AN EXPLORATION OF NONPROFIT HUMAN SERVICE VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND RETENTION

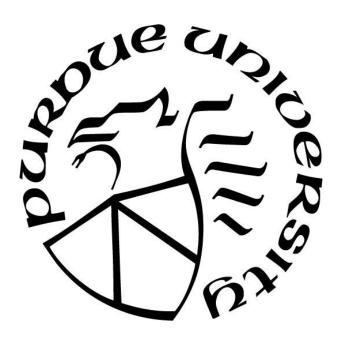by

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For everyone who supported me.

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ABSTRACT

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This study was an exploration of nonprofit human service volunteer training as related to the retention of volunteers. In their pursuit to fulfill client needs, human service nonprofit organizations often rely heavily on volunteers, which emphasizes the need for a better understanding of the means through which organizations may affect positively the retention rates of volunteers. Training long has been thought to be an effective tool for decreasing attrition and engaging volunteers. By investigating the training experiences of volunteers with a focus on retention, this study hoped to further develop the research community's understanding of how training helps or hinders volunteer retention and may serve as the basis for further research on the link between training design and retention.

CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are critical to the success of many nonprofit human service (HS) organizations. Given the nonprofit sector's heavy reliance on volunteers, retention of the volunteer workforce is crucial for the timely and effective provision of human services that often provide for basic human needs, including food and shelter. Volunteer turnover affects not only quality of services provided but the costs associated with recruiting and training volunteers (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001), which may threaten an organization's financial footing. Training and professional development are common strategies suggested for improving the retention rates.

Despite the importance of retention and a general consensus of training as necessary for volunteer retention, at the time of this study, it appeared that the development of best practices for training HS volunteers had not occurred, nor had the supporting research for their development. Research on the loss of volunteers in the earliest stages of volunteering, including the period post-training but pre-service, was seldom connected more than peripherally to the quality or content of training programs (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Long-term retention through professional development was rarely mentioned. A thorough review of volunteer retention literature showed that there had been little research on the topic of training as it relates to retention of nonprofit HS volunteers. Rather, literature at the time focused on one or a combination of retention factors that may relate to training: motivation (Phillips & Phillips, 2011; Ferriera, Proença, & Proença, 2015; Skoglund, 2006), satisfaction (Saksida, Alfes, & Shantz, 2016; Studer, 2016; Hyde, Dunn, Wust, Bax, & Chambers, 2016), and socialization (Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009; McBride & Lee, 2012; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore volunteer perceptions of training and retention in nonprofit HS organizations, adding to the knowledge needed to create best practices for volunteer training.

1.1   Research Question

How does training help or hinder the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers?

1.2   Scope

This phenomenological case study examined, through a lens of retention, the volunteer training experiences in a single nonprofit HS organization in the Midwestern United States. Through interviews, focus groups, and participant-observation of the training process, the researcher examined how training relates to the desire to continue or discontinue volunteer efforts. Close attention was given to the duration of participant activity as well, determining potential short-term and long-term impact of the training program on volunteer retention. Effort was made to include individuals at various stages of the volunteer process rather than taking the more traditional approach of following a set of volunteers from beginning to end of service.

1.3   Significance

As mentioned, the nonprofit sector relies heavily on volunteers. In 2012, over 11 million people were employed by nonprofits in the U.S. with total annual wages of $532 billion (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), while recent nonprofit volunteers numbered 62.2 million people and an estimated value of $184 billion (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2016). Nonprofit organizations in general utilize volunteers in higher numbers than paid employees, and the estimated value of work provided is $23.59 per hour. Understandably, the loss of these workers could have a significant negative impact on an organization and its clients, and the higher an organization's reliance on volunteers, the more critical the need for volunteer retention becomes.

Between 2009 and 2010, the national retention rate for volunteers was 63.5%, a decrease from the rate of 65.5% between 2008 and 2009 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011). The retention rates fluctuate significantly when examined by demographic categories including age, state, and educational background. A better understanding of how training experiences relate to retention may permit future development of training programs targeted for volunteers at high risk of attrition based on demographic information. For instance, differences in the needs of young volunteers and seniors have been well documented in the past 10 years (Hong, et al., 2009; Sellon, 2014; Waters & Bortree, 2010; Luping, 2011). With a deeper understanding of how to meet these needs in training and development programs, effective methods may be developed specifically for these groups.

1.4   Definitions

Long-Term—the duration of volunteer activity falling into the Established Volunteering (one

year of service) and Retiring (beyond one year) stages (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008).

Motivation—the "process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Pintrich &

Schunk, 1996).

Satisfaction—an "affective or attitudinal reaction to" volunteer work or "cluster of evaluative

feelings" about volunteer work, relating to whether an individual desires to "stay with

[…] or quit" a position (Spector, 1985).

Short-Term—the duration of volunteer activity falling into the Newcomer (entrance to three

months) and Emotional Involvement (four to eight months) stages (Haski-Leventhal &

Bargal, 2008).

Socialization—is "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills

necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; p. 211).

Volunteer—a person participating in "freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend

over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation […] through

formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of […] individuals who desire assistance"

(Snyder & Omoto, 2008; p. 3-5).

1.5   Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included the following:

- There was a need for further understanding of nonprofit HS volunteer training
  experiences and how the experiences relate to the desire to continue or discontinue
  service.
- By exploring participant attitudes and expectations toward training, the study deepened
  the research community's understanding of training design as it relates to retention.
- A qualitative phenomenological case study was appropriate for exploring the research
  question.
- The organization had a training program in place at the time of the study.
- Participants responded honestly during interviews and focus group discussions.

- Participants were available to take part in an interview, any necessary follow-up interviews, and/or focus group discussions.
- The number of participants in the study was adequate for facilitation of analysis and appropriate for the type of research being conducted.

1.6   Limitations

The study's limitations included the following:

- The research was limited to one organization.
- The research was limited to participants who were available at the time of the study.
- The research was limited to the topics of training and retention.

1.7   Delimitations

The study's delimitations were as follows:

- The research did not examine the organization's retention rate.
- The research did not measure the retention rate of participants.
- The research did not follow volunteers from beginning to end of service.

1.8   Summary

HS volunteer retention is of crucial importance to nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve. An examination of volunteer training experiences with respect to retention may provide unique insights into the role of training as a tool for promoting retention. The purpose of this study was to conduct such an examination, exploring volunteer experiences with an organization's training process and developing an understanding of how perceptions of training relate to the desire to continue or discontinue volunteer service.

CHAPTER 2.   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Nonprofit human service organizations rely heavily on volunteers, and the expenses incurred through the volunteer training process amplifies the importance of retention. A review of the literature on human service volunteer retention shows three key factors recurring around the globe and across fields of research: motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. This paper explores these factors and their interrelationships as well as implications for training program design. The small number of studies focused specifically on retention as it relates to training illustrates a gap in the recent research and may be an appropriate avenue for future research. (Lowenberg-DeBoer & Akdere, 2018, p. 20)

Above is the abstract of the researcher's previously published literature review, "Integrated Review of Volunteer Retention and Implications", first appearing in the *International Journal of Volunteer Administration* (Lowenberg-DeBoer & Akdere, 2018). The following is a summary of that review.

Underserved populations often have their basic needs met by nonprofit human service organizations. The organizations may offer the life-sustaining provisions of food, shelter, and medical care or provide services that prepare the underprivileged to fill their own needs, such as child care, adult education courses, various types of counseling, and afterschool programs. The services provided by these organizations are of critical importance to both individuals and the communities where they live, especially in countries with high levels of privatization of human services. For many nonprofit human service organizations, volunteers are crucial for the delivery of services. Because grants often include stipulations about how organizations can spend funds, budgets tend to be tight in the nonprofit sector, and staffing is a major expense for any type of organization. To cope with the economic realities of the nonprofit sector, organizations often utilize volunteers to lessen financial strain. However, training volunteers is costly, an issue compounded by high turnover rates (Pichler, Varma, Yu, Beenen, & Davoudpour, 2014; Selden, Lee, & Thompson, 2013; Selden & Sowa, 2015). It is important to train volunteers with retention in mind because a decrease in the number of volunteers trained will reduced training expenses

and may permit human service organizations to use funds to fulfill their missions, saving lives and improving the quality of life for the underprivileged.

Though retention is linked to training, little research completed in recent years connected the two in theory or in practice. Further, most available literature on the topic of volunteer retention linked training to the early stages of volunteering (i.e. short-term retention). The research had not explored the long-lasting effects of training on retention (i.e. long-term retention). This could be important, as lessons or skills learned during initial training may remain relevant for a volunteers' experience, regardless of the duration of service. The effect of cross-functional or continued training on long-term retention also had not been fully explored.

Though the literature had not exposed the full effect of training on volunteer retention in human service organizations, this review identified three common factors that researchers found to be crucial to volunteer retention: motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. This review included the motivation, satisfaction, and socialization factors as well as training-specific research findings and implications of the current literature for the design of training programs.

2.1   Search Methods

The researchers performed searches of scholarly content using several methods, including by-proxy Google Scholar searches as well as individual searches of relevant journals such as *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Journal of Nonprofit Management*, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, and *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. Using all available resources of the University of Phoenix and Purdue University libraries, the search located books, peer-reviewed full-text journal articles, theses, and dissertations from over 300 online information services. The keywords used include training, "volunteer retention", "human service", not-for-profit, nonprofit, non-profit, learning, and/or "learning theory". Because recent research was the researchers' primary interest, only publications between 2006 and 2016 were included. When possible, only research focused on human service organizations was considered, but if particularly relevant, findings from research encompassing other types of nonprofit organizations were included.

2.2   Scope of Literature Review

Though the literature search was extensive, only 50 sources were found on the topic of training and retention of nonprofit human service volunteers. The two most prominent fields were sports and medical volunteerism. Though the research goal does not include highlighting work from specific fields of research, the findings from both medical and sports volunteerism studies have been included. Some recurring topics were present in the literature, including burnout and retention of elderly and young volunteers, both of which are represented peripherally. Because motivation, satisfaction and socialization are experienced across nationalities and cultures, sources from around the globe have been included as well, some of which are case studies in particular countries while others have a global focus. Despite these inclusions, this review's primary focus is the retention of volunteers at nonprofit human service organizations, the role training serves in their retention, and any implications for the design of training programs.

2.3   Training-Specific Literature

Despite the lack of focus on training in the volunteer retention literature, researchers frequently commented on the importance of training and tended to agree that it is important for volunteer retention. In part, training is crucial because volunteers expect to receive it and want to learn new skills and/or gain new abilities through volunteering (Stirling, Kilpatrick, & Orpin, 2011). If the training expectation is not met, volunteers may discontinue service and search elsewhere for learning experiences. Professional development and learning opportunities in the nonprofit sector have become such a common expectation that even for-profit businesses require or encourage their staff members to engage in philanthropic activities to improve the soft and hard skills of their employees (Perigo, 2010). The business necessity of continued learning and development for employees has led to for-profit organizations, "developing and implementing training programs or providing such opportunities to their employees in other venues through outsourcing them" (Azevedo & Akdere, 2011, p. 399). One form of this outsourcing occurs when businesses send employees to the nonprofit sector, acquiring assistance for some of their training and learning needs while providing nonprofit organizations with much-needed volunteers. Furthermore, in nonprofit organizations, volunteers feel more committed when they achieve role

mastery, and role mastery requires an effective training program in addition to support from the organization. Considering the increased commitment levels and expectations placed on training in nonprofit organizations, the partial or complete absence of training and/or learning opportunities can be an issue, especially for the retention of volunteers. Volunteers also may feel unsupported and overwhelmed if their training experience consists mostly of hands-on or on-the-job training under the supervision of long-term volunteers or staff members (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008), particularly when their role involves face-to-face client interaction. In other words, hands-on training alone may not be sufficient. Zhou and Shang (2011) found that volunteers who receive insufficient training for their required tasks struggle or fail in their roles and burnout faster than volunteers who are well-trained.

The importance of initial training is undeniable. However, opportunities for continued learning are also important, and volunteers may require further training as they near the critical burnout stage. The two key benefits of providing learning opportunities after a volunteer begins service are improved skills and experience enrichment, both of which benefit the volunteer and the organization. A case study by Stamer, Lerdall, and Guo (2008) found the practice of offering continued training to be a "very important factor" for 59% of the volunteers who continued service with an organization. Research also confirms that the absence of training and learning opportunities leads to higher volunteer attrition rates. Jansen (2010) found that volunteer burnout begins to occur in volunteers who work as little as 10 hours per week for 10 months. This burnout happens when the emotional cost and stress begin to lower satisfaction levels, and as mentioned, inadequate training can lead volunteers to feel overwhelmed and experience burnout more quickly than they would otherwise. This is particularly true for volunteers involved in social work requiring direct contact with clients. For instance, Andrea Galiette Skoglund (2006) conducted an empirical study on the retention of grief counselors and found that insufficient training was the most common reason for the volunteers' burnout.

