



An Exploratory Study of

Volunteer Satisfaction

At Literacy Volunteers
Of Charlottesville/Albemarle
(LVCA)



Introduction

- Who I am and why this is important to me




Practical Problem

- Nonprofits that use volunteers for service delivery are negatively affected by turnover. How can organizations improve volunteer satisfaction so that volunteers remain in the program longer?



Goal:


- Understand and learn more about the **volunteer experience** at LVCA
(450 active volunteers)


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- Mission of the organization is to teach **adults** how to read, write, and speak English to become better workers, parents, and citizens.
 - We use trained volunteer tutors to deliver this service.
 - Volunteers commit to minimum of 2 hours per week for an entire year.



■ Scope and scale:

- 32 Community-Based Literacy Organizations in Virginia serving 14,000 adult learners
- Similar literacy organizations across the US, many descendants of “Literacy Volunteers of America”
- Relevant to other types of nonprofits that use volunteers for sustained delivery of services

- 
- **Staff & Board of Directors** consider it a problem to continually recruit and train volunteers
 - Training is expensive
 - We value institutional knowledge
 - It is a problem for **learners** if their tutor leaves
 - **Good PR** if volunteers are satisfied

- 
- Assumption: Retention is a primary indicator of volunteer satisfaction.
 - (not true)

 - Assumption: Satisfied volunteers make better teachers. Our clients will be better served by enthusiastic volunteers.
 - Probably true. More research needed.

Why should we care?

- Our sector is voluntary in nature—we should understand the volunteer experience better to make informed decisions.
- Economic value of volunteer hours at LVCA = \$814,449* (2x annual budget)

(Independent Sector, 2018)



Previous Research and Literature

- Best Practices in Volunteer Satisfaction
 - Original motivation for volunteering matters
(Volunteering meets a need in his or her life)

(Clary, et al., 1992)



Previous Research and Literature

- Best Practices for Volunteer Satisfaction
 - Training matters

(Belzer, 2006)



Previous Research and Literature

- Best Practices for Volunteer Satisfaction
 - Recognition and appreciation matters
(Hager and Brudney, 2004)



Previous Research and Literature

- Best Practices for Volunteer Satisfaction

- Screening and matching volunteers to appropriate task matters

(Hager and Brudney, 2004)



Previous Research and Literature

- My project is relevant to the existing body of literature because
 - There are not many studies specifically relevant to Literacy organizations, even though volunteers do the bulk of the work in these programs
 - **LVCA tutors prioritized different aspects of the volunteer experience than expected.**

Method: 20+ years of quantitative data

Reason for Leaving	All Tutors n = 1642		Tutors 2012-2018 n = 899	
Dissatisfied with experience	47	2.86%	37	4.11%
Fulfilled commitment	328	19.97%	135	15%
Health reasons	95	5.78%	46	5.11%
Job conflict	201	12.24%	75	8.34%
Moved/left area	179	10.90%	84	9.34%
Information not available	156	9.50%	105	11.67%
Other	112	6.82%	24	2.66%
Personal problems	54	3.28%	29	3.22%
Schedule conflict	94	5.72%	29	3.22%
Student terminated	31	1.94%	1	0.11%
Transportation problems	4	0.24%	2	0.22%
Never started after training	31	1.88%	25	2.78%
Still active in program	341	20.76%	307	34.14%

Method: 12 volunteer interviews

(28 emailed interview requests yielded 12 interviews)



