

Bring Learning Home through Family Volunteering

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OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

1. To provide the family a valuable platform to learn, share and mutual exchange through volunteering
2. To mobilize family members as a tremendous volunteer force to serve the needy

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Parents' Involvement	% (640 parents)
Couple + children	31%
Mother + children	67%
Father + children	2%
Total:	100%

Children's Involvement	% (757 children)
Kindergarten	30%
Primary schools	54%
Secondary schools	16%
Total:	100%

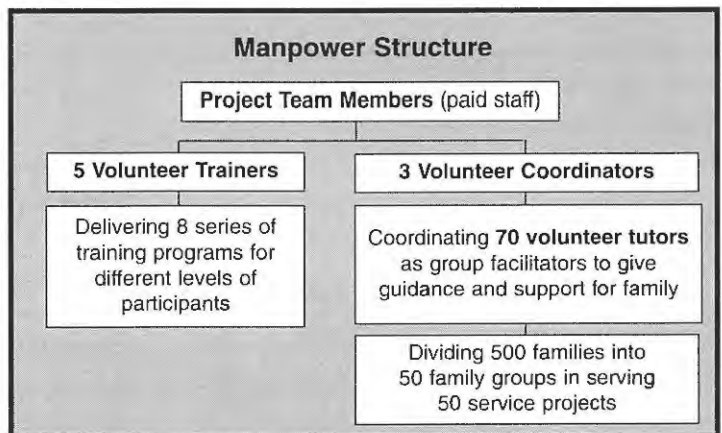
Roles of Volunteer Tutors in Service Guidance

Seventy volunteer tutors were recruited, selected and contracted on a one-year basis. They had to give guidance and support to families throughout the project duration. One tutor was placed in each family group of ten families. During the process, the volunteer tutor had to attend all planning meetings, service implementation and evaluation. They mainly played a role as facilitator to provide guidance and support to group members. The volunteer tutor also acted as a monitor to ensure the service quality, to accomplish the tasks on schedule, and to enhance work competence. More importantly, they were advisors to guide and demonstrate for family members the skills of debriefing and reflection from their learning.

PROGRAMME ORGANIZATION

Organization Structure

To mobilize nearly 1400 family members in this programme, a large scale of manpower was involved in programme administration and implementation, such as providing training, service matching, coordination and communication, supervision and service monitoring, etc. To the right is the illustration of the manpower structure:



Julia Lam is head of Training Department, Agency for Volunteer Services. The Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) was established in 1970 as a non-profit dedicated to playing a proactive and pivotal role in building a civil society and caring community through the promotion and development of sustainable volunteerism. AVS aims to develop partnerships with all sectors of the community to mobilize and facilitate individuals, groups and organizations to provide value added and quality volunteer service in Hong Kong.

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TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Training for Kindergarten Level:

Basic concepts of volunteering with interactive mode and scenario teaching were found more appropriate to cater for the needs of lower aged children. With the guidance of their parents, the children had to express their views on helping others through story telling, painting and drawing, etc. Moreover, the trainers had role-playing situations and asked the children to indicate the appropriateness of the behavior by raising a “√” or a “x”. The concept and value of volunteering was affirmed through their active thinking and participation.

Training for Primary Level:

For the junior level, the trainers introduced basic concepts of volunteering and communication skills through the teaching mode of case demonstration, playing games and experiential exercise, etc. With the support of their parents, the children had to make attempts to speak out and demonstrate effective communication skills in practice. In order to encourage new exposure, some pioneering projects were introduced. For example, some volunteers were invited to bring their working partners — dogs or rabbits — to demonstrate the caring skills, and to share their experience of serving patients suffering from terminal illness and blindness with the help of the animals.

Training for Secondary Level:

In order to facilitate their active involvement, warm up games on trendy “Para-Para” dance brought fun to the family. Basic concepts of volunteering, communication skills, and programme planning were emphasized, as each family had to plan and implement their service projects independently. Teaching methods of role-playing, group discussion and sensitivity games were encouraged to stimulate the exchange and sharing among family members.

Training for Volunteer Tutors:

Seventy volunteer tutors were screened and contracted for this scheme. The job description and role expectation were explicit and agreed to by the volunteers in order to draw their commitment to assume responsibilities. A series of training programmes on programme planning, group leading and guidance skills were provided. Moreover, regular meetings and consultation were provided for tutors to encourage mutual sharing, and to find alternatives to handle any difficulties. Three volunteer coordinators (non-paid staff) provided intensive care and support to the tutors in handling crisis or frustration during the process.

SERVICE PLANNING AND MATCHING

AVS developed partnerships with 32 organizations to provide different types of service projects for participants. Families made their own choices according to their family’s interest and self-competence. Opportunities included visitation service for single elders, recreation parties for the mentally retarded, fundraising for deprived groups, conservancy works on environmental protection, befriending and logistic support for hospital patients, etc. 500 families were divided into 50 groups serving 50 service projects. One example of active service is illustrated below.