2.4   Retention Factors

Though retention literature emphasized numerous important elements necessary for the continued service of volunteers, the three most common and, perhaps, most fundamental were motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. Each of the factors individually had abundant representation in the literature, but many studies illustrated that the factors overlap in significant

ways. The connection between motivation and satisfaction was possibly the most obvious and, based on the literature, may have the strongest relationship among the factors. If an organization fails to provide volunteers with a means of acting on their motivation, the volunteers will be less satisfied with the experience of volunteering (Hyde, Dunn, Wust, Bax, & Chambers, 2016), whereas volunteers experience increased levels of satisfaction when their motivation is realized (Ferriera, Proença, & Proença, 2015). Another common link between motivation and satisfaction was that *self*-satisfaction frequently is considered to be a motivational factor (Phillips & Phillips, 2011; Waikayi, Fearon, Morris, & McLaughlin, 2012). Several different studies identified connections between feelings of satisfaction and the socialization process (Huynh, Metzer, & Winefield, 2011; Hyde et al., 2016), and motivations that included getting to know an organization's staff members and becoming involved with a particular organization indicated some degree of overlap between socialization and motivation as well.

2.4.1   Motivation Factor

A great deal of retention research focused on the motivation factor. Though numerous motivational elements existed in the research, the most common were altruism, social, and learning motivations. Researchers described altruism in many ways, but in general, the altruistic motivation to volunteer relates to the values and desire of an individual to help those in need and/or the community as a whole. Social motivations encompass the desire to build intrapersonal relationships and create strong ties within a volunteer's community as well as encouragement by acquaintances or family members to participate in volunteer activities. The motivation to learn relates most strongly to training, as this element is comprised of the desire to practice skills, gain new skills or abilities, and possibly boost a volunteer's career or improve his or her quality of life. Retention rates will increase if training programs address these motivational elements.

The motivation to volunteer was sometimes treated as distinct from the motivation to continue service. The motivation to continue service is crucial to understanding the importance of training for volunteer retention, whereas initial motives for volunteering are important considerations for recruitment. However, the initial motivation to volunteer may relate to retention as well because volunteers may discontinue service if the training does not adequately meet their learning needs or indicates that their motivations will not be realized through service at an organization. This could explain some of the attrition that occurs after completion of

training but prior to volunteer service. Because both motivation to volunteer and motivation to continue service may be important considerations for understanding the relationship between retention and training, both elements were included in this review and identified when researchers specified a focus on one or the other.

2.4.1.1   Altruism

Altruism is one of the most obvious motivations for human service volunteering and also one of the most commonly studied and cited reasons for volunteer service. However, the terminology used to describe altruistic motives vary. Many volunteers become involved with nonprofit human service organizations because they want to "make a difference" as well as develop an understanding of underlying social issues to better provide for the needs of the underprivileged (Bright, Shovali, & Cooper, 2016). The desire to help or make a difference is the primary reason for service for most volunteers, as confirmed by several studies. For example, Phillips and Phillips (2011) found that the primary motivation for 94.8% of participating volunteers was to help individuals and improve their communities. However, there is some degree of overlap between motivation and satisfaction retention factors with regard to altruism, as the desire to help people and develop deep connections within the community leads to self-satisfaction and can be considered a form of personal gain as well (Bright et al., 2016). Though the development of deep connections within the community could be considered "social", the altruism and social motivations are distinct from one another. For the altruism motivational element, the goal of social interactions is not to develop friendships but to improve the community or the lives of those within the community. The literature indicated that effective training programs may address a volunteer's altruistic motivation by explaining the level of need in the community, how the organization helps, and who specifically benefits from the organization's work.

2.4.1.2   Social

Opportunities to be social and connect with other people is a strong motivation for many volunteers. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) found that the two primary motivations during the earliest stage of volunteering (i.e. the pre-service stage) were social and altruistic. Desired social opportunities may include the development of relationships with an organization's staff

members and leaders in the community as well as friendships with fellow volunteers. A desire to build friendships and even develop new romantic relationships were found to be associated with the desire to initiate the process of volunteer signup. This may signify that initial training should inform volunteers that they will work closely with others during service or include social elements through group training and/or volunteer mentor activities. The development of social skills and gaining experience through interactions with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds appeals to many volunteers as well (Waikayi et al., 2012), particularly young volunteers with less life experience and a stronger need for soft skill development. Volunteers also want to build relationships with an organization's clients, but as mentioned, this aspect is most closely related to altruism because the volunteers' desire to be social with clients is in an effort to make a difference in their lives, help, or even "save" them (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Organizations may improve their retention rates by emphasizing opportunities to build relationships and providing opportunities for volunteers to socialize amongst themselves or with staff members (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007a).

2.4.1.3   Learning

Volunteers want opportunities to learn and develop new skills and abilities, which provides the most obvious connection between the motivation retention factor and training programs for volunteers. McBride and Lee (2012) found that organizations retain more volunteers when they provide mentors and align career interests with service tasks, permitting the development of professional skills that may be useful outside the volunteer service setting. Young volunteers are especially interested in learning through volunteer work, as many cite the development of new skills with professional applications as a key reason for volunteering (Waikayi et al., 2012). Further, entering an organization to gain experience in a work environment is a chief form of motivation for volunteers up to the age of 25. Because the primary motivation for young people is to gain work experience, durations of service for the demographic may be shorter than is typical for older volunteers, suggesting the value of short-term volunteer tracks for students (Bright et al., 2016). Though the duration of service may be short for young volunteers, training should not be shortened for them, as the presence of learning opportunities is a major consideration for their continued service. Older volunteers might find a short training session sufficient, but younger volunteers desire a deep understanding of the tasks

they perform (Stirling et al., 2011). Because the desired depth and quality of training is dependent on age, the literature implies that providing elective training and development opportunities could increase both short- and long-term volunteer retention, particularly among young people for whom it could provide motivation for continued service.

2.4.2 Satisfaction Factor

The satisfaction factor relates closely to both the motivation and socialization factors, as elements of motivation and satisfaction play a role in the satisfaction levels of volunteers. Research found that social opportunities and enjoyment (Hyde et al., 2016) as well as increased job autonomy and other task-related traits (Ching-Fu & Ting, 2014) have led to high satisfaction levels for volunteers. The need for clear expectations regarding the volunteer environment and the volunteer's role in the organization were frequent findings for research on the satisfaction retention factor as well. Informing volunteers of the specific responsibilities, requirements, and role boundaries is a crucial component of training (Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009) that organizations may overlook in an effort to engage volunteers in service delivery as quickly as possible. Burke (2015) recommends "creating routines" during training, in addition to establishing expectations, to ensure the retention of volunteers and the sustainability of volunteer programs. Though the creation of a fun, entertaining, and social initial training experience could create a false impression of volunteer work, which often involves serious social issues, orientation programs that inform volunteers of the necessary structural elements as well as opportunities for fun and/or social activities occurring through the process of volunteer work could lead to higher retention rates while avoiding, during training, an upbeat tone that conflicts with the tone of service.

Because altruism is an essential element of motivation that may not be fulfilled during orientation training, it is crucial for organizations to inform volunteers of the importance of their service to individuals and/or the community. Volunteers will be most satisfied with their work if they believe that the tasks they perform are useful and help people, which highlights the importance of explaining how the tasks or the volunteers' role affects the clients. Communicating the value and significance of volunteer contributions to an organization, individuals, and/or community has been shown to foster commitment to the organization (Ching-Fu & Ting), and in this way, the information relates strongly to both the satisfaction factor and

the socialization factor. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) illustrated, in their research on the five stages of volunteer service, the importance of imparting during training the value and significance of volunteer work. The stages consist of *nominee* (two to three months before volunteering), *newcomer* (entrance to three months of service), *emotional involvement* (four to eight months of service), *established* (one year of service), and *retiring* (two years of service). The study found the lowest levels of volunteer satisfaction occurred during the nominee and newcomer stages because during the application period and earliest months of service, volunteers have not yet seen the positive results of their work. Verbally communicating the importance of their work during training may help to compensate for this. Additionally, the emotional involvement stage showed the highest satisfaction levels because the volunteers by that point had developed a deep connection to the organization as well as the organization's clients, which increased the perceived importance and meaningfulness of the tasks they perform. It is worth noting, however, that the heavy involvement and high satisfaction rate carries an emotional cost for volunteers and contributes to burnout. Continued training, and possibly cross-functional training, may help volunteers learn stress-reducing techniques and/or take a break from the emotional costs while remaining useful at the organization. The research also suggested that highlighting the appreciation for and value of volunteers to the organization could bolster satisfaction levels during training.

2.4.3   Socialization Factor

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) defined socialization as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (p. 211). Developing an understanding of organizational culture is critical for the socialization of new volunteers. Nelson, Netting, Borders, and Huiber (2004) conducted a study in Oregon's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to discover the reasons for attrition among its volunteers. 34% of the reasons given for discontinuation of service relate to socialization and the organization itself, including "conflicts with the central office" and "poor program support", which had the highest rates of response as well. For purposes of comparison, only 10% of volunteers discontinued service for personal reasons, such as lack of transportation, conflicting time commitments, and health issues. Fostering a culture that respects and values volunteers and utilizing training programs that illustrate this culture could improve retention. Additionally,

many of the socialization problems could be avoided by explaining during the training process how the volunteers' role supports the staff and relates to organizational structure as well as the lines of communication (i.e. who the volunteers should report to during regular service, emergencies, and any additional exceptional circumstances).

It is important to explain organizational structure and lines of communication during initial training, but the information should continue flowing from staff to volunteers long after the completion of their orientation. Work resources and support from the staff in the form of strong lines of communication and constructive feedback are frequently included as retention criteria (Sellon, 2014; Ching-Fu & Ting, 2014; Studer, 2016). These elements assist in the development of organizational commitment, which is crucial for the retention of volunteers and especially long-term volunteers. While short-term volunteers are engaged through satisfaction and an emphasis on enjoyable and social experiences, the retention of volunteers over a long period of time requires the development of a strong connection to the organization's values and mission (Hyde et al., 2016). This appears to be a universal trait of the volunteer experience, crossing both countries and cultures. For instance, Burke (2015) examined high turnover rates among volunteers in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) program. The program provides organizations with volunteers for scheduled periods of time up to one year. The researcher suggested that the improvement of volunteer commitment requires the preservation of institutional memory, meaning that if the organization's culture is embraced by the more seasoned volunteers, they will be encouraged to share collective experiences and skills with new volunteers. For the new volunteers, this would result in stability and the desire to continue service. The literature implied that emphasis or reemphasis of an organization's values and explanations of how skills and information support its mission, goals, and vision should be a part of all volunteer training and development activities, including continued training efforts for long-term volunteers.

Changes may be necessary if the organization's systems and processes are not congruent with volunteers developing satisfactory levels of commitment. Hong et al. (2009) found that increasing an organization's institutional capacity (i.e. its ability to provide meaningful roles for its volunteers) will maximize the benefits of utilizing volunteers in the delivery of services. Changes that may increase institutional capacity include improved training programs, a greater provision of resources, and increased job flexibility, all of which may meet volunteers' needs and

foster feelings of belonging. An increase in resources alone will not accomplish this, however. Huynh, Metzer, and Winefield (2011) found that the relationship between the provision of resources and both satisfaction and the desire to continue service are mediated by a volunteer's feelings of connectedness to an organization. Commitment and feelings of connectedness may be developed by adopting a positive and friendly volunteer management style (Waikayi et al., 2012). Staff members at human service organizations often work in high-stress environments, which could make friendly and positive interactions with volunteers more difficult to sustain. To offset negative perceptions, communicating stress levels and the daily responsibilities of employees during volunteer training may help to increase empathy for staff members.

2.5   Implications for Training

The training-specific literature suggested that organizations should provide orientation training to new volunteers prior to on-the-job or hands-on training. An orientation training session should be thorough enough for volunteers to understand what is expected of them, who the recipients of service are, and how their volunteer efforts will benefit the recipients, as these elements are crucial for retention and relate to motivation as well as the satisfaction factor. Communicating role specifications prior to hands-on training also will provide volunteers with support that could prevent early burnout. The presence of volunteer mentors during orientation training may help to prepare trainees for the environment in which they will provide services, as volunteer mentors may have insights into topics that would have been helpful for them to know prior to service.

