ABSTRACT

Volunteers make up practically every "season" of the human life cycle, from pre-adolescence, to the teen years, through early and mid adulthood, and well into the senior years. The authors present a continuum of human development, recognizing that the entire span can best be understood by examining its components. For each "season of service," specific developmental characteristics, implications for volunteerism, and potential volunteer activities are presented. The authors conclude that the true challenge facing volunteer managers and administrators is pulling together all aspects and cohorts of U.S. society so as to build upon their unique abilities and insights in addressing the challenges facing our citizens and communities.

Understanding "Seasons of Service": Promoting Volunteerism Across the Life Span

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Volunteers make up practically every "season" of the human life cycle, from pre-adolescence, to the teen years, through early and middle adulthood, and well into the senior years. Depending on what life cycle stage a volunteer is currently experiencing, they will have unique personal needs and developmental characteristics that must be recognized and respected in order to provide the most positive experience possible for both the individual volunteer and the sponsoring organization.

Although holistic human development can be more easily explored and understood by examining respective individual life "seasons," the true nature of the human life span and the interconnectedness of the respective "seasons" must be approached not as separate, well-defined episodes but rather as an ongoing human drama wherein one "scene" blends seamlessly into the following, and each "act" flows into its successor. Thus is the paradox of exploring human development across the entire life span; we may best study it by dissecting it into its component stages, but we may truly understand it only by combining the stages into the resulting whole. Fisher (1997) commented insightfully on this paradox:

> It is suggested that the journey from early infancy to senescence is an unfolding of unifying maturational and developmental processes. Viewed as a continuum, this journey appears to be seamless, with one moment flowing into the next, ... For purposes of a more focused study, the observational frame can be shifted, maturational levels can be designated, and these levels can then be viewed individually as a series of connected but somewhat discrete epochs — "the seasons of life." (p. 173)

Historically, volunteer programs have been developed to address the needs of a single, targeted audience or group. The American Red Cross, "one of the most well-known volunteer efforts to come out of the post-Civil War era" (Ellis & Noyes, 1990), initially addressed male soldiers' convalescent needs in a society at war. 4-H Youth Development was established originally in the first decades of the twentieth century to address the needs of school-age boys and girls in rural agricultural settings (Reck, 1951). In 1974, the Hospice movement was founded to provide caring support for terminally ill patients and their families (Ellis & Noyes).

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However, contemporary volunteer organizations most often find themselves simultaneously addressing multiple needs of multiple client groups. This challenging reality of today's not-for-profit environment has encouraged (and even forced!) many volunteer-based organizations to find unique ways to connect the various client groups they serve so as to make best use of increasingly scarce material and human resources. Programs such as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Foster Grandparents, and Adopt-a-Grandparent build upon the unique skills and abilities of individuals at specific stages of life, and their interest to contribute their time, energies and talents to others without concern for financial gain. Such intergenerational programs connect individuals from distinctly unique life stages with each other in order to improve the quality of life for those in need, those uniquely challenged, and for our society as a whole. The resulting "seasons of service" also serve important functions in helping us better understand, appreciate, and value individuals experiencing life stages different from our own; "An intergenerational program not only bridges a generation gap with meaningful interactions, but also teaches children some positive aspects of being old" (Chen, 1997).

Understanding human "seasons of service" and promoting volunteerism across the entire life span will enable volunteer programs to meet increasing needs of unique client groups while optimizing existing material resources and capitalizing upon a growing human resource base: senior volunteers. As Stevens (1998) stated: "The human resource of senior volunteers is alive and well and growing... . Supporting their efforts through research-based practice directions can further their well-being".

THE CONTINUUM OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The continuum of human development may be thought of as consisting of four domains or dimensions: cognitive, social, emotional, and physical. These domains are intimately intertwined to make up the whole person, and all four areas must be considered together to promote healthy development or specifically, successful volunteerism at each life stage. The physical domain addresses the growth of the body and its organs in childhood; the appearance of physical signs of aging during adulthood; and gains and losses of motor abilities over the life span. The social domain (relating) involves emergent relationships with peers, adults, and family; learning to play roles (e.g., in school and home); and fitting into a community and society. The emotional domain (feeling) covers the development of self and identity; abilities to cope with emotions such as anger; and capacity changes in self-control. Lastly, the cognitive domain (thinking) involves changes in mental processes involved in perception, language, learning, and thought.

