

Recruiting, Selecting, Training, and Retaining Volunteers

Julie Broadwell, MS, LSW
Behavioral Connections
PO Box 29
Bowling Green, OH 43402
jbroadwe@bc.wcnet.org

The presenter has worked with volunteers for over 14 years and most of it has been really fun! This workshop will go into detail about how to handle the ever-present pressures of running a 24-hour advocacy program which has volunteers taking over the crisis contacts after-hours and on the weekends. The advocacy program works primarily with sexual assault and domestic violence victims; clients range from teenagers to elderly citizens, although the majority of clients are in their 20s to 50s. The volunteer advocates range in age from 20s to 50s, with the majority in their 20s (most are university students when they start their volunteer training).

Once the need for volunteers is identified, where does a program coordinator go from there? The recruitment process can be overwhelming but has over the years gotten quite a bit easier and quicker with the tools available on the internet. Examples of these will be given. Ideas which have been tried in the past and not always worked so well will also be shared.

What is the right way to screen for volunteers without breaking the bank? In the earlier days, we just trusted that someone was “okay”—now we go the route of background checks. Also, what types of questions are asked in volunteer interviews? If you’re adept at interviewing, you can find out a lot about a person and whether it is a good match for them to be helping victims of crime (how do you say “no” to those you can’t accept into training?). The application and interview process will be provided.

How many volunteers is a good number to take into training? Our program selects potential volunteers critically and then expects that all will pass the training and become volunteer advocates for a year. Other programs take anyone who is interested, have bigger classes, and anticipate that some will drop out, leaving the best. Both approaches will be explored and input from the audience sought.

What constitutes a good training program? Our program will be explored in detail: the application, interview, training manual, classroom agenda, self-guided tour, hotline observation, lectures, tours, role-play groups, checklist, written evaluation, and oral evaluation which combine for 40 hours of training. Volunteer coordinators in the audience will be asked to critique our current training and offer their ideas.

What is done to retain these volunteers? Volunteer coordinators must find ways to show the volunteers how much their efforts are appreciated; our plan will be explored: the advocate photo board, task designations, photo album, timesheet summaries, monthly tally sheet, Advocate of the Month award, e-mails, volunteer board, annual volunteer banquet, gifts/certificates, voting for Advocate of the Year, etc. What works really well and what other ideas have been abandoned will be open to critique. The other side of retaining is evaluation; how to get through this, be honest but not have volunteers quit.

Those who currently supervise volunteers are encouraged to bring what has worked for them. Those who are thinking about starting a volunteer program are encouraged to come with lots of questions and an open mind.