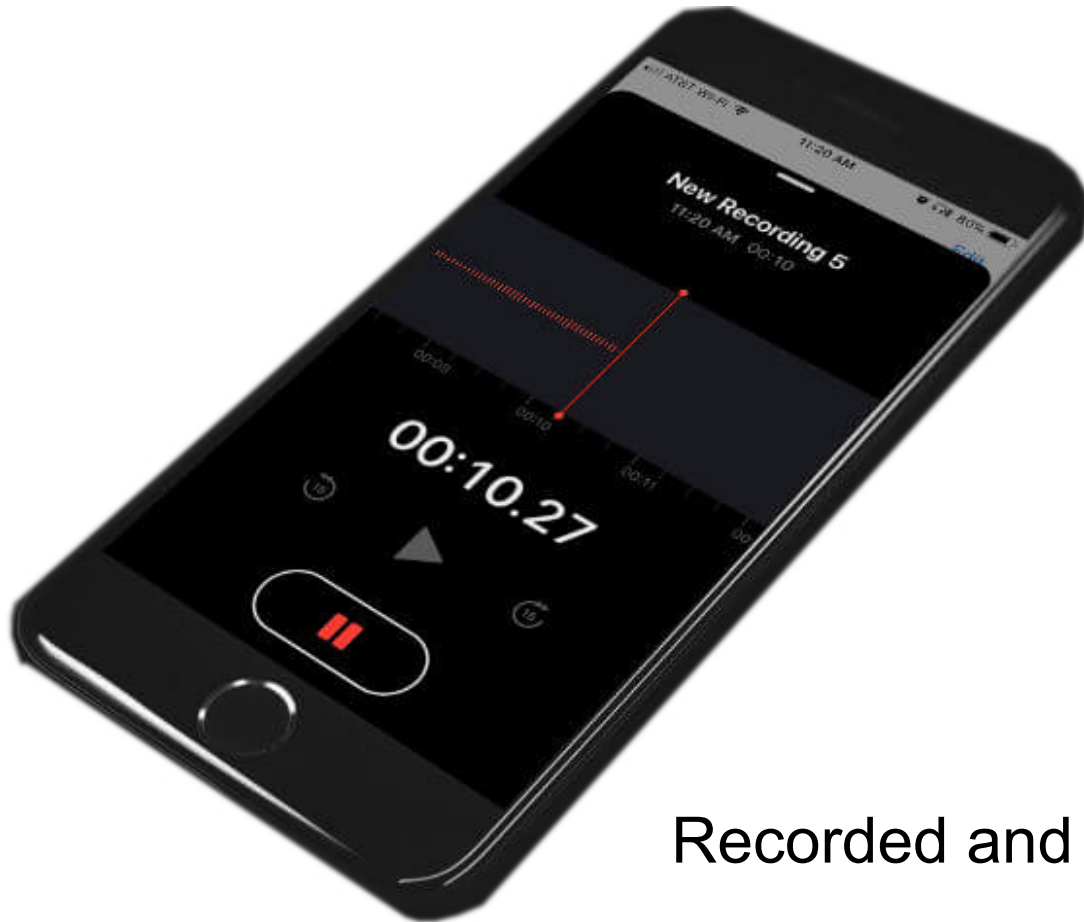


Method: Selection of Participants

- 3 who left “dissatisfied with program”
- 5 who left after they “fulfilled commitment”
- 4 who are still active in the program

- Demographics matched overall tutor base

Method: The Interviews



Recorded and transcribed

Method: Identifying Themes

and had had a little bit of training in it. So since I wasn't finding work in other ways it was appealing to me to volunteer and see even how English is taught as opposed to French. So that was one of the reasons, but I had just moved to Charlottesville and did want to get involved in a nonprofit in one capacity or another, so it kind of served two purposes, one for me personally to get some direction in my life, and that's how I was really looking to move in the direction of teaching English as a Second Language, but in the meantime things have come together for my French. So that's the direction I ended up taking.

EO: Did the experience meet your expectations?

SB: Yes, it did. I felt like the training was very adequate, I brought to it some of my own teacher training, I've taken a number of methodology classes, and my language teaching training ... so I brought that in, but I found that you all supplied a very good training and I had attended one of the training sessions anyway I felt like it was ongoing as well during the year that I was teaching there. I felt like. From my perspective it definitely met me and also the resources you all provided, it seemed like the office is well equipped and you all had what I needed. It felt like there was a lot of support for the teachers.

EO: Interactions with staff?

SB: Gosh, extremely friendly. I can't remember any names. Whoever sits at the main desk. As a receptionist, always quick to point me in the direction of anything I needed, very friendly. Knew who I was, I didn't feel like a stranger coming in, always quick to help me find a room, because it was always pretty busy. Whoever was there was very quick to help me get set up with what I needed. I remember meeting the director, he was brand new then had just come in, so I could appreciate his position that year as he was getting established and I had the sense that the office worked well together. So, um, You know, the various people who worked in

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:33 PM

Comment [1]: Thinking about teaching ESL as a job

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:33 PM

Comment [2]: Recent Cville transplant

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Comment [3]: Teaching background

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:34 PM

Comment [4]: As a teacher, thought training was adequate

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:34 PM

Comment [5]: Ongoing training mentioned twice, perhaps guilt for not attending others. Implied she did, but no record of it.