As a hypothetical example of how the domains are related to each other and relevant for positive volunteering, let us consider the case of a 14-year-old adolescent, "Whitney", who is volunteering in an inner-city soup kitchen for needy individuals. The youth organization has set aside three days a week from 4 to 6 p.m. for their group to help run the soup kitchen. After a couple of weeks there is a dramatic decline in youth participation, including Whitney's. Many of Whitney's close friends do not participate with the youth organization and get together after school. She does not want to miss out on anything her friends are doing (social domain — peak peer involvement in adolescence). In trying to balance her commitments and social life, Whitney gets easily frustrated and upset with herself (emotional domain). In her frustration of not having enough time in the day to be with her friends and volunteering at the soup kitchen, she skips meals (physical domain — diet becomes unhealthy). At school, Whitney has a hard time focusing and thinking in her classes (cognitive domain) because her brain does not have

the fuel it needs to function effectively and is frustrated about her dilemma (being with friends or volunteering). Whitney's situation illustrates how all four domains are connected and influence each other. The youth organization must understand the developmental life stage of adolescence and the characteristics that make up that particular life stage to have successful service programs for its youth members.

These four domains are present throughout the life span. The life span approach to human development encompasses these domains from conception to death with aging viewed in the context of the entire life span (Riley, 1979) with life transitions characterized by both sociological (event-related) and psychological (cognitive) factors (Scheer & Palkovitz, 1994). "Seasons" of human life are usually categorized by life stages. There are specific developmental characteristics to be aware of during the "seasons" of life. These characteristics are norms and averages which means that some seven year-olds may function cognitively as five year-olds and vice versa; the same statement could be made for a 45 and 50-year-old.

LIFE STAGES

Infancy (0 to 2 years).

Physical: reflexes common, then more voluntary control; begins to crawl then walk; early ability to make use of sensory information. Social: social from birth, attachment to care giver(s); stranger anxiety; simple pretend play; family-centered environment. Emotional: self-recognition; temperament is foundation for personality. Cognitive: sensory-motor period; coos, babble, then first words; recognizes symbols, objects, individuals; acquires object permanence.

Childhood (3 to 5 years).

Physical: good perceptual abilities; coordination develops and improves; brain growth. Social: parent-child relationship is dominant; first exposure to schooling; social abilities improve, but still egocentric; "pretend" takes off. Emotional: simple understanding of right and wrong; concrete, physical self-concept; gender-role understanding. Cognitive: preoperational stage; minimal use of memory strategics; language acquisition accelerates; thoughts are perception based with little use of logical skills.

Pre-adolescence (6 to 11 years).

Physical: improved motor skills; slow physical growth; attention span developing. Social: much social comparison among peers; increase involvement with same sex peers; school influence increases along with TV. Emotional: self-concept forming; enjoys organized games; personality traits become clear. Cognitive: limited to concrete mental thinking capacities; can think logically; mastery of words and language; memory improves.

Adolescence (12 to 19 years).

Physical: dramatic growth spurt; reaches sexual maturity; physical functioning accelerates. Social: peak peer involvement; attain close friendships; dating begins; parent relations sometimes strained and more nearly equal. Emotional: adjustment to sexual and self-identity; conventional moral reasoning; conflict of identity vs. role confusion. Cognitive: can think both concretely and abstractly; able to understand hypothetical thought; gains in information processing.

Young adulthood (20 to 39 years).

Physical: peak physical functioning with some gradual decline. Social: social networks expand along with romantic involvements; careers and families launched; career changes. Emotional: high risk for psychological problems; increased confidence; family roles change; stable personality; conflict of intimacy vs. isolation. Cognitive: develop area of expertise; excellent mental skill and growth in knowledge.

Middle adulthood (40 to 64 years).

Physical: physical declines may begin; need for glasses and hearing aids; female menopause; male climacteric. Social: career stabilizes; children leave home; responsibility for older and younger generations in family increases; work, relationships, and family dominate. Emotional: psychological struggles between generativity and stagnation; midlife struggles possible; personality traits remain consistent. Cognitive: intellectual functioning stabilizes; peak expertise; long-term mental skills maintained while fluid or immediate mental processes begin to decline.

Older adulthood (65 years and older).

Physical: more chronic disease and sensory decline; reaction time slows along with physical abilities. Social: social activities and engagements are important; loss of family and significant others; transition to retirement begins. Emotional: maintains personality traits with reflection increasing; resolve conflict of integrity vs. despair. Cognitive: slower learning; memory lapses; declines in cognitive; mental abilities capable enough for daily routines (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995).

These needs or characteristics are relevant for volunteer training and subsequently positive service and volunteer experiences. Using human development terms, there is a "goodness of fit" (Lerner, Nitz, Talwar, & Lerner, 1989) between the person and the environment or the volunteer with their volunteer experience. See Figure 1 for a general summary of developmental characteristics across the life span as linked to volunteerism.

LINKING DEVELOPMENT TO VOLUNTEERISM

Building upon a basic understanding of human development, volunteer program, managers and administrators may develop and sustain stronger "seasons of service" through volunteer programs. Such seasons should be targeted towards and built around the unique capabilities, interests, and needs of a focused volunteer corps (e.g., children, teens, older adults, etc.).

