

# Volunteering of Older People in Hong Kong

Funder: Hong Kong Institute of Volunteers (HKIoV)

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## Motivation (older versus younger)

- Many older respondents reported “lack of information” as a barrier for volunteering (26% of older, but only 2% of younger), so better information about volunteering options may increase volunteering amongst them
- 26% of older respondents (aged 55+) reported that they had volunteered in the past year (50% for younger respondents), including 23% who had volunteered through a charity (40% for younger respondents) and only 9% volunteered through a school or company (38% for younger respondents)
- Amongst those who volunteered formally last year, older respondents reported an average of 146 hours of volunteering (50 hours for younger respondents), so while older people may be less likely to volunteer, the hours are greater for volunteers

## Motivation (demographic change)

Starting point for this study was:

- Demographic changes which mean more older people and older people with more education and
- Re-analysis by Prof John Bacon-Shone of the data in the 2014 Hong Kong Altruism Index Survey (designed by Prof. Paul S.F. Yip & Dr. Qijin Cheng of The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention and funded by HKJC Charities Trust) on older and younger volunteers

## Motivation (education)

Education predicts not only whether older people volunteer, but also predicts how much time they volunteer if they do volunteer

- Educational attainment was the only predictor of whether older respondents engaged in formal volunteering last year - those with at least post-secondary education were twice as likely to volunteer
- Time older volunteers spent per year on volunteering increased with education attainment - those with high levels of education spent twice as many hours as those with low education

## Key Questions

How best to:

- Recruit more older volunteers?
- Train older volunteers?
- Manage older volunteers?

given the changing profile of older volunteers

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## Methodology

- Four focus groups, each lasting about 2 hours
- Two with older volunteers (aged 55 or above) from NGOs/ charities in different fields, one with less educated and one with more educated volunteers.
- Two with staff in NGOs of different service fields to identify good practices for engaging older volunteers, one with NGOs who frequently recruit older volunteers and one with NGOs who seldom recruit them

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## Key Findings

- Strengths and weaknesses
- Recruitment strategies
- Training coverage and methods
- Communication
- Relationships, recognitions, support
- Retention/management
- Future directions

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## Strengths of older volunteers (I)

- Committed and serious about volunteering
- Tough and would not easily give up
- Experienced and might teach staff how to improve the team spirit
- Keen to discuss among themselves how to make things better
- Punctual
- Devoted with sense of responsibility

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## Strengths of older volunteers (II)

- Passionate
- Could understand impairment
- Could educate children who would like to listen to their experience
- All seemed to be equipped with performance skills
- Good communication skills
- Newer elders were better educated

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## Time availability for older volunteers

- Relatively flexible
- Weekday mornings most suitable, otherwise before 5pm on weekdays

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## Weaknesses of older volunteers

- Take time to adapt
- Need to adjust their values and thoughts about volunteering
- Sometimes like to gossip
- Physical constraints & health problems may arise
- May need to look after family members (e.g. grandchildren)
- Difficult to integrate lower with higher educated because of different expectations, such as higher educated less happy to be directed

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## Recruitment strategies (I)

- Become role model to friends by sharing happy experiences
- Bring spouses to volunteer
- Many retired peers could not fully let go of work so volunteering may be good substitute
- Target websites dedicated to older people or social media accounts of alumni and organisation groups
- Encourage those who enjoy singing & dancing not to waste talents by performing

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## Recruitment strategies (II)

- Matching process is important as some like to contribute frontline work and do not want to attend organisation meetings or have added responsibilities
- Reimbursement such as meal and transportation allowance for volunteers as tokens of appreciation
- Target passionate first, who would bring friends later
- Banners for recruitment and newspaper advertisement were effective but expensive

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## Recruitment strategies (III)

- Internet was effective in recruiting volunteers from different regions, as some volunteers might want to try different types of volunteer service
- Allow them to bring their grandchildren to the service centre when volunteering so that the children could be looked after and learn there
- Service recipients often have potential and time to be volunteers, so encourage them to join as volunteers, pair with an existing volunteer, assign simple tasks so that they would have a sense of achievement and build confidence

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## Recruitment strategies (IV)

