

Motivations of Volunteers in Youth-Oriented Programs

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What is Motivation?

Motivation is what drives people to act and determines, in large part, the types of activities to which they choose to direct their energies. If people are to stay motivated, the specific motives underlying their behaviour must be satisfied.

The Research

Research supported by the Knowledge Development Centre, an initiative of the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, identified several distinct motives for volunteering among individuals involved in youth-oriented programs. A total of 1,119 volunteers from Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba responded to a 38-item survey in which they rated reasons (i.e., motives) for volunteering on a scale from one (not at all true for me) to seven (very true for me).¹ Higher values indicate motives that were more important to respondents.

Of those who responded to our survey:

- 88% were parents.
- 12% had no children. More than two thirds (67%) of these respondents were between the ages of 14 and 24.
- 79% had at least one child who was actively participating in the program for which they were volunteering (i.e., Scouts or Girl Guides). Almost all (94%) of these respondents were over the age of 24; 67% were between the ages of 35 and 54.

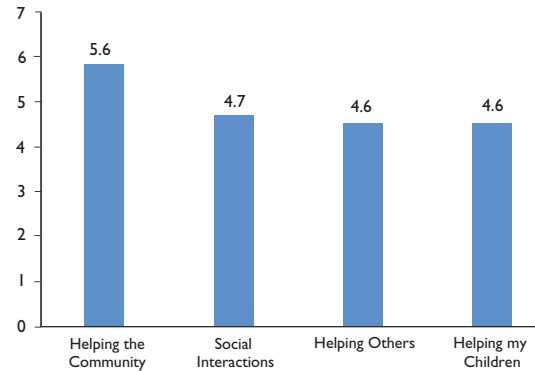
Why do People Volunteer for Youth-Oriented Programs?

The four most important reasons respondents gave for volunteering were:

- 1. Helping the Community.** The benefits a particular organization provided to the community in which volunteers lived was the strongest motive for volunteering in youth-oriented programs.

¹ A total of 2,000 people were mailed questionnaires between July and October 2003; 1,119 people responded, for a response rate of 56%.

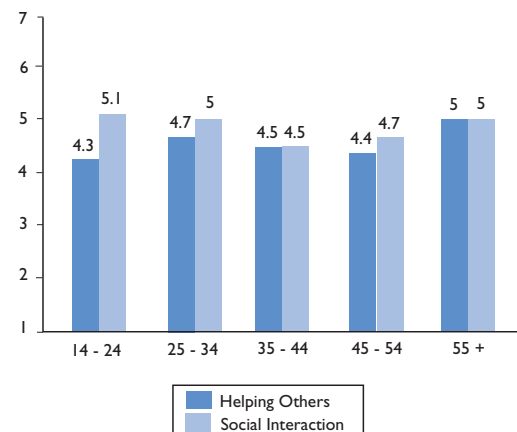
Top Motives for Volunteering in Youth-Oriented Programs



- 2. Social Interactions.** Volunteering for youth-oriented programs provided participants with a place to meet others or make new friends. Further investigation indicated that the importance of this factor varied by the age of the volunteer. Volunteers who were younger than 35 and older than 54 assigned greater importance to this motivation than did other volunteers.

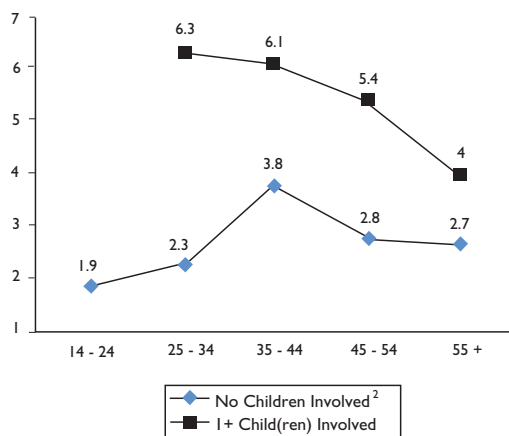
- 3. Helping Others.** Helping others, particularly the less fortunate, was also important for those volunteering in youth-oriented programs. A closer look at this factor indicated that its importance also varied by age. Volunteers who were younger than 35 and older than 54 assigned greater importance to this motivation than did other volunteers.

Importance of "Helping Others" and "Social Interaction" by Age



4. Helping Their Own Children. An important motive for many who volunteered in youth-oriented programs was to ensure that their children would be provided with a good experience. The relative importance of this motivation varied by the age of the volunteer, by whether or not the volunteer was a parent, and by whether or not the volunteer had children participating in the program. Individuals who had children participating in the program were more likely to say that *helping my children* was a strong reason for volunteering, as were individuals between the ages of 35 and 44. Individuals between the ages of 35 and 44 who had children participating in the program were the most likely to assign great importance to this reason. This motive loses strength as people age.

Importance of "Helping my Children" as a function of Age and Whether Their Children are Involved



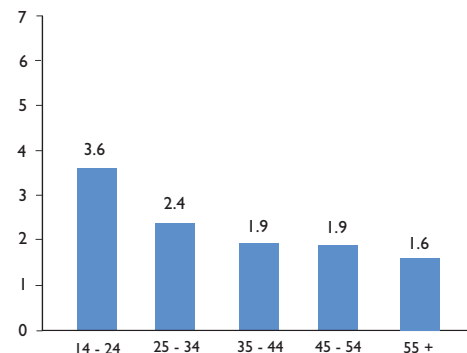
² Respondents may see their volunteering as providing a benefit for their children in some way, even though their children are not directly involved.

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5. Career Advancement. Although *career advancement* was overall a less important motivation for volunteering, it was relatively more important for those between the ages of 14 and 24.

Importance of "Career Advancement" by Age



Recommendations

What does this mean for organizations that want to recruit volunteers for youth-oriented programs? Here are some suggestions:

- The parents of children who participate in youth-oriented programs represent a responsive pool of prospective volunteers. Although it is always advantageous to highlight the benefits the local community receives from youth-oriented programs, many parents will respond more readily if the benefits to their own children are highlighted.
- The benefits of social interaction and the opportunity to help others should be stressed for older adults.
- Young adults should not be overlooked as a potential group of volunteers. In addition to highlighting how volunteering provides opportunities to help the community and others, and allows for social interaction, recruiters should point out the benefits of volunteering for career development.

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