

## Workshop Presentation

Topic: Innovations and Good Practices in Volunteering

### Volunteer Network of Service Users

**Mr. Dominic Yuk-Ming WONG**

*Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong SAR*

*adswoew3@swd.gov.hk*

#### Abstract

With an aim to developing **the District Volunteer Network of Service Users**, the Eastern and Wan Chai District Social Welfare Office has been steering to foster a culture of motivating the service users and the vulnerable groups to get quipped to serve the community as volunteers. Through the process of training and empowerment, the vulnerable or underprivileged groups have become our assets to contribute in the community. As a result, a caring community and volunteerism has been promoted and the outcomes as well as the effects are very encouraging.

#### Body of Paper

- In Eastern and Wan Chai District, we face a relatively high number of deprived groups such as single parents, new arrivals, Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients, low income families, children living in institutions, mental patients, delinquent youth, poorly educated persons, mentally handicapped adults and children living in institutions and elders. Under the increasing expectation from the public and service users as well as the constraint of manpower resources, the Eastern and Wan Chai District Social Welfare Office(E/W DSWO) has strategically led and encouraged the services units to utilize the force of volunteers including training the service users to become volunteers to serve our customers.
- In our District Business Plan 2004-06, with “**Solidarity to Harmony (匯聚伙伴力量 齊建和諧社區)**” as the district theme, we have clearly spelled out our objectives which include (a) to maximize use of community resources in providing high-quality social welfare services in supporting the needy and the disadvantaged group; and (b) to cultivate self-resilience, self-reliance, mutual help and volunteerism in the community. In response to the district’s direction, all the service units of Eastern and Wan Chai District have arranged various programmes and launched suitable projects with a view to fostering a caring community.

*“Volunteering helps in the building of strong and cohesive communities. It fosters trust between citizens and helps develop norms of solidarity and reciprocity which are essential to stable communities” (Justin Davis Smith, Volunteering and Social Development, World Volunteer Web, 2005)*

- In light of the above, E/W DSWO took up the steering role of encouraging various frontline service units, to recruit and provide training as well as service opportunities for the various kinds of volunteers. Our service units such as Hong Kong High Court & District Court Probation Office(HC&DCPO), Medical Social Services Unit (Psychiatric Department) of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital(MSSU/PYNEH(PsyD) and Integrated Family Service Centres(IFSCs) had successfully developed a district volunteer network which includes service users as volunteers in serving those needy people in the district.

*“Volunteerism serves the causes of peace and development through enhancing opportunities for participation by all peoples. It is universal, inclusive and embraces volunteer action in all its diversity” (Volunteerism: UNY and beyond, .UN Volunteers, 2005).*

- With an aim to facilitating tri-partite participation in volunteering, we establish many platforms of volunteer services for district’s residents, commercial corporations, community organizations (such as churches and schools) as well as **our service users** who have specifically become a potential crucial volunteer force in the district. Besides, our staff and their family members also formed a Volunteer Team.
- Through the process of training and empowerment, ***the vulnerable or underprivileged groups have become our assets to contribute in the community***. In return, they have attained recognition, acceptance, higher self-efficacy, personal growth and development which are conducive to their self-reliance, better rehabilitation and reintegration in the community.
- Their breakthrough of participating in volunteer services is highlighted as follows:

**(1) Children from poor families:**

- The children from deprived families, having limited financial resources, have little opportunities to join interest classes to develop their interests and talents. Besides, most of them, having experienced abandonment and family break up, usually have poor self image, lack confidence with occasional unstable behaviour and emotions.
- An enthusiastic volunteer of Causeway Bay Rotary Club(CBRC) not only donated

violins to the underprivileged children, he also taught them violin personally once weekly.

- The project started at Causeway Bay Integrated Family Services Centre. Deprived children including Wards of DSW living in institutions, children of single parents families living on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), new arrival families and low income families were recruited to receive violin training for developing their music talents.
- Through the means of violin training, performance at mass programmes for other vulnerable families and children as well as concern visits to an elderly home in the district, they learned to serve the needy people and bring joy to them. Consequently, their low self-image was improved through the music learning process. Moreover, their sense of achievement, personal growth and caring to the community was strengthened.
- The elders at the elderly home, who had never been visited by children volunteers, were very happy to have the children visiting them, presenting them gifts and playing violin which they had never heard. The programme brought them warmth and stimulation.
- In addition, the volunteer tutor also served as a mentor to the deprived children and provided a modeling effect to them who turned from passive service recipients to active service givers.

## (2) **Single Parents living on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance:**

- After receiving the volunteer training of Quarry Bay Integrated Family Services Centre (QBIFSC), Social Welfare Department, ten single parents visited the mentally handicapped wards of DSW who were abandoned children living in institutions. Unlike other residents, these Wards of DSW were not visited by relatives or brought home for home leave (caseworkers of QBIFSC, on behalf of Director of Social Welfare, take care of their well-being). Besides bringing warmth and concern to these children, the volunteers also gained sense of achievement, confidence and positive attitudes towards life.