Additionally, orientation provides a means of socialization and serves as an introduction to the organization itself and may increase levels of volunteer satisfaction (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007b). During orientation training, an organization can start the on-boarding process necessary for connectedness and commitment by describing clearly the mission and vision with a level of passion and/or excitement that may foster buy-in and increase a volunteer's desire to be involved with the organization. As mentioned, communicating the volunteer's role in delivering on an organization's mission and vision is important and may strengthen the connectedness a volunteer feels toward the cause as well as the organization (Schmidt & Akdere, 2007). Orientation training is also an opportunity to inform volunteers about lines of communication and the

supervisory structure. Volunteers may feel more supported and/or accepted at an organization if they know who to ask for help or feedback.

For retention, the literature implied that all volunteer training and development activities will be most effective when volunteers participate in teams or groups. This includes cross-functional, orientation, and hands-on training as well as continued development and retraining activities. For orientation training, a team or group learning environment may permit volunteers to feel connected and less lonely prior to hands-on training (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007c). For cross-functional training, retraining, or continued development activities, a group learning environment may reduce stress and increase perceived levels of fun for volunteers. Some icebreaker activities and team-building resources also may be helpful and could create the foundations for relationships that may increase the desire to continue service and deepen feelings of connectedness.

Learning is a strong motivation for volunteering and is the easiest factor to accommodate through various types of training. The literature suggested that recognizing opportunities for 'teaching moments' and permitting volunteers to learn new skills can help improve long-term retention. Saksida, Alfes, and Shantz (2016) found that a volunteer's desire to continue service can be affected positively during orientation training by communicating to new volunteers the skills they will obtain through the orientation process as well as any continued learning activities provided by the organization. This is particularly true when the opportunities for continued learning involve skills and abilities that align with a volunteer's interests.

2.6   Conclusion

At the time of this review, there were gaps in the research on training's role in improving retention rates of nonprofit human service volunteers, indicating a need for further research. The lack of literature on the retention of long-term volunteers through the use of continued training and development activities was noteworthy. Learning opportunities are one of the primary motivations for volunteering, and continued training and development has the potential to increase retention rates and possibly reduce instances of burnout among long-term volunteers. Utilizing the work of Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) as a foundation for further research on volunteer needs at each stage of the volunteer lifecycle could be helpful for the development of training programs for seasoned volunteers. Other underrepresented topics in the current literature

included the phenomenon of post-training but pre-service attrition (i.e. completion of training coupled with the failure to provide volunteer service at the organization) and the association between volunteer retention and learning theories. Additional research in these areas could provide a deeper understanding of volunteer training needs and aid in the creation of more effective volunteer training programs for nonprofit human service organizations.

CHAPTER 3.   METHODOLOGY

How does training help or hinder the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers? Do volunteers perceive certain aspects of training to be more influential than others on their desire to continue service? What training design elements do participants believe best support the decisions to volunteer and continue volunteering? These were the questions investigated in this study. Because the research goal was to understand volunteer lived experiences (phenomenological study) within a single program or "bounded system" of time and place (case study), a phenomenological case study was an appropriate method for this research (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, the phenomenology approach allowed the researcher to explore volunteers' interpretations of their own experiences with training, to discover how their desire to continue service changed over time, and to understand the influence of the training experience on the volunteers' retention. The focus on volunteers with individual motivations, expectations, and needs provided a depth of knowledge on volunteer training and retention experiences at the organization.

3.1   Framework

As described in Chapter 2, a considerable amount of research existed on the topic of volunteer retention, and researchers had investigated the volunteer training process. However, there had been little research on training for retention (Lowenberg-DeBoer & Akdere, 2018). As volunteer attrition had been observed post-training but pre-service, it seemed unusual that the topics had not been studied together and best practices developed based on their relationship. Because volunteers have more freedom to quit than do typical employees, it seemed logical to use retention as a foundation for training design in HS nonprofit organizations.

Previous research on retention had identified three key retention factors: motivation, satisfaction, and socialization. Though this study explored volunteer experiences of training as related to retention in general, the key retention factors were considered as part of that exploration, as they were helpful for identifying training design components that volunteers felt were related to their desire to continue or discontinue service. The expectation was for feelings of satisfaction to be enhanced in the presence of training design elements that volunteers believe

are supportive of their motivation and socialization needs, whereas a training experience that does not touch on the motivation for volunteering or address socialization needs may decrease satisfaction. However, all preconceived notions of the relationship between retention and training were bracketed during data collection.

Retention typically is viewed as a long-term phenomenon, whereas nonprofit organizations may offer only orientation or initial hands-on training, which are short-term and early occurrences. To help bridge this divide, this study included as part of its framework the Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) Volunteering Stages and Transitions Model (VSTM), which linked commitment levels to distinct periods of volunteer service. The model consists of five stages: Nominee (one to two months prior to volunteering), Newcomer (entrance to three months of service), Emotional Investment (four to eight months), Established (one year), and Retiring (one to two years). VSTM also illustrates the socialization needs and motivations associated with each stage of the volunteer lifecycle, and as mentioned previously, socialization and motivation are two of the key factors for retention. Furthermore, VSTM highlights the period immediately following entrance as a crucial time in the cycle because attrition is most likely to occur before the Emotional Investment stage. If volunteers are not accommodated in the Newcomer stage, they will be "ejected", discontinuing service. In addition, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) stated that training is important for this transition from Nominee (pre-service) to Newcomer (entrance). In other words, initial training, in either orientation or hands-on form, serves as a foundation for long-term retention. Through examining volunteer experiences with training at each stage, the researcher used this connection to gain a deeper understanding of *how* training helps or hinders retention. For purposes of discussion, Newcomer and Emotional Involvement stages were considered "short-term", whereas Established Volunteering and Retiring were "long-term".

3.2 Data Sources and Collection

As a participant observer, the researcher took part in the training process and volunteer activities. Volunteer activities included working shifts in the pantry spanning six weeks and totaling over 50 hours. During this time, the researcher participated in multiple roles within the pantry, trained and/or mentored several new volunteers, and became acquainted with fellow volunteers, staff members, and clients. The training process included participation in an online

orientation as well as hands-on training in the food pantry. The researcher created field notes when possible and, after each training experience and shift, wrote journal entries and reflections on the experiences as a participant observer. Additionally, the researcher generated personal interview responses, answering the same questions as interviewed volunteers, to serve as a point of comparison or contrast to the data collected from volunteers. All field notes and journal entries were handwritten and/or typed, as were the interview question responses.

Four volunteers, one from each stage of the volunteer life cycle, participated in post-training, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were used for an in-depth exploration of volunteer experiences. Each interview session was between 60 and 90 minutes in duration, with the long-term volunteers requiring more time to convey their experiences. Both short-term volunteer interviews lasted for approximately one hour, whereas the long-term volunteers each took roughly 90 minutes. Each interview took place near or after the end of the work day to accommodate participants' commitments. The locations for interviews varied, including one interviewees' place of employment, a local library, and an empty office at the organization. The intention was to interview all volunteers offsite and away from the organization for which they volunteer to protect their anonymity. However, many participants found that arrangement too difficult or inconvenient. As a compromise, several interviewees chose to meet with the researcher at the organization after the office had closed for the day. The food pantry was open later than the offices, and as each was a frequent volunteer, participants and researcher entered through the pantry without question. All locations were quiet with minimal distractions. Data was gathered through audio recording and handwritten notes.

To supplement interview data, two focus groups were conducted. The first consisted of eight (8) volunteers from diverse stages in the volunteer life cycle. The data aided in triangulation and provide further insights into the volunteer experiences of training, as related to the desire to continue or discontinue service. Similar to the volunteer interviews, meeting at an offsite location proved too difficult for participants. Following the same process outlined above, the focus group was held in a conference room at the organization after its offices had closed for the night. The duration was roughly 75 minutes. All participants engaged in the focus group from beginning to end, and there were no external distractions. Data was gathered through audio recording and handwritten notes.

All volunteer interview and volunteer focus group participants were pre-interviewed to ensure that they met the criteria to participate (see 3.6 Participants for criteria information). The majority of pre-interviews were performed via email or phone. However, several occurred in person after food pantry shifts because the researcher recruited multiple participants while volunteering. Recruitment of volunteers through mass email and fliers at the facility resulted in too few participants. To improve responsiveness, the researcher personally gave fliers to volunteers after working with them in the pantry, asking the pre-interview questions at that time. Pre-interviews were not audio recorded or used for analysis.

The second focus group was comprised of six (6) of the organization's staff members who had insights on volunteer training, preparedness, and challenges to retention. No volunteers were included in the staff focus group. The duration was just over 60 minutes, and the session took place during office hours in a conference room at the organization. There were no external distractions, and all staff members gave undivided attention to answering the questions and engaging with the focus group. All participants remained in the room from start to finish. The staff focus group data was gathered through audio recording and handwritten notes.

3.3   Data Analysis

The researcher compiled all research and performed a rigorous review of data gathered throughout the study. Data included interview and focus group transcripts as well as researcher journal entries, field notes, interview responses, and reflections as a participant observer. The researcher transcribed all audio recordings, identifying the emerging patterns in the interviews and focus group sessions. Each data source was examined independently to identify patterns before investigating comparisons across data sources, but the transcription process provided familiarity with the data and aided in the comparisons that later occurred. Nvivo data analysis software was used for organization and coding, but all clusters and themes were identified by the researcher.

For the interview data analysis, the researcher wrote responses to interview questions to use as a point of reference. Using a phenomenological approach, as described by Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1994), interview transcripts and the researcher's written responses were examined to identify statements of how volunteers had experienced motivation, satisfaction, and socialization during training as well as general statements on retention and their training

experience. Overlapping and repetitive statements were removed before those remaining were grouped into meaning units. Individual textural descriptions were then written to describe what each volunteer experienced. For interpretation of the meaning of the experiences, the researcher used imaginative variation to reflect on the textural descriptions of each participant and create individual structural descriptions. The individual textural and structural descriptions were used in the creation of an individual textural-structural description for each participant. Finally, the individual textural-structural descriptions were analyzed for similarities and used to create one composite textural-structural description of the essence of the volunteer experience with training at the organization and how the experience influenced the desire to continue or discontinue service.

Focus group data analysis followed the process outlined by Stewart & Shamdasani (2014), which required the coding of transcripts by identifying relevant data and categorizing based on topic or issue. The transcripts were coded for retention and training statements as well as the common themes discovered during the interview analysis. After coding, a semantic content analysis was conducted to interpret the meaning of statements made during the focus group sessions. This was aided by notes made during transcription of vocal tone as well as handwritten notes from the focus group session describing reactions and facial expressions when statements were made. The analysis included consideration of the frequency with which ideas or issues were raised, the frequency of recurring descriptors or characterizations, and the frequency of ideas or issues being described in a similar manner. Additionally, the researcher considered the context in which the statements were made during the analysis.

3.4   Researcher Bias

The researcher used her bias as a point of reference during data analysis. With six years of experience as a trainer/instructor and several years of training/learning design experience at the time of the study, the researcher had a familiarity with training process and design that allowed for deeper reflection. The researcher had been the recipient of nonprofit HS volunteer training several times prior to conducting this research and had preexisting, strong beliefs in the importance of work performed by nonprofit HS organizations and their volunteers.

Additionally, having been raised in a poor area of rural Maine, the researcher had had many first-hand experiences with poverty-related issues, particularly food insecurity. Classmates

and close friends often had no food at home. As school-provided breakfasts and lunches were the primary meal sources, weekends and holidays were a struggle for them. The later weeks each month also appeared to be difficult, as the families usually ran out of food stamps long before the month ended. Occasionally, friends mentioned the selling or trading of food stamps for money or drugs as well, which led to longer periods with no food in the home. Although unemployment added to the problem at times, most families had a minimum of one working parent but a household income insufficient to feed themselves and their children. Given the environment, the researcher's childhood home often was filled with neighborhood children at meal times, and her parents provided extra money on a daily basis to purchase snacks or meals for friends before, after, and during school. Field trips and sleepovers always were accompanied by enough funds to purchase pizzas for friends and their siblings. In addition, the researcher's parents insisted that gifts were provided in a manner that did not appear to be "charity" and did not insult the families, instilling a natural instinct to preserve the dignity of those in need. Because of these experiences, the researcher believes strongly in giving to the underprivileged and considers it a duty of everyone in society, leading to a simple philosophy: Those who have time should volunteer, and those who have money should donate.

3.5   Trustworthiness

At the time of the study, the researcher had six years of experience as a trainer in business settings. The experience included the development of training programs utilized in those settings. Additionally, the researcher had completed several training/learning system designs in the role of external consultant.

