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**Family Volunteering –
An Interactive Learning Mode for Families**

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Abstract

Family Volunteering Scheme was jointly organized by the Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC), Education and Manpower Bureau of HKSAR and the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS). It aimed to promote active and interactive mode of family learning through volunteering as well as to develop a new frontier of volunteer force to bring contribution to the society. The project had been launching for 5 years since 2001 with different service themes and scope of volunteer services. Over the years, there were totally over 10,000 families coming from over 300 kindergarten, primary and secondary schools to participate actively in the project. They had contributed over 200,000 service hours in serving 100,000 needy service recipients. In their participation, they had to go through training, programme planning, service organization and implementation, service de-briefing and evaluation, submission of reports and volunteer recognition programme, etc. The workshop presenter is going to illustrate the organization of such a large scale of projects, such as its managing system, organizational structure, networking of resources, facilitating skills, etc. But most importantly, the service impact on families through the interactive learning mode of family participation in volunteer service is the main focal point to be demonstrated and shared in this presentation.

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

Among 10,000 participating families, there were about 20% coming from kindergartens, 50% from primary schools, 20% from secondary schools and 10% from special schools for mentally handicapped children. About 65% of students were accompanied by mothers to participate volunteer services, 30% got both parents involved and only 5% of students with only father joined. Most of participating

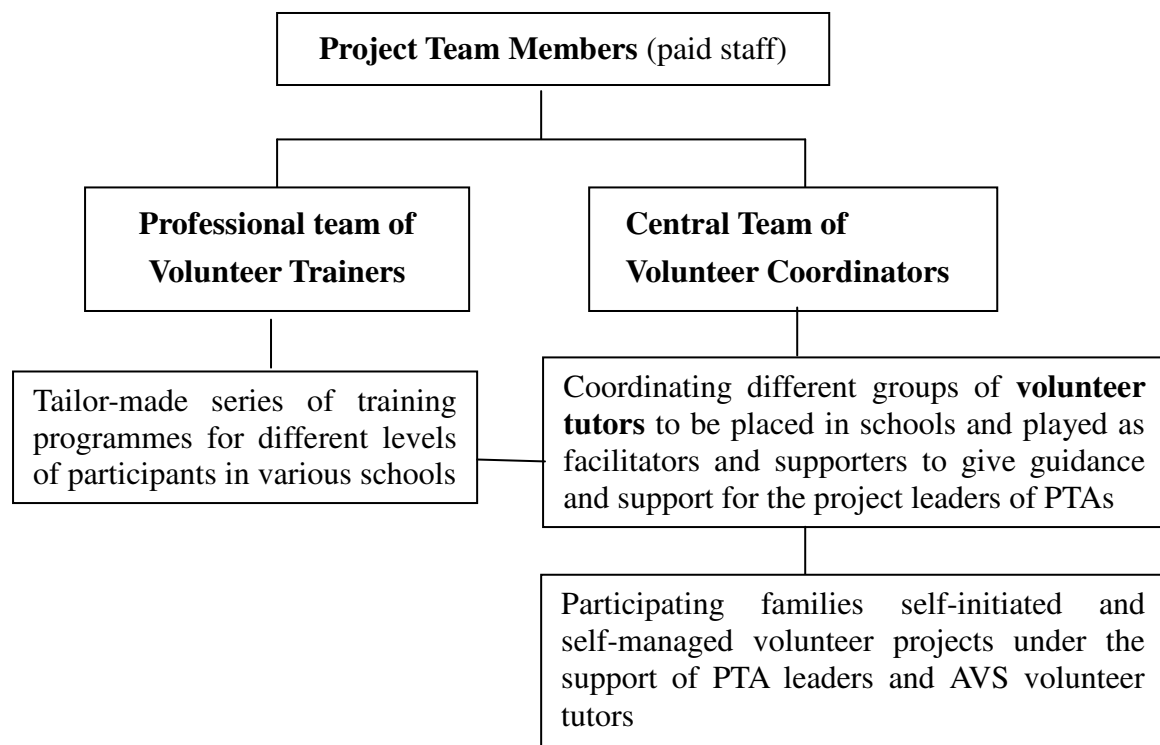
families were mainly recruited and organized by the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)¹ of respective schools and AVS would give professional consultation, training and technical support throughout the process. Almost all PTAs had also gained the support from headmasters and teachers of the school side to render encouragement, advice and technical support whenever necessary in service delivery process.

Programme Organization

Family volunteering was not a new idea but really a good one. More and more families treasured very much the occasion of spending quality time together, sharing meaning experiences, common goals and a good sense of purpose. How to efficiently and effectively use of this tremendous volunteer force became a major concern for volunteer administrators. They needed to relate more the management strategies built around this kind of involvement.