## (3) **Youth delinquents:**

- QBIFSC also provides counseling to the youth delinquents under statutory supervision to

restructure their life pattern and develop their personal growth. The staff assisted ten delinquent youth forming a volunteer group to serve the mentally handicapped Wards of DSW. Various activities such as outings, interactive games, artwork etc. were organized to benefit both the customers and volunteers.

- It was amazing to see from the above that all the single parents and the youth delinquents had changed from being helped to helpers. The volunteers attained sense of satisfaction and learned how to care for the weak. For the Wards of DSW, although they could not speak, their active participation and cheerful facial expression reflected their enjoyment of the visits and concerns from the service user volunteers.

#### (4) **Ex-mental patients:**

- The training up of the discharged ex-mental patients as volunteers is an effective way to help the hospitalized mental patients. The “EXITERS Programme” under Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (Department of Psychiatry) is aimed at helping a group of chronic mental patients staying in hospital to receive extended care and continued support and supervision in the community after their discharge.
- In fact, most of the in-patients always hold a negative image on themselves and have a dim perspective toward their future while ex-mental patients, though living successfully in the community, are still worried whether they can persist and overcome misconception of the public on mental patients.
- To strengthen the self-confidence and foster positive self-image on these ex-patients for better rehabilitation in the community, staff of Medical Social Workers of PYNEH(PsyD) initiated the volunteer project and engaged the NGO of Mental Health Link which contributed its expertise in community support services for ex-mental patients and assisted in recruitment and volunteer training.
- 30 discharged ex-mental patients were recruited as volunteers to assist in organizing activities for the in-patients under the EXISTERS Programme. Through volunteering effort and befriender support, they acquired a sense of self-assurance and achievement and confidence of leading a normal life.
- Besides, such in-patients would reduce their loneliness and enhance their positive view/attitude towards rehabilitation. All the participants had enlarged their social circle and realized the channels of seeking help from social workers and other professions.

They also developed mutual support among themselves which sustained their smooth rehabilitation in the community. Moreover, they had learnt different kinds of life skills from these volunteer “coaches” on how to counteract negative comments and the most hard-to-deal obstacles for rehabilitation.

**(5) Probationers and juvenile delinquents under statutory supervision:**

- Most of the probationers are poor in self-image with low confidence and little concern to people around them and the community. Before the introduction of the project, counselling is the only means to help them in terms of self-reflection and goal-setting. However, many of them have little motivation to follow behaviourally.
- To enhance probationers’ self-confidence and social responsibilities, the Probation Officers (also as social workers) of the High Court & District Court Probation Office had organized two volunteer training cum concern visits, to the elders and mentally retarded persons in institutions. They recruited totally 41 volunteers (32 probationers, 4 family members and 6 friends) to join the project.
- The project helped those delinquent youth of probationers change their deviant attitude to be constructive as well as show care and concern to others especially the vulnerable groups in the community.
- By strengthening their confidence and self-esteem, the delinquent youth eventually learnt to lead a positive living in developing themselves on the right track by serving the community.

**Evaluation of the effects of the volunteer services**

- In evaluating the volunteer services, we refer to (1) feedbacks from the customers including both the service user volunteers and the service recipients, either in written or verbal to our organizing staff; (2) the number of participants attending the organized activities and (3) the sustainability of the service.
- Positive feedback from both groups as well as high participatory rate show the success of the volunteer programmes. Evaluation of the projects further reveals the value of their extension in future, as well as the need of their sustainability. In foreseeable future, all these participants and many new comers would continue taking part as volunteers. We believe that

with this snowball effect, a more fruitful harvest will be gained.

- As a significant annual event of the district, their achievements and innovative services are recognized in the award presentation ceremony cum service day in which the publicity effect of promoting mutual care in the community is also achieved.

## Conclusion

- With an aim to developing **the District Volunteer Network of Service Users**, the Eastern and Wan Chai District Social Welfare Office has been successfully steering to foster a culture of volunteerism and develop various volunteer groups with many meaningful programmes. The service users had benefited both themselves as volunteers as well as the community. Besides establishing self-resilience and self-reliance, these volunteers' life experience is remarkably valuable and useful to help others with similar background and promote the community's mutual acceptance, support, integration and harmony. They act as a very positive model to promote volunteerism through all walks of life.

“Volunteering also generates new networks and norms, extending society's existing capital reservoirs by building new relationships and widening its webs of social interaction... the lessons of trust learned through voluntary action teach us to extend our localized moral commitments to people” (*Roundtable on Volunteerism and Social Development: Below the Waterline of Public Visibility -- 29-30 November 2000/ The Hague, Netherlands*) .

- Finally, with the mission of making volunteerism to be a driving force for building a caring and harmonious community, we will continue the cross-sector efforts and collaboration to further develop the Network and strengthen the momentum and effect of volunteerism in the district.

## References

1. Smith, Justin Davis, 2005, Volunteering and Social Development, World Volunteer Web
2. UN Volunteers, 2005, Volunteerism: UNY and beyond
3. Roundtable on Volunteerism and Social Development: Below the Waterline of Public Visibility -- 29-30 November 2000/The Hague, Netherlands