A Fundraising Project for a Rehabilitation Programme for Drug Addicts

Children aged 12 and under participated in a Flag Day fund raising campaign, selling flag stickers on the street in the name of a fundraising group. Parents were required to accompany their children. Family members treasured this valuable experience very much, as they had the chance to get in touch with people from all walks of life. Their children experienced the give-and-take process. The most exciting thing was that families raised more funds for the deprived groups because the small kids were welcomed by the donors. To strengthen the meaning of their helping

action, a follow-up programme was arranged for the families to pay a friendly visit to a drug rehabilitation center to see first hand how the funds were being used for a drug rehabilitation programme. The service recipients shared past experiences, and encouraged the children to reflect on their learning and the parent-child relationship in a positive way. All family members were deeply impressed from the visit.

SERVICE DE-BRIEFING AND EVALUATION

To enhance mutual learning between parents and their children, some assignments were required, such as: writing proposals (families developed proposal for the volunteer activities they wanted to undertake), regular meetings to discuss programme planning, clear division of labor and cooperation, and submission of individual report on their experience and gains, etc. Active feedback and advice were encouraged to enhance mutual understanding and appreciation among family members throughout the process. To reinforce active learning and reflection, every family was given a diary book and stickers with appreciation words such as "well done", "excellent", "keep it up", etc. Each family member had to record their experience, special feelings and gains in the diary, and the other members would use the sticker to give encouragement and support to those positive behaviors. Photo stands were distributed to encourage families to take photos as they were volunteering, to write down meaningful words or thoughts on the photos to encourage reflection and discussion, and to display the photos of their volunteer activities.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

Besides facilitating appreciation in their daily practice, a formal recognition ceremony was held to highlight the achievements as well as to grant awards to families with outstanding performance. Feedback was collected from volunteer tutors, service agencies, as well

as a self-rating of family members. Prizes for outstanding performance on programme planning, reports, and outstanding families were presented by the Director of the Education Department and Chairman of AVS. Some families were also invited to share special or invaluable experiences gained from volunteering. A DVD was produced to record the event, and a booklet was published to collect the pictures, feelings and fruitful experiences learned from the venture. The publication together with the DVD was widely produced and sent to all schools for reference. All teachers were advised to help spread the message of the programme and to use the materials as their teaching kit for classroom learning.

Achievements

Most families treasured this opportunity to bring learning home through volunteering. Through volunteer service they could expose themselves to, and reach out to, deprived groups to better understand social problems and features, and to contribute their time to serve those in need. It was an effective means to guide the children to foster a sense of citizenship and belonging to the society.

Throughout the process, under the guidance of volunteer tutors, every family had much time to reflect on their actions and learnings, and to develop new skills and talents. Frequent mutual sharing and support enhanced their parent-child relationship and communications.

Participating families had to commit nearly 9 months to this scheme. It was a big challenge to retain the commitment and participation for the whole family. The drop out rate of this programme was found to be comparatively lower than for other family activities. More than 70 percent of the participants completed all services and assignments, and were granted a certificate of appreciation in the volunteer recognition ceremony.

Upon the completion of the scheme, many family members promised to continue volun-

teering and to register as volunteers under AVS volunteer referral service. Some members developed their potentials and became volunteers in their work site and school committees. Moreover, in order to sustain their friendship within the group, they organized gathering programmes and service groups.

For AVS it was a new attempt to mobilize a tremendous volunteer force. In quantitative measures, the 1400 family members of 500 families contributed 27,500 service hours to the 5,600 service recipients; 32 working partners were engaged to provide 50 service opportunities. But most importantly, it also demonstrated a high quality of service by bringing fruitful learning experiences for all family members throughout the process. We give special honor and credit to the 80 volunteer trainers, coordinators and tutors who contributed a lot of time and effort to this venture! *Thank you very much for our volunteers!*

GO AHEAD 2002

In order to further develop and consolidate our achievement, the Committee on Home-School Cooperation of the Education Department had again invited AVS to organize a "Family Volunteering Promotional Scheme" in 2002. Besides recruiting 200 families from open recruitment, the project mobilizes 30 schools' Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) to plan and organize family volunteering programmes in their own schools. Some of the terms for participating PTAs are:

- Signature of the school headmaster and PTA chairman to endorse and give support to the programme;
- To delegate 3 to 5 school volunteer leaders (be it teachers and/or parents) to head the project, as well as to receive the training on volunteer management provided by AVS;
- An experienced and well-trained volunteer tutor was placed at each school to provide professional support for the school volunteer leaders so they could plan, organize,

implement and evaluate the programme during the project period from April to December;

- AVS is the central body to back up the volunteer tutors, to develop operational systems to monitor the work in progress, and to control the service quality as well as to tailor training programmes for family volunteers in each participating schools;
- There was a contract for the school to recruit at least 50 families, and to complete 500 hours of service during the program period. The expected output in 2002 is to multiply at least 3 times from the previous scheme;
- During the pilot period, a service model was introduced to the participating schools and they were expected to continue the family volunteering scheme by their own capacity. They also were to serve as models and mentors to other schools in the district that were interested in joining this meaningful program in coming years.

CONCLUSION

From the promotional scheme 2002, AVS plans to develop and utilize the potential of volunteers to self-manage their own programmes. This is a way to maximize the resources and output of services, to bring closer links and support among family members in their own setting, to enhance a sense of belongings, and to sustain their commitment in volunteering. It is very important to study the outcome and impact for the family members' participation, and to measure how much they gained and learned from the scheme. This was actually a challenge to experiment *the gift of volunteer service management*.