At this point, the authors want to acknowledge and affirm the major emphasis in today's not-for-profit sector on building bridges between such focused seasons of service in order to promote intergenerational understanding through volunteering. Blyth and Leffert (1995) emphasized the critical role of the entire community (including volunteer programs and organizations) in providing a positive context for teens to grow and development the life skills critical to their success as adult citizens. Chen (1997) described an intergenerational program designed to address the fact that "today's children and older people have limited opportunities for meaningful interaction in a country increasingly segregated by age and marked by long distance grandparents and grandchildren" Putnam (2000) defined this idea as "social capital... connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". Again, by recognizing and respecting the needs and interests of the respective "seasons" we are attempting to connect, the resulting volunteer efforts will be not only more appropriate for participants but also more meaningful.

Following are some focused considerations for volunteer efforts for each season of service, as well as a few examples of possible volunteer activities.

Infancy (0 to 2 years)

Most individuals would agree, infants are not conscious of volunteering and have no choice whether to volunteer or not volunteer. For infants, being a part of volunteering is to be a part of their parent's volunteering/community socialization. Volunteer opportunities do provide infants with an early exposure to service and can serve as a foundation for developing the belief that helping others is important. Infants who "volunteer" with

their parents should be engaged in activities that are short-term and may include accompanying parents while they help at the local place of worship or help a neighbor with yard work.

Childhood (3 to 5 years)

Three to five year olds should assist family members and other adults in short-term activities that actively engage them in hands-on activities. Such activities should encourage an individual's creativity, be cooperatively focused rather than competitive with an opportunity for success. Children require close supervision and should include an emphasis on safety. Volunteer activities for this age group may include helping a family member plant flowers at a local nursing home or for an elderly neighbor, raking leaves for a neighbor, or planting a community garden.

Pre-adolescence (6 to 11 years)

Similar to the three to five year olds, pre-adolescent youth may be most willing to volunteer when the opportunities are cooperatively focused and allow youth to be actively engaged in the activity. Activities should be very structured and organized with an emphasis on having fun. Youth in this category may respond most positively if they are involved in same-gender groups with adequate guidance from an older teen or adult. Volunteer activities may include helping plant flowers at their school or for an elderly neighbor, helping serve a meal at a local family homeless shelter, raking leaves for a neighbor, or playing with other children at a local family homeless shelter.

Adolescence (12 to 19 years)

Teens are more willing to actively engage in mixed gender groups and seek greater responsibility/decision making in what volunteer projects to conduct. Volunteer opportunities can enhance the teen's career exploration, provide an opportunity to learn about themselves, and be included as a part of building a strong college application or job resumé. Activities may include conducting a canned-food drive and delivering to a family in need, serving as a tutor for a younger child at school or in the neighborhood, planning and conducting a community clean up day, or organizing a voter registration drive. Peer-to-peer mentoring and mediation programs are also especially appropriate and effective for teen volunteers (Smith & Havercamp, 1991).

Young adulthood (20 to 39 years)

Black and Jirovic (1999) presented an excellent discussion of similarities and differences among adult volunteers at various ages.

Safrit and Merrill (1998) explored volunteer activities among (adult) Generation X and Baby Boomer generations. Other authors have discussed differences in volunteering between older and younger adults (Fisher, Mueller, & Cooper, 1991; Lee & Burden, 1991; O'Reilly & Caro, 1994; Strom & Strom, 1994). However, we would suggest three "seasons of service" among adults, each with unique assets and opportunities regarding volunteer efforts.

Young adults have limited time available and want to focus on quality volunteer opportunity. Volunteer activities that connect volunteerism to work and family would be very desirable. Adults in this category can work with minimal direction and may look at the volunteer activities as a way to expand their skills, meet others, and connect to personal causes/values. Opportunities may include offering to conduct an after-school program to involve kids from the neighborhood, provide leadership to a group of friends to raise money for the local humane society, or encourage their local place of employment to adopt a school classroom or participate in a local Habitat for Humanity project.

Middle Adulthood (40 to 64 years)

During middle adulthood, organizations should continue to recognize the need for individuals to balance work and family as volunteer opportunities are developed and shared. Activities that provide an opportunity for adults to utilize their expertise are highly desirable. Volunteer opportunities for individuals in middle adulthood may include serving on a community board or committee, volunteering with a local youth club or organization, or serving Thanksgiving dinner (with their families) at a local homeless or senior center.

Older adulthood (65 and older)

Adults who are 65 and older will often have more disposable time and may be looking for ways to fill voids in their lives. Volunteer opportunities for this age group must consider potential physical and health limitations. Volunteer positions may include serving as a literacy tutor at the local school or family shelter or serving as a community advocate for a local senior citizen issue or concern.