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:34 PM

Comment [6]: Office well equipped

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:35 PM

Comment [7]: Support for teachers

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:35 PM

Comment [8]: Can't remember names

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:35 PM

Comment [9]: Staff knew who she was

Ellen Osbo..., 11/4/2018 11:36 PM

Comment [10]: Space issue, but easily resolved

Method: Responses Distilled

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Demographics	original motivation	meet expectations?	Training	materials	staff	feel appreciated?	Self competence as instructor	Student Match/ relationship	What could have made it better?	Other
9	58 hours										
10	Disatisfied with experience				Library "worthless" compared to Northside, and compared to the internet. Didn't find specifics there.	Minimal interaction with staff.	Very little interaction with Steven. A few emails before and after test time. But I never initiated any communication.		Albermarle generous in giving resources. I would like to know if he's moved up in testing.	He called me teacher but I thought we were friends. He would tell me personal stuff, all about his life and family. He sent so much money back to his family in mexico. There's so much we don't know about the rest of the world.	
11					There weren't enough.				Family dynamic is so different with Latinos in general. Everybody lived at their house. Lots of children there. Lived in Standardville.		
12									Car dealership-- 27% interest on a car. Ugh. Looked it up. It's legal to charge that much. How do you get out from under something like that?		
13											
14											
16	Sally Barstow	Thinking about teaching ESL as a job	Yes	As a teacher, I thought the Training was adequate	Office well equipped	Can't remember names	Enjoyed the group event	yes	Student very busy		Personal gain from experience
17	61		Student did not meet expectations		Felt like there was a lot of support for teachers	Staff knew who she was		Needed to be diligent about keeping up with training.	Discrepancy in income		
18	White	Recent Civilie transplant		In-service training mentioned several times, led to believe she participated but didn't	Space issue, but easily resolved by staff	Sense the office worked well together		Planned lessons	felt "incongruous"		
19	Undergrad degree	teaching background		Felt guilt for not attending		Library well equipped			felt deflated		
20	July 2015 to Feb 2017					Used the textbooks given, no complaints			Not who she expected to serve		
21	575 days, only 54 hours								No closure		
22									Need better screening. Student could have paid for services.		
23	Fulfilled commitment								Felt like they were friends		
24									Student was friendly		
25									Should have served other students instead		
26									Connected with student educational level.		
27									Student had emotional and mental health issues-- problem with screening.		
28									Org did what it could do.		
29									More social work than education.		
30	Alan Lane	Trump effect	Program met expectations	Training very good.	Material never gelled with them	Steven very accomodating	Frustrating when student didn't respond to texts.	Lots of feeling of inadequacy.			Doesn't preclude future involvement with org.
31	63	Word of mouth	His own Personal skill level did not meet expectations.	Intimidated by others at training.	Made it up as they went along	Steven did not answer emails		Lack of patience.			Individual is very self-aware, knowledgeable about personal strengths.
32	white				Materials not appropriate						
33	some college										
34	Feb- Oct 2017										
35	251 days										
36	30 hours										
37											
38											
39											
40											
41											
42											
43											
44	disatisfied with experience										
45											
46											
47	Ella Reed	Wordplay	I think so	Good job painting a clear picture of what to expect	Books, not thrilled with. Starting from scratch, "the whole conversational method was difficult"	Usually didn't see daytime people, but there was always someone at the desk.	Yes, appreciated by staff. Clear that the staff understands tutors are the backbone and felt like a rockstar.	Wish I could have done more to help her.	appreciated the oppty to choose student		
48	44	"I could do that"	I wondered how well I did as a tutor	Catering Lunch nice	Lot to go over		We were recognized and got ribbons at Wordplay.	Not speaking the language was tough.	Close relationship		
49	white				Needed a more structured textbook		To stick with it, you have to feel like it's important beyond the student. I realize there's an entire organization	What have I taught her?	Knew things about her life		
					did not understand what levels were	generated a lot of material's myself			aside from the language barrier, could have done to help with		



Findings

- What the literature told me was going to be important was not identified as important to these volunteers. Listening to the individual LVCA volunteers was important.



Findings

- Retention did not completely correlate to satisfaction.
 - Some who left intend to return
 - Some who left “dissatisfied” wanted to support the organization in other ways.

Findings

- Original **motivation** for volunteering had little effect on volunteer satisfaction.
- Tutors thought the **training** was fine.
- Tutors thought the amount of **recognition** they received was fine.
- Tutors who had trouble with the task identified they lacked patience and should have **screened** themselves out

Findings: **Keys to satisfaction**

- Primary keys to satisfaction were:
 - Success of the student (Ego-driven)
 - Relationship with the student

Neither of these topics were substantially addressed in previous literature.

Findings: Keys to satisfaction

- Success of the student

“I thought I could do it, I tried to motivate him...
I was frustrated with not being able to
accomplish my goal.” (*tutor R.C.*)

Findings: Keys to satisfaction

- Success of the student

“The best motivator is success.”

(tutor D.H.)



Findings: Keys to satisfaction

- Relationship with the student

“She called me the other day... and it really touched me that she would reach out again and give me an update on how things were going for her.”

(tutor L.C., speaking about a former student)



Findings: Keys to satisfaction

- Relationship with the student

“We were from different parts of the world but cut from the same cloth.”

(tutor M.H., speaking about her student)

Findings: Similar annoyances



Space



Materials



Student
Habits



Understanding the volunteer experience:

- We're asking volunteers to participate in a deeply personal activity
 - Relationships are important
 - Success is important because the tutor doesn't want to let the student down

Study's significance:

- Organizations: No study I found had included 12 volunteer voices.
 - What the tutors said needs to be heard.
- Practitioners: I received concrete ideas for program improvement.
- Communities: How to assign value to the experience for both beneficiaries?
 - Program also fulfills a need for the volunteers.



Next steps for program:

- Think about what is appropriate size for the organization
- Fix annoyances
 - Screen students better
 - Explain curriculum better
 - More staff availability (opportunities for informal conversations)




Next steps for future research:

- Relationship b/w volunteer satisfaction and learner improvement
- Study organizational growth
 - How big is too big?
 - Replication vs. Expansion



My “takeaways”

- Conduct interviews every year
(12 more underway now)
- Bigger is not always better
- Don't assume volunteers will ask for help



What are your questions?
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