

Risk Management in Volunteerism

—Advice by an expert



‘Risk is any uncertainty about a future event that threatens your organization’s ability to accomplish its mission.’ (The Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2001a.) Risk management is no doubt an important aspect in volunteer services nowadays.

In view of this, the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) invited Ms Linda Graff to conduct a series of workshop in Hong Kong for the first time last year.

Linda Graff is an expert in Volunteer Management Training. She is a president of the Linda Graff & Assoc. Inc and has over 25 years of working and consultancy experience in the non-profit sector in

Canada. She was one of recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Volunteer Administration

This year AVS invited Linda came to Hong Kong again to deliver a risk management and work safety measures workshop to about 50 volunteer administrators, volunteer leaders and staff that came from NGOs and Corporate. Participants highly rated her clear theme as well as the examples used in her illustrations.

Through this interview, you are able to know more about Linda’s view of risk management and her advice to Hong Kong volunteer organizations.

AVS volunteer reporter (AVS R) / Linda Graff (Linda)

AVS R: Linda, can you briefly describe the origin of risk management in volunteerism to us?

Linda: Risk management is a new issue to volunteerism which originates from the private sector and eventually becomes more important in the non-profit sector after a number of high profile wrongdoings have been reported by the media in the America and Canada in the 1990s. It is new to Hong Kong too. With the increasing sophistication of the labour force, more volunteers are now given positions of trust and with greater responsibilities, the risks of intentional and unintentional harm to volunteers, clients and agencies will rise.

AVS R: What do you think the AVS can do in this aspect?

Linda: Hong Kong volunteerism has developed to a point sophisticated enough that risk management deserves more attention. Within the community of non-government organizations (NGOs), AVS can play the proactive role in leading different parties and organizations towards a thorough discussion of the issue through seminars and workshops.

The 3 pieces of advice from Linda:

- Preventive strategies are most effective to avoid risk and reduce harm
- Insurance can only be used to protect loss after accidents
- AVS can take the proactive role in the NGO community

AVS R: Nowadays, many corporations in Hong Kong participate in volunteer services so as to promote their public image. Will the notion of preventive strategies deter corporations away from community services?

Linda: It is possible to become paranoid but it is of vital importance to strike a balance. Although risk management takes time and resources, the benefits obtained outweigh the possible costs involved. You will realize its worthiness when you compare the cost of managing your risks and the cost of responding to disasters.



Linda's view on the future development of volunteerism risk management in Hong Kong:

- A task force should be set up to conduct a survey, studying the shortcomings of different volunteer organizations. The survey is useful to see if more services on risk management should be provided to local organizations.
- AVS should continue to play the pivotal role in raising the awareness among NGOs through seminars and workshops. Guidelines on work safety in volunteer services may also be initiated.

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Linda Graff has been working and consulting in the non-profit sector since 1980 in Canada. In 2003 Linda proudly received the Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Volunteer Administration for her authoritative leadership on risk management in the world of volunteerism and her articulate advocacy for ethical volunteer management. Linda has published series of famous books on volunteer management, such as "Best of All – The Quick Reference Guide to Effective Volunteer Involvement", "Better Safe...Risk Management in Volunteer Programs & Community Service", "By Definition: Policy Development for Volunteer Programs", etc. you may reach the website: www.lindagraff.ca for getting more information.