For verification of research, the study used interviews and focus groups for data collection. The researcher's journal, field notes, interview responses and reflections also served as a point of triangulation because training experience combined with extensive knowledge of volunteer retention literature provided a unique perspective. Through the utilization of a variety of sources, the researcher verified that the collected data all supported the same conclusions.

In addition, the researcher gained the trust of participants through volunteering and working alongside the other volunteers. The staff participants appreciated the help and offered their full support to the study. The researcher firmly believes that all participants were honest in their responses because of this trust.

3.6   <u>Participants</u>

Participants included 12 volunteers and six staff members for a total of 18, and participant selection for this study was purposeful. Interview and volunteer focus group participants consisted of short-term and long-term volunteers, based on the Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) VSTM, and all post-Nominee stages of the VSTM were represented in the sample. As the Nominee stage is described as occurring prior to volunteering and, therefore, prior to training, the stage was not included in this study. The inclusion of participants from each active stage provided a more diverse view of training experiences, particularly as the training program had undergone changes. The long-term volunteers provided insights into how training affected the decision to remain with the organization for a duration of time and highlighted particularly memorable or important aspects of training pertaining to the decision to continue service. It is worth noting that, because the training program was changed roughly one year prior to the study, all long-term volunteers received the previously required training and hands-on training from staff, whereas short-term volunteers had access to a new optional training program and often received training from seasoned volunteers.

In addition to duration of service, several other criteria were required for inclusion in the study. Participants must have provided at least three (3) hours of post-training service or one full "shift" in the program. Shifts consisting of on-the-job training were not included in the counting of minimum experience. Participants must have lived in the local area for a minimum of one (1) year prior to volunteering. Those who volunteered in the food pantry as part of a formal group were not included. After these criteria were met, participants were selected for diversity and uniqueness, including (if possible) a variety of age groups, educational backgrounds, genders, and so forth. Preference also was shown to volunteers who had served at one or more nonprofit HS organizations in the past.

Several issues became apparent when selecting participants. First, the diversity of volunteers willing to participate was lacking. All but one participant was Caucasian and college educated, and more than half were retirees. This reflects the makeup of the volunteer pool as observed by the researcher, but the organization believes their demographics change dramatically during the summer months. As the research occurred during the summer, the lack of diversity may be the result of timing. More diversity existed in the college-student volunteers, but some received compensation in the form of class credit and were excluded, while others simply did not

wish to participate. Though not demographically diverse, participants were chosen for the uniqueness of their perspectives. For example, one participant was chosen because he strongly disliked volunteering in the pantry and avoided it unless asked, whereas his wife (also included in the study) enjoys her time in the food pantry and has no intention to discontinue service.

It also became clear that the formal group exclusion and the calculations for duration of service needed to be for the food pantry only. The organization that runs the food pantry has countless affiliated organizations and programs and also uses relationships with local businesses and churches to enlist large groups of volunteers. It was extremely difficult to find volunteers who had never worked for the organization prior to their involvement in the food pantry. Additionally, many participants stated during pre-interviews that they had never volunteered for the organization before their food pantry service. However, when discussing their past volunteer activities during their interview or focus group session, the volunteers included programs affiliated with the organization. For instance, several participants were unaware that their church-operated pantries were founded, organized, and supplied by the organization. Essentially, the lines between volunteering for the organization and its affiliates clouded the duration criteria as well as the formal group exclusion criteria. Thus, participant service durations are specific to the food pantry, and while they may have volunteered as part of a formal group for another program, they must have volunteered at the food pantry as an individual. This adjustment was not problematic because the organization does not provide training for any of its non-pantry volunteers and treats all first-time food pantry volunteers as a "new". It also became apparent that many participants who had been volunteering at the organization for years knew little about what the organization did outside the program for which they volunteered.

Staff insights were crucial to the study as well. Employees were included based on relevance and closeness of their positions to the volunteer training and early supervision processes. Availability was also a factor, as the part-time Pantry Manager was unable to attend the staff focus group session. The staff participants were as follows: CEO, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Director of Programs, Pantry Coordinator, Education and Resource Coordinator, and Volunteer Coordinator.

Volunteer interview participants provided considerable detail about their lives, families, and prior volunteer experiences but were not pressed if they felt uncomfortable sharing certain

information, including precise age. Table 3.1 below includes participant information and demographics that may have informed their responses.

Table 3.1 Volunteer Interview Participants

	Duration of Service	**Gender**	**Age**	**Other**
Volunteer 1	3 Weeks (Newcomer)	F	Early-50s	Director of Spirituality for elderly healthcare organization; recruiter of volunteers for her company (for-profit); deeply familiar with volunteer retention issues; BA in piano and sacred music; husband travels frequently; adult son lives in Southwest U.S. and struggles with finances and food insecurity; volunteers for several other types of organizations and causes, none benefit the underprivileged or require direct contact with clients; described herself as committed to volunteering; entirely new to the organization with no prior knowledge of its work; experiences in the food pantry inspired her to create a small pantry for nurses in her workplace
Volunteer 2	4 Months (Emotional Involvement)	M	26	Graduate from a nearby university; MS in Mechanical Engineering; works at a research institute; volunteers with co-workers in a different program at the organization (5 months total); no prior knowledge of the organization; chose to work in the food pantry alone after receiving an email from the organization requesting pantry volunteers; wants to get to know and give back to the community; only volunteer to have made friends in the pantry with whom he socializes outside the organization; volunteered very little and sporadically prior to involvement with the organization; little prior knowledge of food insecurity; no intention of ceasing volunteer service in either program

Table 3.1 continued

Volunteer 3	1 Year (Established Volunteering)	M	67	Recent retiree; BS in Organizational Leadership; career in industrial operations management; father of adult children; deeply misses work; travels frequently for pleasure; avid volunteer prior to retirement (countless organizations and causes); began volunteering at the organization through his workplace; has volunteered in all of the organization's programs at one time or another; prefers the food pantry; has no intention to leave the organization and no immediate plans to volunteer outside the pantry again
Volunteer 4	2 Years (Retiring)	F	Mid-70s	Retired at age 70; education & career unclear; always wanted to be a teacher; volunteers frequently at another food pantry and early reader programs; long familiarity with the organization (knew the founders); prior to retirement volunteered in another program at the organization through work & did not enjoy it; husband volunteers for a different program at the organization; mother of adult children; large family, some of whom have struggled with food insecurity; passionate about the cause prior to volunteering at the organization

Due to time constraints and the number of participants, the volunteer focus group was not asked for much demographic information or asked to discuss previous volunteer experiences, though some personal information and prior experience was discussed in response to other questions. However, all participants confirmed that they had volunteered for other organizations as part of the pre-interview process. Though not as thorough, some pertinent information for each participant in the volunteer focus group has been included in Table 2.2. All ages are estimates. Though careers and educational background were not asked for, each participant mentioned both while discussing their experiences working with clients in the food pantry or interactions with staff members.

Table 3.2 Volunteer Focus Group Participants

	Duration of Service	**Gender**	**Age**	**Other**
Volunteer 5	3 Weeks (Newcomer)	F	Mid-40s	Client-volunteer; Latin-American; worked as a chef now maintenance worker at area elementary school; mother of children in their late-teens and early-20s; believes in volunteering to strengthen community and be a good role model for her children; no familiarity with organization prior to enrolling in the pantry program as a client; volunteered for her first shift the same day; some behavioral issues
Volunteer 6	3 Months (Newcomer)	F	Mid-50s	Business professional; has volunteered in other programs at the organization; prefers the food pantry; volunteered through work for another program for several years; never volunteered regularly before the food pantry
Volunteer 7	5 Months (Emotional Involvement)	F	Early-60s	Recent Retiree; previous company helped run organization's annual fundraiser for six years; volunteers for another program through her church; volunteers in the food pantry and another program as an individual volunteer; prefers the other program but continues in the food pantry because they need volunteers
Volunteer 8	2 Years (Retiring)	M	Late-60s	Recent Retiree; industrial management career; began volunteering prior to retirement but increased hours after he retired; feels a deep connection with the organization; volunteers for several programs regularly

Table 3.2 continued

Volunteer 9	2 Years (Retiring)	M	90s	Retired surgeon; regular volunteer at organization for over 10 years; prefers the food pantry and client interaction; fierce loyalty to the organization; plans to volunteer there "until he dies"; in the event of disagreeable policy changes, stated he would volunteer on the board of directors rather than quit; wife volunteers for a different program
Volunteer 10	2 Months (Newcomer)	M	Mid-70s	Retired from management career; volunteered for previous food-related nonprofit used by elderly parents, schedules too inflexible; has volunteered at the organization for 4 years; has volunteered in the food pantry only twice because he dislikes it; regular volunteer for another program; frequently travels for pleasure with wife (Volunteer 11)
Volunteer 11	3 Months (Newcomer)	F	Mid-70s	Retired teacher; volunteers with husband (Volunteer 10) and individually; enjoys working in the pantry but prefers another program; she works in the pantry only when the organization alerts volunteers to immediate openings due to cancellations
Volunteer 12	1 Year (Established Volunteer)	F	Early-80s	Retired business professional; dislikes technology, stating she had an assistant to do that for her; has volunteered in several programs at the organization and frequently switched programs prior to beginning at the food pantry; has been with the organization for at least 4 years

3.7   Location

The research location was a food pantry operated by a nonprofit HS organization in the Midwestern United States. To protect the identity of the organization and individual participants, transcripts have not been provided. However, knowledge of the volunteer setting, roles, and tasks performed as well as details on retention issues and training practices at the organization are crucial to understanding the experiences of this study's participants and have been included. Information in this section was gathered through researcher observation as well as data from interviews and focus groups with the volunteers and staff.

Volunteers were of critical importance to the success of the organization's mission, as its collected programs used between 20,000 and 25,000 hours of volunteer service per year (Chief Operating Officer, personal communication, December 26, 2017). To run efficiently, the food pantry program required a minimum 60 volunteers per week. Because working hands-on with clients was necessary, all food pantry volunteers were over the age of 16. The exposure to clients living with food insecurity and poverty-related issues also had led to high burnout rates and early exits for the program's volunteers.

The number of volunteers required per week had created training challenges as well. The organization's administration believed that thorough training was necessary for food pantry volunteers, but high client demand had led to a reduction in training, which began a cycle of attrition due to volunteers being ill-prepared for the realities of working with the underprivileged (Chief Operating Officer, personal communication, December 26, 2017). A two-hour orientation training program to prepare volunteers for client encounters in the food pantry was mandatory for a time, but the requirement became a barrier to filling the food pantry shifts. The orientation training program was removed and later became available as a recommended but optional self-learning opportunity prior to service. On-the-job training remained available throughout, but the training period was described by administrative staff as "very brief" because the duration was dependent on the number of clients who arrived during a volunteer's first shift. To provide better support, the organization launched a new and, at the time of this study, untested mentor program, teaming new volunteers with seasoned peers for the entirety of a first three-hour shift. The variety inherent in the volunteers' training experiences were of particular interest during data collection and analysis.

3.7.1   Volunteer Process

Signup for the organization's food pantry shifts occurred online. Volunteers chose the dates and times from available shifts. All shifts were in two- to three-hour increments. The volunteers were not required to work particular shifts or work a set number of hours (e.g. 20 hours over six months), committing only to the two- to three-hour shift selected at signup. After completing the online signup, the volunteers received an email with basic information, including when and where to arrive and tips for clothing and shoes. For first-time volunteers, the email also contained a link to online orientation training.

Upon arrival at the pantry, the staff member or volunteer managing pantry activities typically asked if any volunteers were new, informed the new volunteer(s) of the available roles, and provided hands-on training at that time. Occasionally, volunteers were asked to perform several different roles within a single shift. End-of-day volunteers restocked any empty shelves and, if needed, cleaned before leaving the facility. After the conclusion of a shift, the volunteers received an automated email thanking them for their service. Additionally, the organization had a small, nonmonetary "incentive program" for volunteers, recognizing people for continued service (e.g. volunteers received a t-shirt if they served for a certain number of months). The incentives were akin to a surprise 'thank you' because volunteers generally were not informed of the existence of the incentive program, hearing about it from other volunteers, if at all, prior to receiving thanks.

3.7.2   Volunteer Roles and Tasks

The organization had created several volunteer roles within the food pantry. The key roles included stocking, check-in, and checkout. Other roles for volunteers, such as greeters at the door, had been eliminated or transformed into optional roles because of a volunteer shortage. As one staff member explained:

> We had a plan for eight volunteers each shift, and so we had the jobs all divided up for eight people. And then we're lucky if we get four. So we were changing the job descriptions a lot and then changing what the staff did to just cover everything. (COO, Focus Group, 2018)

The role reductions led to several processes being performed by staff members, including new client intake procedures. Essentially, the long-term volunteers had received training for roles that

they no longer performed on a regular basis. Other roles, such as a greeter posted at the door, still existed but were filled only when enough volunteers were present. During the researcher's time in the food pantry, a greeter was available only once (i.e. the greeter role was filled for two hours of the more than 50 volunteer hours served). The following descriptions are those of the researcher, who received training for and filled each of the key positions.