- Organize interest classes that arouse interest, followed by keeping them
- Contact the media and arrange radio interviews
- Target those living in the district as they were more likely to participate in the long term because they had a closer bond with the neighbourhood

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## Training coverage (I)

- Nature and duties of the task and physical limitations to avoid accidents and failures
- Standards, ethics and rules, e.g. punctuality, no links with service targets outside service
- Organization culture and mission
- On-job training to make improvement

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## **Training coverage (II)**

- Self-protection training
- Emotional training to sustain their mental health
- How to communicate with clients
- Leadership programmes and training for those who show interest and commitment

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## **Training methods (I)**

- Formal training methods not very useful as they might already know the content from other organizations, often deterred by the term “training” as they thought they already have experience, so use new terms to make them less reluctant in the beginning
- PowerPoint presentation is too boring, can use role-playing by visiting the service targets, but need to convince them that role-playing helps them to acquire the skills

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## **Training methods (II)**

- Diversified training, e.g. games
- Workshops for groups interested in a particular aspect of volunteering
- Adapt to their ability, time, and physical strength - can shorten the training time, give regular breaks, provide graphics and simple notes to make it easier or organize revision classes

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## **Communication (I)**

- Transparency and fairness must be ensured, e.g. by having committee meetings conducted frequently with decisions & discussion properly recorded and shared among all members
- NGOs with few permanent staff may employ a one-to-many style of communication with little connection between volunteers, hence need activities to connect the volunteers together
- Use smartphone apps, e.g. WhatsApp, for efficient communication
- Survey to work out their schedules and expectations
- Ask for their opinions as they could give amazing ideas

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## Communication (II)

- Need to talk with the unhappy to find the problems and formulate solutions together
- Usually listen to the staff they are close to
- Better to clarify things in an occasion that everyone was present to avoid gossip
- Volunteers who are easy-going, uninvolved in gossip, and maintain good relationships can be intermediaries between staff and volunteers

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## Building relationships

- First 3 months crucial for retention so need to show care and respect and assign simple tasks to establish their confidence and stimulate their initiative
- Might leave if the staff did not contact them regularly
- Organize different kinds of activities to gradually develop a sense of affiliation
- Regular services help familiarize them but non-regular services might be more interesting
- Publicize future plans so that they could know when they could volunteer again

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## Communication (III)

- More willing to speak up outside service centre, so going to “yum cha” could help
- Volunteers should be allowed to discuss the arrangement of activity with the staff in order to compromise between the practical experience of the volunteers and the requirements of the staff

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## Giving recognition

- Show regular recognition to all volunteers to fairly respect their contribution
- Not excessive but provide motivation
- Use social media as a way of recognising their contribution.

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## Reimbursement

- Those with better financial capability seldom cared about reimbursement while the less well-off would consider the cost first, so this must be made clear

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## Debriefing

- Important to help evaluation and improvement and to help volunteers establish better relationships among themselves and with the NGO

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## Preparation of facilities

- Need to plan access to the activity site by going there beforehand to prepare

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## Managing (I)

- Need supervisor present initially as only listen to the junior staff after become familiar
- Like to form groups, so newcomers leave if they cannot integrate into existing social circles
- Sense of hierarchy was strong so educating them about the division of labour and allowing teams allocating works to their members could help
- Risk management plan should be prepared especially in activities with physical work

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## Managing (II)

- Staff need to be devoted and believe in the cause they were working for and be there for more than just salary
- Many events and functions could be organised and coordinated by volunteers themselves
- Sometimes staff have less education than volunteers so need to achieve respect

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## Managing (III)

- Need to make the regular services interesting by frequently adding new elements
- Pair experienced with novices so that they could have a sense of responsibility and self-affirmation
- Reward with e.g. overseas exchange, after they had fulfilled certain requirements

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## Future directions

- In future, there will be more highly educated older volunteers, who will be more capable, but will be less happy to be directed and will expect a more participatory role that values their opinions and suggestions
- Need to take advantage of popular social networking tools, e.g. Whatsapp, to facilitate communication within volunteers, not just from the NGO to the volunteers

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**Happy to discuss in Q&A**