulfilment of a personal value through the Pets for Life volunteer role. The key theme found within the Values function centres on providing care for people and/or animals. Overall, comments generally highlighted being able to make a positive difference in the lives of others: “The knowledge that a group of the community very often forgotten get a helping hand and I am able to be part of that help” (Participant 13).

A small proportion of participants’ comments on volunteering outcomes inversely related to the Values function. These comments highlighted areas of the volunteer role which did not always allow for actualisation of personal values. For example: “Dealing with the owner’s attitude toward their dog (such as lack of training)” (Participant 10), depicts the frustration felt by this volunteer when his/ her personal values did not align with the person he/ she was providing pet care support to.

Enhancement function: “a way to help the ego grow and develop” (Clary et al., 1998). Many comments implicitly or explicitly related to feelings of psychological growth or reward. These comments relate strongly to the Enhancement function. Many unique themes within this function were found. Receiving appreciation, witnessing the love of owner and pet, and reducing stress for others were all themes found within the Enhancement function for outcomes of volunteering. Appreciation is seen to be received from numerous sources, including the pet, pet owner, and organisation (Pets for Life): “Genuine gratefulness from the organisation and the client” (Participant 3), “...seeing how excited their dogs are when I arrive to take them for a walk” (Participant 13).

Social function: “a way to develop and strengthen social ties” (Clary et al., 1998).

Outcomes relating to development or strengthening of social relationships were also common among participants. Most comments regarding social outcomes of volunteering acknowledge the development of relationships with both the pet owner and the pet. Some comments relay the unique role of the pet in developing relationships with the pet owner: “Being a carer, I am part of a triangle, dog, dog owner and the carer, which is more satisfying” (Participant 12). One participant also mentioned “becoming acquainted with the...neighbourhood” as a positive social outcome of volunteering for Pets for Life.

Protective Function “a way of protecting the ego from the difficulties of life”

(Clary et al., 1998). Some outcome themes were seen to inversely relate to the Protective function, in that they highlighted some of the difficulties of volunteering with Pets for Life. Feelings of becoming overly involved with pets and pet owners, as well as the anxiety of wishing to do more for others, were key outcome themes in the protective function. Some comments relay the emotional discomfort that can arise from the volunteer role:

It is hard not to get ‘involved’ with the owner and the animals, or to feel the need to help further (buy leash or ball, take to vet, spend more time, listen to pet un-related problems, help with pet un-related tasks, etc.)
(Participant 10).

Potential Reasons for Cessation

Only one participant indicated they were likely not to be volunteering for Pets for Life in 12 months. Most participants indicated they expected to still be volunteering with Pets for Life in the following year. Potential reasons for cessation of the volunteer role were provided by some participants. The primary themes included competing commitments (eg. work, family) and relocation: “I think in the future I will be too busy or relocated so therefore

unable to participate in the program” (Participant 9). One respondent identified financial strain/ limited compensation for resources as a potential reason for cessation.

Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative findings from this research together indicate that volunteers at Pets for Life were most strongly motivated by the desire to fulfil humanitarian and altruistic values. The quantitative data highlighted that generalised humanitarian values were strong motivators for this population. Qualitative results supported these findings and indicated specifically that providing humanitarian service to the elderly and/ or pets are the motivating values for the Pets for Life volunteer population. Fulfilment of humanitarian values was also the most prominent outcome of volunteering reflected by both quantitative and qualitative results.

Clary, et al., (1998) found that volunteers were more likely to be satisfied with and retain their roles both in the short and long term if outcomes relevant to initial motivation were achieved through volunteering. The results of this study show that Pets for Life volunteers who were motivated to achieve fulfilment of humanitarian values in fact do achieve these outcomes through their volunteer role in the program. The statistically significant relationships between scores in all three of the VFI components: motivation to volunteer, outcomes of volunteering, and satisfaction of the volunteer role, are a strong indicator of both volunteer satisfaction and potential for volunteer retention. This was further supported by the fact that 94% of participants indicated that they intend to remain as volunteers with Pets for Life for at least the next 12 months.

While quantitative results found a mid-range mean score (3.44) for the Understanding function in relation to outcomes of volunteering, few qualitative themes were found to support this result. This discrepancy may reflect that although some volunteers found that

skills or knowledge relevant to the role may be gained through volunteering with Pets for Life, it was not initially the primary motivation to volunteer. Given that quantitative data indicates Pets for Life volunteers are able to gain skills and knowledge through their volunteer role, this aspect of the role could be included in volunteer recruitment material.