Stocking required volunteers to replenish food displays within the pantry. This involved lifting heavy boxes, entering walk-in refrigerator and freezer areas, sweeping the floor, ensuring that food had not spoiled, using food safety practices, changing signage, and flattening boxes for recycling. Additionally, stockers often helped clients carry food items and bag food items after checkout as well as escorting new clients through the pantry to explain the process. It was the most physically demanding of the jobs and was preferred by several male volunteer participants.

Check-in occurred at a desk in the waiting room outside the food pantry. The role required the volunteer to enter client names into check-in software and update the client profiles, recording visits to the pantry. Additional tasks included greeting clients, granting access to the pantry via electronic lock, updating client contact information, initiating new client intake procedures, creating new profiles for clients, accepting new forms for by-proxy pantry visits, and providing proxy tokens for identification purposes. The check-in role was the most complex of the volunteer roles and required the most interaction with clients. When available, staff members rather than volunteers performed new client intake procedures.

Checkout required a volunteer to sit at a desk near the pantry exit and bagging area. The checkout volunteer asked clients to place all food items on a scale, recording in a simple Excel spreadsheet the name of the client and the weight of the items. The role required basic math skills, though a calculator was provided. Volunteers estimated the weights of baskets, bags, backpacks, and wheeled carts, subtracting the vessel weight from the recorded poundage. Occasionally, the role required sweeping the floor, resetting the scale for accurate weighing, helping clients lift heavy items onto the scale, collecting proxy identification tokens, and recording the names and weights for multiple clients at once, particularly those shopping for themselves and another client by-proxy. The role was the least demanding and heavily favored among volunteers, especially the older female participants.

Additionally, all roles sometimes required training new volunteers. Seasoned volunteers were often asked by staff members to train new volunteers prior to the end of their shift or during

a shift in which they will be performing a different role. For example, a stocker who has experience at the checkout station may train a new checkout volunteer at the beginning of a shift. The researcher served in the stocking and checkout roles many times and trained several new volunteers for the roles. She never trained volunteers for the check-in role and served in that position only once.

When new shifts began, the staff or volunteer in charge usually attempted to fill the check-in role first, followed by checkout, leaving all remaining volunteers in the role of stockers. If sufficient numbers of volunteers arrived, a greeter sometimes joined the check-in volunteer in the waiting room. According to the staff, the check-in is the most difficult role to fill, as it requires comfortability with computers as well as clients. Efforts were made to ensure that new volunteers always were placed within the pantry, stocking or checkout, for their first shifts, as the staff believed that new volunteers were less likely to return if placed at the check-in station. However, new volunteers continued to be placed in the check-in role. The researcher's first shift and initial hands-on training was for the check-in role. The Pantry Manager asked if the researcher was comfortable with technology, and upon hearing affirmation, asked a seasoned volunteer to provide training. The experience involved less than two minutes of training and consisted of a quick software click-through of the necessary screens and a brief explanation and demonstration of the electronic lock. After being told of the added responsibility of controlling the number of people allowed into the pantry, the volunteer trainer left, stating that if the researcher had any questions, she should open the pantry door and ask. No software manual or instructions existed, and when the researcher opened the door in search of help, no one was there. The clients were kind, and the researcher was not overwhelmed because it was not a busy day. However, the experience was lonely and confusing. By the end of the shift, the researcher felt comfortable in the role and would have been happy to serve at the check-in again but was not provided with another opportunity to do so. For some of the participants, the initial experience with the check-in role was far worse because of added pressure of client overcrowding on a busy day. Some, if not most, never became comfortable in the role and filled the position only when no one else was available.

According to the data gathered throughout the study, the check-in training universally was viewed as insufficient, and the role was the least favorite for most of the participants. Several participants frequently were asked or expected to work at the check-in due to familiarity

rather than a desire to volunteer in the role as well. For some volunteers, including elderly retirees, the technology was daunting. One staff member (CEO, Focus Group, 2018), for example, related an anecdote about a volunteer who stated, "If there was just some way that I didn't have to do that computer, then I'd be willing to come more often". Volunteer focus group members echoed similar sentiments, stating that they would prefer to know what role they would fill prior to shift signup. Other staff members believed the technology was only one part of the problem: "It's not only the technology, but it's everyone crowding your space. Like, everyone is in your face yelling at you (COO, Focus Group, 2018)." Volunteers concur that the crowding and occasional aggression witnessed at the check-in station was difficult at times, even for those who frequently volunteered in the role. The crowding was caused, in part, by the facility layout.

3.7.3   Layout and Equipment

The food pantry was comprised of four areas: the waiting room, the pantry, the walk-in refrigerator and freezer area, and the dry goods storage area. The waiting room was separated from the other areas by an electronically locked door. The room was large but not adequate to hold all of the clients arriving at any given time, particularly if clients waited outside before the pantry opened. Volunteers for the morning shift often were met with large groups of clients hoping to gain entry before work. As the pantry closed every day during lunch hours, large groups of clients often were waiting outside for the first afternoon pantry shift to begin as well. It also was not uncommon for clients to overfill the waiting room if the weather outside was not ideal. When available, a greeter helped to keep clients from crowding the desk and door to the pantry, but as mentioned, the availability of enough volunteers to permit a greeter was infrequent, perhaps even rare.

The pantry itself was a large space in which clients "shopped" for food items. The area had a street exit and checkout desk as well as convenient access to the refrigerator and freezer area. The pantry was prone to overcrowding as well. Part of the check-in role was controlling the number of clients inside the pantry, as the check-in volunteer controls the door between the waiting area and pantry. However, overcrowding in the waiting area sometimes led to volunteers admitting more clients than could reasonable shop in the pantry at once. Stocking shelves often required maneuvering through crowds of clients and other volunteers as well.

The freezer maintained a temperature around zero degrees Fahrenheit. Volunteers spent a considerable amount of time in the refrigerated area and as little time as possible in the freezer. The dry goods area was located off the pantry as well. In short, the supplies for restocking were spread over a large area. When first trained as a stocker, the researcher was shown only the refrigerated area, discovering for herself or via other volunteers the freezer and dry goods areas during subsequent shifts. Rest rooms and pantry staff offices were accessible through the dry goods area as well. The researcher was not shown the locations of rest rooms, nor did she observe any new volunteer training session in which they were identified.

Carts were provided for transporting heavy items from storage areas to the pantry. The volunteers received name tags, box cutters, and bottles of water. All other items, including gloves, were not provided but often were brought from home by volunteers.

3.7.4   Types of Training

As mentioned, the organization changed the pantry training program several times and, at the time of the study, offered several different types of training. This resulted in many inconsistencies in the training experience, with some volunteers receiving multiple hours of training while others received only brief hands-on training. Previous training included a thorough one- to two-hour orientation-compassion training session, a webinar for the check-in system, and training on government assistance programs. The long-term volunteer study participants received some or all previously available training sessions. The then-current orientation training was offered primarily through emailed online training and monthly volunteer meetings. Monthly compassion training sessions were available as well.

3.7.4.1   Previously Offered

The one- to two-hour orientation-compassion training was mandatory until roughly one year prior to the study, at which time it became defunct. Training included a thorough orientation, complete with information about the pantry as well as the organization's history, mission, values, culture, policies, and food-related statistics. The compassion aspect of training included statistics on food insecurity in the county and/or state. Volunteers participated in empathy-building exercises, such as creating household budgets with a typical clients' level of

income. The earliest of these training sessions occurred off-site. Volunteers were told about the available roles in the pantry but were not informed of what their roles would be.

The check-in webinar was offered for a short time after the organization changed the check-in system. The training consisted of a presentation that took roughly 30 minutes. The volunteers learned how to use the new check-in software to find client profiles, add and update profiles, and perform other tasks for the check-in role.

At the time of the study, less information was available for the government assistance program training. The goal of the training session was to provide volunteers with the information needed to help clients feel confident signing up for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. One study participant (Volunteer 4) received this training.

Additionally, many of the long-term volunteers received more thorough hands-on training than short-term volunteers receive, particularly for the check-in station. The volunteers were trained, observed, and mentored by the staff rather than fellow volunteers.

3.7.4.2   Currently Offered

At the time of the study, the online training served as a replacement for the previously mandatory orientation-compassion training and was accessible through the signup email for new volunteers. The training was comprised of a static presentation with an embedded video lecture on food insecurity. The presentation included information on the organization's history, mission, values, and recent food-related statistics. Images of the pantry and waiting room areas were included along with information about the roles available for pantry volunteers. The compassion component of the training was an embedded lecture video, which was roughly 12 minutes in duration. The lecture discussed types of people who may suffer from food insecurity with a heavy focus on people who recently lost white collar jobs, single mothers whose children required expensive medication, and other atypical types of clients. Essentially, the video focused more on nonjudgment and awareness than on empathy-building, which was the main feature of the previously required compassion training. Though offered to all short-term volunteers via email, none of the participants in this study took part in the online training, either because they did not see the link or chose not to open it. Further, none of the new volunteers with whom the researcher became acquainted through volunteer activity had taken the online training. In short, the researcher is the only known volunteer to have opened the online orientation training.

Monthly volunteer meetings were an opportunity for the organization to meet potential volunteers and interact with current volunteers. Attendance for new and current volunteers was entirely voluntary. The meetings were multi-purpose, but the staff provided an orientation presentation and Q&A session. After the meeting, interested volunteers sometimes received a short tour of the pantry and volunteered at that time, receiving brief hands-on training from another volunteer.

Compassion training sessions were available once per month. Attendance was optional. The volunteers learned about food insecurity and participated in empathy-building exercises similar to those in the previously mandatory orientation-compassion sessions. Volunteers also were provided with practical advice on how to interact with clients.

Hands-on training depended heavily on volunteers. The pantry had a "volunteer mentor" program in which volunteers agreed to train new people and provide a 'job shadowing' type of experience. The mentors were not always available and/or identified for new volunteers. To her knowledge, the researcher never met or worked with an official volunteer mentor during her 50 hours of service. More commonly, the staff asked a seasoned volunteer to show new volunteers around the pantry. When available, a staff member sometimes trained volunteers as well. These hands-on training sessions typically lasted fewer than five minutes. Though the check-in role was complex and intimidating to many, the training provided typically was still fewer than five minutes, at which point the volunteer was left on their own unless enough volunteers were available to have a greeter present.

3.7.5   Retention of Food Pantry Volunteers

Unfortunately, the organization tracked its volunteer activities in terms of hours rather than individuals. They could not provide data for the average number of times a volunteer served in the pantry or the percentage who discontinued service after one shift. The organization could not provide a retention rate. Additionally, the organization did not track volunteers by program or group. In 2017, around 620 people signed up for over 10,000 shifts in total, across all programs. This is the extent of their data tracking for individual volunteers.

Because the organization did not track its retention rates, the focus group staff members, which included employees involved directly with the pantry and its volunteers, were asked for estimates of how many volunteers return for a second shift. The Pantry Coordinator (Focus

Group, 2018) estimated that "less than half return on a consistent basis", a figure that included one-time-only groups, court-ordered individuals, and those volunteering for a college class. When asked for a retention estimate for the volunteers with no external time requirements, the response was, "I don't know. Now that I'm thinking about it, I just don't know" (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). Additionally, at the time of the study, the organization did not conduct follow-up surveys to inquire about volunteer experiences and/or reasons for discontinuation of service. The information provided on the topic of retention was almost entirely observational and/or based on the volunteers who offered explanations for leaving the organization. Based on staff observations and the frequency of having too few volunteers in the pantry, they believed that retention was a considerable issue for the pantry program. Further, the staff agreed that "the pantry has been the hardest to get recurring volunteers" (CEO, Focus Group, 2018) when compared to the organization's other programs.

According to the staff members present for the focus group, volunteers at the organization had diverse needs, and because of this, designing a training program and providing a volunteer experience to meet their needs was difficult. The pantry allowed teenagers to volunteer when accompanied by a parent, but otherwise, the age was 18 or higher. All socioeconomic backgrounds were included. The staff estimated that roughly 50% volunteered as part of a formal group, with the remaining half volunteering as individuals or with a spouse or child. Roughly half of the formal groups were, by design, one-time-only volunteers. The other half volunteered at regular intervals, be it annually, monthly, or weekly. A relatively high proportion of individual volunteers were retirees, some 90 or more years old. As mentioned previously, the diversity of volunteer demographics was not observed by the researcher, who found most to be at or near retirement age, Caucasian, and college educated. However, the researcher met several college-student volunteers (fewer than 10) and a few non-Caucasian volunteers (fewer than five) during participation in volunteer activities. Genders appeared to be an even mix of male and female.