CONSIDERING THE BIG PICTURE

Human development involves a complex, interconnected series of physical, cognitive, and affective components spanning the time between birth and death. As Fischer stated, it is "a journey from infancy through senescence. Though presented as separate contributions, they covey a sense of continuity, one that we come to appreciate as inherent in the life cycle itself". Thus, we can better understand the whole by examining its components, yet we can best appreciate the parts by reflecting upon the synergistic whole.

The true challenge facing volunteer managers and administrators is pulling together all aspects and cohorts of human society, from the very youngest to the most senior citizen, so as to build upon their unique abilities and insights in addressing the challenges facing our citizens and communities (Safrit & Merrill, 1999). Putnam (2000) concluded that we must "transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves"; we would add age and generational identities to further his call for strengthening American community through civic action.

This seemingly overwhelming task is not unlike the heritage American art of quilting. As "quilters", volunteer administrators must piece together intricate individual "quilt blocks" composed of unique designs, colors, and textures that comprise individual "seasons of service" within the human experience. However, while each individual quilt block is, in itself, a significant and valued work of art, the true challenge to the quilter is deciding how to lay out the overall quilt, building upon the opportunity for each block to highlight and reflect the beauty of the blocks around it. Thus, the true beauty in the final, resulting quilt lies within the synergy of the combined individual blocks. As quilters, we, too, must design beautiful, individual seasons of service, each of which contributes to and connects with the larger tapestry of life.

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Figure 1 *Linking Human Development to Volunteerism Across the Life Span.*

FIGURE 1

Linking Human Development to Volunteerism Across the Life Span.

Life Stage & Reference	Human Development Characteristics	Implications for Volunteerism	Potential Volunteer Activities
Infancy: birth - 2 years (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* rapid brain & body growth * social from birth * gain awareness of gender * acquires self recognition * speaks first words & phrases * walks around 1 year of age	* not conscious volunteerism (no choice) * parental socialization * early exposure to service * develop belief that helping others is important * short term activities	Parents take their infant children as they: * help at the local place of worship * help a neighbor with yard work
Childhood: 3 - 5 years (Woehrle, 1993; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) * short attention span	* improving coordination * thought guided by perceptions over logic * concrete self-concept * parent child relations dominant	* short term activities * active, hands-on activities * encourage individual creativity * cooperative focus (non-competitive) * close supervision (whole family involved) * success focus (make child feel good about oneself) * emphasize safety	Help family members: * plant flowers at a local nursing home or for an elderly neighbor * rake leaves for a neighbor * plant a community garden Pre-adolescence:
Pre-adolescence: 6 - 11 years (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* motor skills & attention span developing * limited to concrete thinking * much social comparison among peers & others * enjoys organized games	* cooperative focus (non- competitive) * actively engaged * very structured/organized * make activity fun * same-gender groups * need expert guidance	* help plant flowers at a local nursing home or for an elderly neighbor * help serve a meal at a local family homeless shelter * rake leaves for a neighbor * play with other children at a local family homeless shelter

Adolescence: 12 - 19 years (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* dramatic growth spurt * reach sexual maturity * thinking both concretely & abstractly * peak peer involvement * adjustment & confusion about self-identity	* mixed gender groups * provide greater responsibility/decision making * career exploration * opportunity to learn about themselves * college application/job resume building * sensitivity to individual feelings/perceptions	* conduct a can-food drive for the local food pantry * serve as a tutor for a young child at school or neighborhood * conduct a community clean up day * help organize and conduct a voter registration drive
Young Adulthood: 20 - 39 (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* peak physical functioning * excellent mental skill & growth in knowledge * social networks expand along with romantic relations * careers & families launched	* time is limited; focus on quality * connect volunteerism to work & family (corporate volunteerism, family volunteerism) * minimal direction (empowerment) * expand skills (resume) * opportunity to meet others * connect to personal causes/values	* offer to conduct an after-school program to involve kids from the neighborhood * provide leadership to a group of friends to raise money for the local humane society * encourage your local place of employment to adopt a school classroom or participate in a local Habitat for Humanity project
Middle Adulthood: 40 - 64 (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* physical decline may begin * intellectual functioning stabilizes along with personality * work & relationships dominate	* utilize high degree of expertise * need to balance work & family * utilize high expertise * mentoring younger adults/teens	* serve on a community board or committee to share expertise * volunteer with a local youth club or organization * as a family spend a thanksgiving day serving dinner at a local homeless or senior center
Older Adulthood: 65 and older (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995)	* reaction time slows along with physical abilities * transition to retirement * loss of family & significant others * maintains personality traits with reflection increasing	* more disposable time (income) * fill voids in life * need for self-reflection (altruism) * be aware of health limitations	* serve as a literacy tutor at the local school or family shelter * serve as a community advocate for a local senior citizen issue or concern