Themes relating to psychological enhancement were found through qualitative findings although quantitative results for volunteer outcomes in this area showed a mean score less than mid-range (2.94). Here, the unique value of qualitative data is realised as participants appear better able to express themselves through words than numerical scales. This theory is supported by Black (1994): “Used in combination [with quantitative methods], qualitative methods can help to improve the accuracy and relevance of quantitative studies by increasing our understanding of the creation of quantitative data” (p. 426). The generic questions of the VFI may not have been sensitive enough to consider unique outcomes of the Pets for Life volunteer role in relation to the Enhancement function.

Qualitative themes in the Enhancement function are of importance as some volunteers in this study highlighted the importance of being appreciated by the Pets for Life project workers, and having positive interactions with animals as a valued aspects of their volunteer role with Pets for Life. These results suggest that although volunteers may not be motivated by the potential for psychological enhancement, it is an outcome of the Pets for Life volunteer role. This aspect of the role could also be included in volunteer recruitment material and continued as part of existing volunteer retention activities.

Difficult aspects of volunteering for Pets for Life were identified through qualitative findings. The theme of emotional over-involvement with pets and their owners was seen to inversely relate to the Protective function of the VFI, which views volunteering as a way to “reduce negative feelings, such as guilt” (Clary et al., 1998). Outcomes of volunteering in

the Protective function achieved the second lowest mean score, which further indicates that some volunteers may find aspects of volunteering emotionally challenging. Although it should be mentioned that the potential for emotional stress is considered a negligible risk, Pets for Life can take these results into consideration when developing recruitment and volunteer safety procedures.

Qualitative findings also allude to the intricacies of social relationships developed as part of being a Pets for Life volunteer. Development of meaningful social connections with both the pet owner and the pet are highlighted through qualitative outcomes, with the inimitable role the pet can play in developing human interactions a key point of interest.

Potential reasons for cessation largely included competing commitments and relocation. These factors are mostly unavoidable and uncontrollable, and have been found to be reasons for cessation in other Australian volunteer populations (McLennan et al., 2009; Wolcott, Ingwersen, Weston, & Tzaros, 2008). Strong intention for continuation at Pets for Life was indicated through survey data, and findings suggest that attrition is not a key concern for the organisation at this time

Study Limitations

Limitations of this study which may have influenced results include potential bias in the sample population. Project workers from Pets for Life (responsible for managing volunteers) reported having good rapport and working relationships with volunteers prior to research initiation. This may have created feelings of obligation amongst volunteers to participate in research, or to not reflect poorly on Pets for Life. The potential for this bias was discussed with project workers prior to participant recruitment; although this measure cannot assure volunteers felt no obligation to participate.

Given that “an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that answers the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523) and data saturation is seen to occur when no new themes emerge (Marshall, 1996), data saturation in this sample may not have been fully achieved and the potential for new themes still exists. The iterative nature of qualitative research has also brought about emerging topics for investigation which may be explored through further qualitative research such as in-depth interviews or focus groups.

In terms of representativeness, the sample size for this study may be considered representative of the broader Pets for Life volunteer population. The somewhat narrow parameters of the study, the consistency of quantitative results, and a comparison of demographic survey data with demographic data from the total Pets for Life volunteer population during the research period, indicate this sample is likely to be representative of the Pets for Life volunteer population.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gain an understanding of factors which motivate people to volunteer for Pets for Life, what the outcomes of volunteering in this program are, how satisfied these volunteers are with their roles, as well as potential reasons that volunteers may cease their roles with Pets for Life. A modified VFI survey conducted with Pets for Life volunteers found that they are most likely to be motivated by the humanitarian values of providing support for the elderly and/ or animals. Pets for Life volunteers are most likely to achieve positive outcomes through the fulfilment of the humanitarian values aforementioned. Overall, volunteers in this program are highly satisfied with their roles. Potential reasons for cessation of the Pets for Life volunteer role include competing commitments (eg. work or family) and relocation, although only one participant indicated the intention to cease his/ her volunteer role in the next 12 months.

Creating social connections with people and animals was also found to be a valued outcome of volunteering with Pets for Life from this research. Psychological enhancement, primarily gained through expressions of appreciation from Pets for Life project workers, pets and pet owners in the program, was also a positive outcome for this volunteer population.

Emotional discomfort was found to be one of the more challenging aspects of the Pets for Life volunteer role. Some volunteers expressed that it can be difficult not to feel the desire to provide more support to pets and pet owners than is expected of the volunteer.

Further research may include more in-depth qualitative focus on the volunteer experience, particularly in relation to emotional stress and the development of social connections with people and pets. Research into the experiences of older adults receiving service from Pets for Life would provide a more full view of the overall project, areas for improvement and continuation of quality service.

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