Because of the perceived diversity, the staff believed that motivations varied. The elderly were believed to volunteer mostly for the social aspects of the experience and "getting out of the house" (CEO, Focus Group, 2018), whereas the younger retirees "are literally just here because they want to do something good" (Volunteer Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). Regardless of age, the retirees tended to be loyal volunteers, with many volunteering with the organization for

more than a decade. The fierce level of loyalty was observed by the researcher in both participants and non-participant volunteers, and many of the older, long-term volunteers felt that they had more ownership of the organization than did the staff members who worked closest with volunteers. Several mentioned staff turnover rates as the reason for their perception of the staff caring less about the organization than did the volunteers. The researcher's observations supported this. During the six weeks in which most of the research occurred, the organization lost and/or replaced the Pantry Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, and Pantry Coordinator. These were the three staff members who worked most closely with food pantry volunteers. At the time of the study, the staff had no immediate plans to fill the Pantry Manager role, as it was deemed unnecessary, but several participants mentioned the Pantry Manager as the only staff member with whom they interacted on a regular basis and felt they knew well. For instance, Volunteer 2 (Interview, 2018) openly expressed concern over the staff not filling the position and considered the previous Pantry Manager to be his only "friend" among the staff. Additionally, Volunteer 3 and Volunteer 4, both long-term volunteers, frequently commented on the past pantry coordinators and volunteer coordinators. Volunteer 4 (Interview, 2018) felt that promises made by previous staff members for food pantry improvements went unfulfilled by their replacements and stated that she had difficulty keeping track of the staff member roles in the organization because of the frequent changes. Volunteer 3 (Interview, 2018) believed that the Pantry Coordinator at the time of the study had a "hands-off approach" to the food pantry, spending most of his time in his office, whereas his predecessor was active in training volunteers and engaging with clients in the pantry. Volunteer 3 also expressed concern over the absence of a Pantry Manager because the next Pantry Coordinator may be hands-off as well, leaving the pantry unsupervised. The feelings of ownership and loyalty to the organization may indicate a deeper motivation than the aforementioned "getting out of the house", namely a sense of belonging. Though the staff members did not mention turnover of key staff positions as an issue for volunteers and may not have recognized the strength of volunteer feelings of ownership, the staff focus group made it clear that they are aware of the loyalty among the older volunteers. In fact, the CEO and the Education and Resource Coordinator (Interview, 2018) both mentioned death as a reason for volunteer attrition. Among the elderly volunteers, change was also a key reason given for attrition, as the staff mentioned many instances of losing volunteers because of changes in policy or processes. The motivation of college-student volunteers was entirely service

learning, according to the staff, if not mandatory participation for classes at a nearby college. As such, the duration of service was typically short for college students. Some volunteers were paid for their service by companies that partner with the organization, while others were performing court-ordered community service. None of the volunteers who participated in this study were paid or required to volunteer for a class or by court order. Though motivation varied, the staff agreed that about 90% of the individuals volunteer for the "right reasons" (i.e. altruistic reasons).

The staff acknowledged training as vital for retention in the pantry, but they had struggled with how best to deliver the training. The organization had experienced considerable levels of post-training, pre-service attrition. In other words, people "go through the training and *never* volunteer" (CEO, Focus Group, 2018). A recurring theme in the staff focus group was balance. They want to strike a balance during training, providing enough information to prepare volunteers for the pantry environment without scaring away potential volunteers. The balance of time and money spent training and the effectiveness of training is important to the organization. The staff also wants volunteers to feel that they can talk openly with the staff while not interrupting work flow. As one staff member explained, "Sometimes, the [volunteers] that have been here the longest then feel like they own the place, […] they'll come and sit in my office and tell me everything that we do wrong" (COO, Focus Group, 2018). The intensity of ownership was described as a "blessing and a curse". Yet another type of balance is described below:

> If they have a bad experience *one* time, which you can easily have in the pantry, or something wasn't explained, or they see something they don't like… but they've never asked us or asked for more information... we may never see them again. […] But it's just been that constant balance between having enough staff and volunteers down there for them to have a good experience and getting them *enough* information ahead of time.
> (COO, Focus Group, 2018)

The balance of training and providing a good experience by ensuring the necessary number of volunteers in the pantry led to the frequent changes to the pantry training program. According to the staff, time is the biggest challenge for training volunteers. Extensive training prior to entry into the pantry became a barrier to filling the necessary volunteer roles. The effectiveness of the training also was in question, with one employee stating, "There is a huge benefit to having them *be* in that environment [the pantry] one or two times before we then go back and do some of that more in-depth training" (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). Training after entry

proved difficult because the volunteers are "already committing time to the actual volunteering" and do not want to commit more time to training (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). Removal of the mandatory orientation-compassion training resulted in new volunteers having little knowledge of what the organization does for the community and what its values are. The volunteers with limited experience working with the underprivileged had difficulty relating to the clients as well. The staff related several stories of new volunteers who had unrealistic expectations concerning the clients. The monthly compassion training offered at the time of the study, designed to aid volunteer-client interactions, was inaccessible to many volunteers, however.

> It's just that it's optional so, if everyone can have that [compassion] message, that would be fantastic. And that would be our goal, to hear it from us directly. but since it's optional and it's a week night and that sort of stuff… you know. It just excludes people. (COO, Focus Group, 2018)

To fill the volunteer roles with people empathetic to food insecure individuals without the need for compassion training, the staff briefly incentivized client volunteering, which created issues with increased frequency of arguments in the pantry, rule breaking, "yelling" at fellow volunteers, and other undesirable behaviors from the client-volunteers. The incentive program had been abandoned prior to the study, but for better or worse, the pantry had retained several client-volunteers. The researcher met several client-volunteers during her time in the food pantry and witnessed many of the problematic behaviors, including hoarding food and abusing other clients and volunteers. Some of the client-volunteers were very helpful and were described as "the better volunteers that we have" (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). The researcher observed one such client-volunteer, who appeared to be kind, rule-abiding, and generous with his time. In fact, he created his own volunteer role at the food pantry because he wanted to help but his health and age prevented him from stocking (too physically demanding) and he did not feel comfortable with technology (required for check-in and checkout roles). Instead, the client-volunteer spent nearly every afternoon sitting in a chair, flattening boxes for recycling. The researcher did not realize how much help he provided until he was absent on a busy day, resulting in roughly 100 boxes to be flattened at the end of the shift. Overall though, the staff considered the client-volunteers to be the most difficult to manage, stating that they volunteer for "self-serving reasons" (Education and Resource Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). Staff

members believed that the reasons for the self-serving and problematic behaviors were embedded in "scarcity thinking" (COO, Focus Group, 2018) and "control needs" (CEO, Focus Group, 2018). Many of the client-volunteers donated their time to get the best selection of food items, to hide extra food, and to exert some measure of control over other clients regarding 'rule enforcement'. Observation of client-volunteers indicated the development of a strong sense of ownership that was much more overstated than other volunteers of similar and longer service duration. Because of these issues, the staff asked several client-volunteers to discontinue service. One client-volunteer participated in this study as a member of the volunteer focus group, Volunteer 5, exhibiting only a high power/control need and little scarcity thinking. There were some behavioral issues present, namely frequent judgmental statements toward volunteers, staff, and clients as well as negative comments about the "unhealthy" food provided (i.e. dry goods with preservatives viewed as "poison"). Additionally, as Volunteer 5 was new to the food pantry (3 weeks), there was little indication of a sense of ownership. The organization's CEO mentioned that a high need for power or control was a factor in the discontinuation of service among volunteers in general, not just client-volunteers:

> A lot of people that want to be involved in handing out food have high control needs. And if your motivation for being here is to control the behavior of low-income people, then that need doesn't get met, and those are probably a big chunk of who we lose. (CEO, Focus Group, 2018)

Other staff members concurred that volunteers who exhibit a need for control do not become long-term volunteers.

The consistency of training was a problem in the pantry, not only because of changes to the training program but also because of time. Some volunteers received immediate and extensive hands-on training upon arrival at the pantry, and others did not. One staff member described the hands-on training as follows:

> It depends on the volunteer and the day, honestly. You know, there are days where we get the opportunity and have the time that we can go through just kind of the logistics of, here's the job that you're gonna be doing today, and then kind of while we're doing that we can also talk about some compassion things, and things like that. But there are also other days, you know, like I've said, they are thrown out there and "put these cans on that shelf, I gotta go train this other person". (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018)

Even on slow days, the training may be brief and insufficient, as was evidenced by the researcher's hands-on training for both check-in and stocking roles. The inconsistency in training had led to a wide variety of first impressions of the organization and food pantry. This was particularly true for check-in volunteers, as the role is complex and more skill-based than other roles. The CEO (Focus Group, 2018) stated that check-in volunteers who "haven't had adequate training" often do not return, adding, "I don't think we have the time to do that study, but I bet that's who we're losing." Based on her experience in the check-in role, the researcher believes that the food pantry may indeed have lost volunteers after first shifts at check-in. The inconsistency of training existed partly because the organization asked volunteer mentors and/or seasoned volunteers to train new people as well:

> Sometimes [volunteers training new people is] a negative though because sometimes we have people that do it their own way. but I think that they're willing to, and they're happy to help other volunteers […] whether it's not the best way or the way that we've taught them or want them to do it, but they're open to it. (Director of Programs, Focus Group, 2018)

As a "seasoned volunteer" asked to train new volunteers on several occasions, the researcher believes that the problem is deeper than acknowledged by the staff. The training provided by the researcher was as thorough as possible and included many aspects missing from her own training, but it was impossible to judge whether all of the necessary information was included, as she received very little hands-on training. Essentially, volunteers who received little and/or poor-quality training were given the task of training new volunteers. Volunteer 2 (Interview, 2018) also mentioned being asked to train new volunteers, having received very little hands-on training and no orientation or compassion training. In short, volunteers may have "[done] it their own way" because they were not taught the 'right way', and there was no training provided to volunteer mentor/trainers on what should be included when training new volunteers.

A volunteer's first experience in the pantry is crucial to retention. The staff acknowledged that people frequently volunteer once and never return. In part, the quality of a volunteer's first shift related to knowledge of the food pantry environment/process and comfortability with client interaction, both of which were addressed in the previously mandatory orientation-compassion training sessions. When asked for the most important factor required for volunteer retention, the staff members immediately indicated orientation and compassion. Lack

of awareness of the organization's values and policies as well as "preconceived notions on how they think that it should be" (COO, Focus Group, 2018) were mentioned as reasons for attrition. In particular, volunteers sometimes disagreed with how the organization was "controlling food", believing that the organization is "handing out too much food". This was one of the organization's values included in its optional online training, which none of the volunteers appeared to have taken. The other major issue cited as the cause of attrition was that volunteers "don't like the clients" (CEO, Focus Group, 2018). One staff member elaborated, stating that volunteers think clients are "greedy, needy, rude, [and] not grateful enough" (COO, Focus Group, 2018). Another added: "When you're in the pantry, you are, I mean, it's right in front of your face, some of the things that maybe you don't want to know or see in your community" (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018).

The staff observed that volunteers returned if they "had fun" and felt that they "made a difference" during their first shift, even if the volunteer did not connect with the cause of food insecurity (Volunteer Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018). The social aspects of the experience were highlighted several times in the staff focus group session, including when asked for the key factor in the retention of their volunteers:

> A lot of times, people just find us. It's like word of mouth or whatever. 'I heard you were fun'. Like I said, it's not even always mission, but then, when they're here, if they had a good time, they met cool people, they felt like they made a difference, then usually they're hooked. I mean, it's like more work to find more places to volunteer, so I think if their first initial experience was good, they heard good things, then a lot of times…
> (Volunteer Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018)

The staff believed that the opportunity to be social was as important for retention as the opportunity for "doing good". In addition to socializing and altruism as reasons for continued service, the CEO (Focus Group, 2018) added that the flexible scheduling was equally important, stating: "Sometimes it really seems that it's more about the volunteer and their schedule and that this fits in well to their life." The flexible scheduling observation was confirmed by every volunteer participant in the study, each of whom commented on the subject with no prompting from the researcher.

3.8 <u>Summary</u>

This study was conducted with volunteers and staff from a single nonprofit HS organization. Interviews with volunteer participants were supplemented with focus group data, and the researcher used participant-observer experience as a point of reference for the data analysis. Through a thorough examination of volunteer experiences of training and retention, it was hoped that the study would add to the research community's understanding of the influence of nonprofit HS volunteer training on the desire to continue or discontinue service.

