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)
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

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

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- 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 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...
## Method: Responses Distilled

**Selena Blanco**
- **Position:** Teacher
- **Background:** Recent College graduate

**Travis Bryant**
- **Position:** Program coordinator
- **Background:** Bachelor's degree in education

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**Populating the spreadsheet based on responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Trends</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Profession</td>
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**Key Findings**

- **Student engagement:** Low engagement with materials.
- **Teacher feedback:** Lack of student engagement in discussions.
- **Classroom management:** Strategies to enhance student engagement.

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**Conclusion**

- Strategies to improve student engagement and retention.
- Ongoing monitoring of progress and adjustments as necessary.

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**Notes**

- Additional comments from students to support feedback.
- Challenges faced in implementing strategies.

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**Appendix**

- Detailed analysis of student survey responses.
- Strategies for enhancing engagement.

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**References**

- Educational Psychology Resources
- Student Engagement Best Practices

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**Acknowledgements**

- Support from the faculty and administration.
- Funding from the Educational Development Fund.
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.
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

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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.
- **Practicioners**: 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?
ellen@literacyforall.org