Organization Structure

As to mobilize a great amount of family members getting involved, a large scale of manpower had been drawn in programme administration and implementation, such as providing training, service matching, coordination and communication, supervision and service monitoring, etc. Below is the illustration of the manpower structure:-



¹ The establishment of PTAs was initiated in 1994 under the support of CHSC of EMB. There were over 1,600 PTAs (95% of Government subsidized schools) setup to encourage home-school cooperation on students' education. There were also Federations of PTAs initiated in 15 districts.

Roles of Volunteer Tutors in Service Guidance

Volunteer tutors were recruited, selected and contracted on yearly basis. Some had even committed for 5 years as they enjoyed the tasks very much. They had to give guidance and support to families throughout the project duration. One to two tutors were placed in each school to give professional consultation and support on service planning, implementation and evaluation. The volunteer tutor also acted as a monitor to ensure the service quality, to accomplish the tasks on schedule as well as to enhance their work competence. More importantly, they were the advisors to guide and demonstrate members the skills of de-briefing and reflection from their learning.

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 concept through story telling, painting and drawing, etc. Moreover, the trainers had role played the situation and asked the children to indicate the appropriateness of the behaviour by raising a “✓” or a “✗”. The input of concepts and value of volunteering was affirmed through their active thinking and participation.

Training for Primary Level:

For the junior level, the trainers had introduced basic concepts of volunteering and communication skills learning through the teaching mode of case demonstration, playing games and experiential exercise, etc. With the support of their parents, the children had to make attempt 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 with their working partners - dogs or rabbits, to demonstrate the caring skills and to share with their experience in serving the 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 they had to plan and implement their service projects independently. Teaching methods of role playing, group discussion and sensitivity games were encouraged to stimulate their exchange and sharing among family members.

Training for Volunteer Tutors:

Volunteer tutors were being screened and contracted for this scheme. Clear role expectation and job description were explicit and agreed 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 rendered. Moreover, regular meetings and consultation were provided for tutors to encourage mutual sharing and to find alternatives to handle the difficulties. Another three

volunteer coordinators (non-paid staff) also rendered intensive care and support to the tutors in handling crisis or frustration during the process.

Service Planning and Matching

For exploring different varieties of service opportunities for a large group of family volunteers, participating schools were encouraged to plan their service projects based on their interest, capability and needs of the community under the advice of volunteer tutors. In order to facilitate fuller participation of some newly joined schools, AVS also organized some mass volunteer campaign for the new comers to participate as the first attempt. After then, they had to self initiate and manage their own projects directly. Service scope covered visitation service for the singleton elders, recreation parties for the mentally retarded, fundraising for the deprived groups, conservancy works on environmental protection, befriending and logistic support for hospital patients, etc.

Service De-briefing and Evaluation

In order to enhance mutual learning between parents and their children, some assignments were instructed such as, writing proposals, regular meetings to discuss on programme planning, clear division of labor and cooperation, 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. A token system was introduced to reinforce their 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.

Volunteer Recognition

Besides facilitating appreciation in their daily practice, a formal recognition ceremony was launched each year to round up the achievement of their contribution as well as to grant awards to those families with outstanding performance. By collecting views from volunteer tutors, feedback from service agencies and self-rating of family members, some prizes of outstanding performance on programme planning, excellent team work and outstanding families were presented by both the Chairman of CHSC and AVS. Some families were also invited to share special or invaluable experience gained from volunteering at the occasion. Moreover, some service reports, video films, training kits and manual, etc. were produced to record the scenery of their participation and share with fruitful experience learnt from the venture. Those publications were also widely produced and sent to all schools for reference. All teachers were advised to help spread the message of the programme as well as to use the materials as their teaching kit in the classroom learning.

Achievements

Demonstrating Good Modeling Effect

Concepts of community, philanthropy and volunteering are handed down from one generation to the next. Parents are the role models in the family and their actions set the standard around civic stewardship and community responsibility (Bowen and

KcKechne, 2002). Children would appreciate and respect their parents more and seeing how much they cared for the community. Parents also noticed a change in their children's attitudes towards each others. Reed and Selbee (2001) confirmed the common knowledge that individuals who engaged in volunteering activity as a child or who observed their parents volunteering had a much higher probability of being a volunteer in their adult years, whereas 49% volunteered if a parent had volunteered, compared with 29% if a parent had not.

Bringing Closer Parent-Child Relationship

Family volunteering presented excellent opportunities and innovative ways for enabling families to spend more time together in today's busy world. It was the "togetherness" aspect of family volunteering that made it such an attractive volunteering option. Most of families were satisfied with their accomplishments and enjoyed the day. They found that volunteering helped them to share values and talk more easily with their family, and it allowed them to spend quality time together (Melendez, 2001). Frequent mutual share and support did enhance a lot their parent-child relationship and communications.