CHAPTER 4.   RESULTS

How does training help or hinder the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers? Using the research methods outlined by Moustakas (1994), the researcher performed a thorough analysis of interviews conducted with volunteers from each stage of the volunteer life cycle to uncover the essence of the volunteer experience with training and retention at the food pantry. Beginning with a full transcript of a volunteer interview, the researcher listed and grouped statements. Nvivo was used for manual grouping. Statements were then removed if they were repetitive, could not be labeled, or were not useful for furthering understanding of volunteer training and retention. Remaining statements were clustered, at which time the researcher performed another reduction and elimination. From the remaining statements, a textural description was written, describing what was experienced. Using imaginative variation, the researcher then created a structural description of how it was experienced. The textural and structural descriptions were then combined into a textural-structural description that vividly expressed what volunteers experienced and how they experienced it. The process then began again for another volunteer interview and was repeated until textural-structural descriptions existed for all four volunteer interviews and the researcher's written responses to interview questions. From the five textural-structural descriptions, the researcher performed another reduction and included the invariant themes in a composite textural-structural description, the essence of the experience. Focus group data was analyzed to serve as a point of reference. The researcher transcribed the sessions in full before data was listed and grouped using Nvivo. Data was coded by topic and relevance. The frequency of ideas and descriptions were considered as well. Researcher journal entries and field notes were not coded but used to create the researcher responses to the interview questions.

The themes emerged in three clusters: altruism, self-interest, and organizational support. The themes for altruism include Belief System, Passion, Level of Need, Relationship Building, and Guilt. Themes and subthemes for the self-interest cluster were Social with subthemes of interaction and entertainment, and Personal Needs with subthemes of self-satisfaction, ability to commit, and career. The third cluster, organizational support, had two themes: Safety and Preparedness. However, two additional themes became apparent in the long-term volunteer experience and were supported by data from the researcher's field notes and observations as well

as both staff and volunteer focus groups. These additional organizational support themes were Perceived Failures of the Organization and Ownership and Responsibility.

4.1.1   Altruism

The subthemes for altruism included Belief System, Passion, Level of Need, Relationship Building, and Guilt. In the context of the study, relationship building differs from the Social theme. Building relationships with clients is for the betterment of the client and represents a deeper desire to connect than is present in the Social theme, which is the need for socializing and more superficial, coworker-type relationships.

4.1.1.1   Belief System

Participants in the study wanted to "give back to the community", improve the lives of those in need, and make the world a better place. In the words of one volunteer, "If there is anything I can do to help meet that need, I should do it" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018). Though not explicitly stated, volunteer responses indicated that they believe in equality, fairness, and social harmony within their community, and anything short of this ideal was distressing and, for some, even repulsive. For example, many participants spoke of their belief that all members of a community should volunteer. "Everyone has a skill or something they can offer" (Volunteer 5, Focus Group, 2018). They also agreed that everyone deserves food. As one participant stated:

> I knew we had some [mobile pantries] going on here because they used to have one [near my home]. And I would read about some people being upset about that. And I, of course, then I always would get riled up thinking, "but these people have to eat," you know? People have to eat. (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018)

Volunteering provided a way for volunteers to display that their beliefs in equality, fairness, and social harmony aligned with their actions and allowed them to be good role models for others, including their children, acquaintances, and the clients. One volunteer explained that her adult children were volunteering for another organization during the time allotted for her interview, stating that she taught her children, "if they want a strong community, make one" (Volunteer 5, Focus Group, 2018).

The organization's mission was to provide for a basic human need, and the volunteers believed that every member of the community should have their basic needs met, even if

individual clients did not appear "deserving" or particularly needy. The food pantry's policy of not prying into clients' lives by requiring proof of need aligned with volunteer beliefs, as the policy was viewed as "compassionate". As Volunteer 1 (Interview, 2018) explained, "It's not mainstreamed for any particular income or type of income, and I love that. And I *love* that." The volunteers acknowledged that they did not know each client's background and, therefore, had to trust that the clients truly needed help: "I mean maybe they're pulling up in a Range Rover. It's not my business. Maybe it's their mother's Range Rover that let them drive down here. It's not my place to judge them" (Volunteer 7, Focus Group, 2018).

4.1.1.2   Passion

Volunteers were universally passionate about their altruistic beliefs, believing not only that they should give their time and energy to help others but that everyone should. They also displayed passion for the cause and/or the organization to varying degrees. Short-term volunteers may not have immediately felt passionate about the cause or organization, but these feelings may develop over time. For example, Volunteer 2 (Interview, 2018) began looking for volunteer opportunities in education/tutor roles immediately after he started at the food pantry because he wanted to help the underprivileged but did not connect with food insecurity as much as education. However, at the time of his interview, after volunteering for four months, he had no desire to leave and stated that only "some sort of personal obligation that prevented me from doing so" would keep him from continuing his volunteer service at the food pantry (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018). Additionally, a passion for the food insecurity cause developed for some volunteers prior to their service in the pantry because of personal experience with hunger, family member experiences with hunger, or previous experience working for food pantries. This supports the idea that witnessing the effects of food insecurity and the need within a community is a catalyst for the development of passion for the cause, and because volunteers witness the effects of food insecurity while volunteering in the pantry, they may develop a passion for the cause.

Passion for the organization also occured over time as volunteers became socialized. This was evident in the long-term volunteers' firm responses when asked if they had ever considered leaving the organization. For example, Volunteer 4 (Interview, 2018) answered the question with an immediate, "No," followed by a long pause. When asked to elaborate, she stated that she had

no intention of ever leaving the organization and would not quit under any circumstances short of, "If I can't walk anymore. If I'm physically unable to get in here" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018). All of the long-term volunteers were adamant that they had no intentions to leave the organization under any circumstances short of physical inability to volunteer or changes to the philosophy and practices that they have bought into (i.e. "unethical behavior", restrictions placed on clients, or policies that go against volunteers' belief systems).

Some of the newest volunteers had bought into the organization's mission and values, connecting in a particularly strong manner with the policy of placing few restrictions on clients, but the long-term volunteers had developed a deep connection to, and fierce loyalty for, the organization, helping to spread the its values and culture to new volunteers. One example of this occurred in the focus group when Volunteer 5 (three weeks of service), who received no orientation training and therefore knew little of the organization's values or culture, suggested that the pantry require clients to "bring their own bags if they want food" (Volunteer 5, Focus Group, 2018). The response from a long-term volunteer was, "The key to me for [the organization] is there's very few quote-unquote rules or questions [for clients], and if they say that you can *only* bring your own bag, I wouldn't want to see that" (Volunteer 7, Focus Group, 2018). This statement aligns with the organization's values, as illustrated several times during the staff focus group. For instance, the Volunteer Coordinator (Focus Group, 2018) told the story of a former volunteer who discontinued service in the pantry "because she doesn't think we screen our clients well enough, and we just give out too much." The staff member's response was, "I am so happy that she's not coming back" because the organization clearly was not a good fit for the volunteer. The statement was met with approval from the staff group. Essentially, the newest volunteers were in the early stages of socialization and may have understood the mission, values, and culture only on a superficial level, whereas the long-term volunteers often felt that they understood the organization better than the staff members who run the pantry, as its "not a very high paid job so there's a lot of turnover" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). Many of the volunteers had been with the organization far longer and felt that they were more passionate about it than the newer staff members could be. They often introduced friends and relatives to the organization and encouraged involvement in volunteer activities as well.

4.1.1.3 Level of Need

All of the volunteers experienced the level of need in the community. Though some had had personal experiences with food insecurity prior to volunteering, the level of need became clear only after working directly with clients. The number of clients overwhelmed even volunteers who had previous experience volunteering in a food pantry. As one volunteer with previous experience stated:

> I don't think I envisioned the number of people that we would see because at [the other pantry] 40-some is a huge day. […] I remember my first day thinking, 'Oh, dear' because I already worked a year at [the other pantry] and never had that. (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018)

In a single two-hour shift, a volunteer may see hundreds of clients. For those with no prior experience, their first shifts in the pantry were shocking. One recent college graduate said of the experience, "It's kind of startling to me. It's something I didn't ever think about as a student," and described the number of clients seen during a shift as "something that's raised my awareness" (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018). In addition to the number of clients, the volunteers were aware of the individual high levels of need for any one client in the pantry, as some "come in almost every day". As one volunteer said, "you know that we're probably the single source of food for them" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). The high level of need, both in the number of clients and the level of need for individual clients, related to retention of the volunteers because they viewed the pantry as crucial for the individuals and the community, which heightened their altruistic desires and made their volunteer roles crucial as well.

4.1.1.4 Relationship Building

The volunteers wanted to build relationships with the underprivileged members of their community. Some sought greater understanding and wanted to develop empathy for "people who are really different from me. Like not my age, not my background, not the same race, different levels of income" (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018). Others, having already developed a considerable level of empathy for the underprivileged, wanted to be a positive part of clients' lives, making sure clients were "recognized and valued for who they are" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018) and offering support and advice on anything from job interviews to family

problems. The following is an example from a volunteer who received voluntary supplemental training at the organization to help people navigate government assistance programs:

> But some people would be so frustrated by [the process of obtaining "food stamps"] because they said, "You know, I applied for it, and I only got $12 a month. And so it's just not worth it." And I said, "Well, $12 is better in your pocket than not, so you could get $12 worth of something at the grocery store […] at least you can get milk when we don't have it". (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018)

At times, interactions were depressing or disheartening: "I may go home and, you know, dwell on it a little bit at home. Like, 'What are we doing? What are we doing with this world?'" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018). However, these feelings were offset by the deep appreciation volunteers receive from the clients, which had become for all of the volunteers a reason to continue service. The following is one instance from a volunteer recounting his first day in the food pantry, but all of the participants made similar statements:

> Even though I didn't really know what I was doing, [the clients] couldn't tell. They were just grateful. They're grateful for the service that is provided, and they're really grateful and open in expressing that to the volunteers that work there. (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018)

The researcher was surprised by similar sentiments during her first shift at the check-in desk, as she was confused about the process but received repeated thanks from clients. The volunteers felt the appreciation received from clients was "important for a volunteer to feel" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018). This appreciation helped to balance the negative feelings that may have occurred when a client behaved poorly, attempted to break the rules, or became aggressive with the volunteers as well:

> The number of people that I see and the number that I have to get upset with, or have to say anything to, are minimal. I mean, you know, what do I have… 200 people in a shift? And maybe I've said something to two? Well, come on. But yes, there are some that are so dear, and I think they'd give me the shirt off their back. I really do. (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018)

4.1.1.5   Guilt

The balance of negative feelings with gratitude was important, as it related to feelings of guilt and concerns over *time*. Volunteers needed to feel that their time was well spent, and if "the ones who say thank you" did not outnumber "the people who are less grateful" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018), the volunteers would not have felt that their time was well spent. Interactions with a high number of appreciative clients alleviated some guilt over not volunteering more, either currently or in the past, as well as guilt over not giving monetary donations. However, the appreciation alongside an understanding of the level of need may have created another form of time-related guilt: "[I]f I have to miss [a pantry shift] or something, I feel like I need to make that up. Make that time up" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018).

Though not explicitly expressed, the volunteers' belief systems, passion, and perception of the level of need were all entwined with feelings of guilt. They wanted to do more and give more, both time and money, but external pressures and needs sometimes conflicted with their desire to help. They wanted to spend time with family and time on themselves, and they had obligations that sometimes prevented them from service. The volunteers experienced guilt over the division of time, as they often felt that they spent too little time on themselves, their families, and their obligations *or* on volunteering, usually the latter. This conflict could lead to retention issues for the organization. For example, one volunteer mentioned the conflict between the need to give and external pressures in relation to no longer volunteering for another organization: "I really enjoyed doing that [volunteer work], but I felt that it wasn't fair to the [clients], since we were going traveling so much that I wouldn't be there a lot. So I kind of stopped that" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018).

The volunteers also sometimes felt uncomfortable with clients and/or the environment in the pantry, which was a small space, crowded with clients who were sometimes loud and "get riled up and even aggressive sometimes" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018). The volunteers felt overwhelmed by the number of clients, seeing children in need, hearing the depth of appreciation, and recognizing the struggle that clients face. The emotion was too much for some volunteers, a fact acknowledged by the staff as well as volunteers, one of whom related the following story:

> I was the greeter training this one lady, and she, honest to god, I thought she was gonna
> freak out two or three times. And she never came back. She was so stressed out. She had

> to leave, go outside, and smoke cigarettes half the time just because she was too nervous and upset. (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018)

The volunteers who remained in the pantry also felt some level of discomfort at times when interacting with clients, which led to feelings of guilt because the uneasiness conflicts with their beliefs in fairness and equality. On some level, the discomfort and guilt also stemmed from recognition of advantages that the volunteers had had as compared to the clients.