Gaining new exposures and practice skills

As reflected by most families, they treasured very much on grasping this opportunity to bring learning home through volunteering. In fact, through volunteer service, they could expose themselves to reach the deprived groups, to understand more the social problems and features and to contribute their time to serve the needy. Children learn how to interact and respond to people in the community who are in need of their help as well as gaining a deeper understanding of the scope of community need. For each family member, volunteering offered an opportunity to develop new skills sets, utilize their existing skills and experience, teach each other and the people they encounter during their volunteer work and, perhaps most importantly, experience the satisfaction of doing something for others and making a difference.

Fostering interactive and mutual learning

Throughout the process, under the guidance of volunteer tutors, every family had much time to reflect their thinking, learning and to equip new skills and develop talents. Families were looking for ways to spend time together, teach important values, and share the experience of helping others. Parents were conscious to educate their children the values of reciprocity, caring for others and being part of community. Children also demonstrated themselves to be confident, responsible and learnt how to appreciate what their parents had done and performed. Mutual share and support were encouraged in their interactions. Family volunteering was viewed overall as providing an important opportunity to develop values for future generation by instilling good social conscience. It was also seen as contributing to healthy family connections by offering venues that gave family members a common interest (Hegel, 2000).

Contributing to the benefits of the community

It was an effective means to guide the children to foster a sense of citizenship and

belongings to the society. Participating families had to commit nearly 9 months duration in this scheme each year. It might be a big challenge to retain their commitment and participation for the whole family. Over the five years, there were totally over 10,000 families coming from over 300 kindergarten, primary and secondary schools to participate actively in the project. They had contributed over 200,000 service hours in serving 100,000 needy service recipients. It was really a great potential volunteer manpower force to be further explored and developed. Upon the completion of the scheme, many family members also promised to continue volunteering and to register as volunteers under AVS Hong Kong Community Volunteers membership pool. Some members developed their potentials and became a volunteer in their work site and school committees as well.

Conclusion

Family volunteering was a simple and powerful idea (Jones, 2001). Family allowed parents and children, siblings and other family members contributing to spend quality time together while achieving the goal of contributing to the community to worthy causes. If managed effectively, family volunteering offered volunteer organizations an innovative way to expand and enrich their volunteer force and bring betterment to the community. Over the 5 years, CHSC and AVS joined hands to promote and develop the scheme with different modes of service delivery (Appendix). They provided various types of activities that were appropriate for various age groups and offered flexible times to enable families to participate. The ultimate goal was not only to achieve a certain standard and number of participants and service recipients, but rather, to transform the concept of family volunteering to be the type of informal volunteering - include helping family members, a neighbor, a friend or even an un-familiarized member on ad hoc basis, not necessarily at the same time or agency.

Family volunteering was a unique “win-win-win” situation where the volunteer, organization and community can benefit equally (Bowen and McKechnie, 2002). It is truly a trend whose time has come.

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(Appendix)

Summary of Service Operations and Deliverables

Year	Project Name	Strategies	Deliverables
2001	Learning Family Campaign: Family Volunteering Scheme	To promote, publicize and explore the concept of family volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ 500 families involved ✧ 50 service projects ✧ 27,500 service hours ✧ 5,600 service recipients ✧ 60 volunteer tutors
2002	Family Volunteering Promotion Campaign	To consolidate the function of home-school cooperation through promoting family volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ 30 schools mobilized ✧ 2,500 families involved ✧ 200 service projects ✧ 72,500 service hours ✧ 24,400 service recipients ✧ 80 volunteer tutors ✧ 300 PTA leaders

2003	A Training Scheme on Family Volunteering	To develop and promote service quality on family volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ 72 schools involved ✧ 150 training series ✧ 42 schools received mentorship ✧ 3,000 trainees ✧ 108 service projects ✧ 30 volunteer tutors
2004	“Healthy Schools” Family Volunteering Campaign	To promote, network and consolidate coordination of resources in district level to work under the same theme (line up the support of Federation of PTAs from 15 districts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Setup of 11 working groups in 17 districts ✧ 144 schools mobilized ✧ 2,400 families involved ✧ 53,000 service hours ✧ 80,000 service recipients ✧ 27 mass service projects ✧ 30 volunteer tutors
2005	“Caring Schools” Family Volunteering Campaign	To encourage and support participating schools to self initiate, organize and manage their own family volunteering projects. Their service record will be accredited by AVS and a logo of caring school will be granted.	<p>Expected deliverables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ 100 schools participated ✧ 3,000 families involved

** After 5 years of active implementation, an overall review will be carried out this year to overview the response, participation and achievement of the scheme. Further directions and service development will be formulated according to the findings of the review.*