4.1.2   Self-Interest

The term 'self-interest' in this context was not used to imply a negative connotation but to describe the counterpoint of altruism. The volunteers continued service for themselves as well as the clients. Additionally, the volunteers were more willing to continue service if the organization fit their social and personal needs.

4.1.2.1   Social

The social component of the volunteer experience had two subthemes: interaction and entertainment. Both played a major role in the volunteers' desire to continue service. As mentioned, the Social theme and subthemes differ from the altruistic Relationship Building theme in intensity and depth of the bond desired as well as the volunteers' motivation for pursuing the connections.

4.1.2.1.1   Interaction

Though building relationships had altruistic motivation, the social aspect of volunteering was the result of self-interest as well. Several participants considered meeting clients and "visiting" with them to be the most satisfying aspect of volunteering. For instance, one volunteer stated, in regards to building relationships with clients, "I think I get more out of it then for myself, I mean it's a selfish thing probably" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018). Many volunteers used their service as a substitute for relationships with co-workers after retirement, particularly with the staff members. Another volunteer spoke of the most exciting aspect of working in the pantry as "the interaction with people" because, "Being retired, you miss that" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). Non-retirees also expressed an interest in developing relationships with staff members, some of whom have offices just outside the pantry. All of these were working relationships rather than friendships, as none of the participants have socialized with staff

members outside the pantry. The desired interaction with staff was either a substitute or supplement for career-related relationships, depending upon whether the volunteer was retired or a current member of the workforce. The staff focus group members who worked most closely with volunteers all stated that they often wrote professional recommendations for volunteers, which was a clear motivational factor for the young volunteers. One staff member added, "I'll get really great volunteers that are coming regularly and […] investing time. And then they ask for a recommendation, and then I never see them again" (Pantry Coordinator, Focus Group, 2018).

Building relationships with clients also fulfilled social needs for the volunteers, in addition to making them feel helpful and connected to the cause. Seeing the clients in person and hearing firsthand the stories of those who struggled with food insecurity made volunteers feel more strongly about helping them. One volunteer who has worked in several roles for the organization but currently works only in the pantry said that he feels he makes more of a difference in the pantry than elsewhere because in other roles, "you don't have that interaction with the clients, really seeing who's getting it" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). As volunteer activities that did not require direct contact with clients also fulfilled altruistic needs, the preference for interaction as a social opportunity was clear. As mentioned, the interactions brought about strong emotional responses in the volunteers, but they universally acknowledge that the positive feelings outweighed the negative feelings that sometimes arose from the interactions.

4.1.2.1.2   Entertainment

To some degree, this emotional rollercoaster was a form of entertainment and a release from boredom. Though mentioned by all participants in the study, the relief from boredom and/or entertainment as a motivating and satisfying part of the experience was particularly true for the retirees and those nearing retirement. It got volunteers out of the house, away from the television and other "fun" activities and provided another type of fun. For example, one retiree explained her reasons for volunteering as follows: "I waited till I was 70 to retire, but I, I couldn't stand not having something to do. You know, you can only read and crochet so long in the day" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018).

The enjoyment and entertainment were found partly through interactions with clients, staff, and other volunteers, but there also was a tendency for volunteers to create their own

games and "fun" activities, such as matching clients with food items they might like, sharing recipes, making food displays enticing, and seeing how quickly they could stock shelves. Another example observed in the pantry involved working with another volunteer on a task and collectively deciding how best to complete the task. The volunteers inevitably found a rhythm together and appear to take greater pleasure in it.

4.1.2.2   Personal Needs

The theme of Personal Needs presented itself in numerous ways, unique to each participant. However, the subthemes of self-satisfaction, ability to commit, and career were for all participants essential aspects of the training and retention experience in the food pantry.

4.1.2.2.1   Self-Satisfaction

Self-satisfaction was the counterpoint to altruism for the volunteers and a minor source of guilt, as they knew that their service was not entirely altruistic whereas they believed that it should be. The staff also acknowledged altruism as "the right reason" to volunteer. The volunteers continued their service because it made them 'feel good to help other people' or some variant thereof. As one volunteer stated, "That's why you volunteer. Because it feels good" (Volunteer 9, Focus Group, 2018). The volunteers also experience self-satisfaction when working with other volunteers who shared their beliefs:

> I get so much gratification about working with people who are so good. I am so in awe of some of the volunteers here and how committed they are, how many hours they put in. And it just makes me feel good to be around them. (Volunteer 6, Focus Group, 2018)

The volunteers all wanted to feel useful and needed by the clients or organization, and the pantry provided them with an opportunity to be useful and feel needed, which was one reason for their continuation of service. Working in the pantry made the volunteers feel good about themselves, and the harder they worked and the more clients they helped, the better they felt about their service and contribution to the community. One member of the volunteer focus group summarized the feeling: "Sometimes you look at your heart, and you're just so damn tired you can barely move. But it feels good. You've done something positive" (Volunteer 9, Focus Group, 2018).

Because self-satisfaction was important to the volunteers, any delay in seeing the results of their work was viewed as negative, including any training that they felt was not directly useful to working in the pantry. Volunteers who took part in the mandatory one- or two-hour training sessions felt that the "majority of it was more fluffy stuff" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018) and that they "don't want to be just lectured at" (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018). All volunteers expressed the desire for a very short training session prior to entering the pantry, emphasizing that the "hands-on" or "on-the-job" training was most useful to them. One volunteer who received only on-the-job training suggested that the training for new volunteers should entail, "just a little five-minute talk about major things […] like food safety and what the different roles are and where on that specific day that person can help out" (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018). The other volunteers expressed similar thoughts with a maximum suggested duration of 15 minutes to "make sure they do the basics" (Volunteer 12, Focus Group, 2018), including a bit of compassion training that could help people uncomfortable with client interaction. The volunteers also noted policies, processes, and systems that they felt slowed down the delivery of food to clients, delaying the immediate results they needed or preferred to see. Again, any delay in the self-satisfaction of seeing results was a negative for them. Additionally, the only volunteer who felt mostly satisfied with the training process (Volunteer 1) received an orientation presentation immediately prior to entering the pantry. All other volunteers received no orientation training or took part in orientation training prior to the day they volunteered for the first time, which supported the idea that the lack of immediate results was not ideal for them.

Appreciation was also an aspect of the need for immediate results and personal satisfaction. Receiving gratitude and appreciation from clients and the staff was a major point of retention for all of the volunteers. As mentioned previously, the gratitude made coping with "aggressive", "greedy", or unpleasant clients far less emotionally draining. Volunteers noted that the clients began thanking them in genuine and sincere tones on their first shifts, as did the staff. For instance, one volunteer said of the staff, "I felt very welcomed when I came in and appreciated" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018). Others mentioned the frequency with which the staff thanked them after completion of a shift, while several mentioned that they might consider leaving the organization if they no longer felt appreciated. The gratitude amplified their self-satisfaction at doing a 'good deed' and immediately signaled to new volunteers that they were doing something important and helpful for the clients and organization.

4.1.2.2.2 Ability to Commit

The ability to commit was another key concern for all of the volunteers. Because of the aforementioned guilt over time-related concerns, they all wanted a place where they could go, provide a needed service, and go about their lives. There were two components to the ability to commit. First, the volunteers appreciated or required flexible schedules for volunteers. The volunteers appreciated, "the flexibility and not feeling like you were letting somebody down if you went on a vacation" (Volunteer 10, Focus Group, 2018). In general, the food pantry volunteers wanted short shifts with a variety of time slots and no commitment:

> If you can't come in, you just don't sign up that week. And you don't have to feel guilty about that. And the shifts are pretty short, so you can look into going if you have some free time during the week too. I think it's just, like, a lot more fluid [than other organizations]. (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018).

The lack of required commitment was one reason for the volunteers' desire to commit to this organization, and several noted that they were "excited" to volunteer because of the flexibility. They felt that offering schedule freedom was a sign of consideration for the volunteers' time and illustrated how much the organization and/or staff cared about its volunteers: "It feels like they value the volunteers' time and other commitments" (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018).

The second component of the ability to commit was the cause and reputation of the organization, as they aligned with the volunteers' beliefs (e.g. helping others, making a positive contribution to the community) and provided for the volunteers' needs (e.g. interaction, appreciation). Because food is a basic human need, all of the volunteers felt that they could support the cause, and the organization's reputation made the volunteers feel that they could truly commit to working in its food pantry as opposed to one of the other local pantries. The volunteers had heard or seen positive things about the organization prior to volunteering, often through partnered organizations. One such volunteer explained: "and I saw what good work they were doing. And so when I retired then I focused more [on the organization]" (Volunteer 7, Focus Group, 2018).

4.1.2.2.3 Career

In addition to the aforementioned social relationships as a replacement for co-workers, volunteers used their service for other career-related means. For retirees, this took the form of structure, responsibilities, and a sense of belonging lost when they stopped working.

> I've been retired, and I've been used to working with people for, I mean, hundreds and hundreds of people. So, I worked with [the organization's staff]. I know a lot of the folks in the staff just through stopping by and talking to them. I feel like, I feel more part of this organization. (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018)

For younger volunteers, it was a means for their personal development (e.g. empathy building), skill development (e.g. problem-solving), and/or an addition to their resumes. Based on comments from the staff, the younger short-term volunteers also may have provided service as a means of practicing skills in a low-pressure, professional environment, knowing that if they failed, there was no long-term commitment or consequences.

4.1.3   Organizational Support

While the Altruism and Self-Interest clusters related to volunteer motivation and satisfaction levels, the Organizational Support cluster related mostly to satisfaction and socialization.

4.1.3.1 Safety

Safety was important to all of the volunteers, but it was an acute concern for the long-term volunteers. While the short-term volunteers may have had limited experience with client aggression in the pantry, they still had minor concerns over their personal safety and the safety of their belongings while on site. For example, one short-term volunteer (three weeks of service) stated:

> I felt safe there even the first time. I mean, they were careful to say, 'Well, this is where you can put your personal belongings, and they'll be safe.' […] We always want to know where can we put our purses. (Volunteer 1, Interview, 2018)

Conversely, the long-term volunteers expressed the potential for violence as a genuine threat and cited police intervention for disputes between clients (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018) and the possibility of 'getting shot' (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). The long-term volunteers

were aware of the potential risks but did not allow themselves to be intimidated by the clients, despite curses and "nasty" comments. For instance, the same volunteer who expressed concerns over getting shot stated, "What I tell them is, 'Man, as long as you're behaving this way, I'll just sit here, and I won't check anybody in, and we'll just sit here as long you want'. And then that usually shuts him up" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018) The pantry was sometimes a scary place for the volunteers, particularly when they were in the waiting room, packed full of impatient clients. It was a loud and chaotic environment, as the waiting room "is not large enough" to hold all of the clients (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018).

The short-term volunteers may be shocked when they first experience aggression in the pantry, especially those who feel committed and loyal to the organization but have been volunteering for only a few weeks. A violent incident could be a threat to retention, as they may want to leave after their first frightening encounter. This was what prompted several volunteers to state that the most crucial part of training is compassion training: "I mean, and I just, no question in my mind, [the most important part is] how to handle the people" (Volunteer 9, Focus Group, 2018). The volunteers also felt that staff always should be available to handle negative and/or aggressive situations, but the staff members sometimes were not present to intervene at the time of an occurrence. One volunteer focus group participant commented, "Occasionally, there needs to be somebody with authority to handle a situation" (Volunteer 9, Focus Group, 2018) because, as another volunteer added, "Things get heated sometimes" (Volunteer 11, Focus Group, 2018). Additionally, the recently offered training programs did not cover potential safety concerns beyond the topic of food safety, and new volunteers were inconsistently informed of who to speak to if a problem arose. Both issues could lead to volunteers discontinuing service, and the staff acknowledged the problem. The Pantry Coordinator (Focus Group, 2018) stated that he tries to inform all new volunteers of these safety concerns but finds it difficult because, "I don't want to scare them away, but I also want them to know what they're getting themselves into."

4.1.3.2   Preparedness

The short-term volunteers felt unprepared for their first shift in the pantry, but they all felt relatively comfortable in their roles by the end of their first shifts and entirely comfortable after three shifts. The long-term volunteers also cited three shifts for complete comfort in their roles,

but they felt overprepared in some regards and underprepared in others. The long-term volunteers received one to three hours of training that new volunteers were not offered, and they felt that the training provided too much information about the organization, food insecurity, and statistics, none of which were considered useful. As one stated, "It was more about food insecurity and playing games and things like that. It wasn't so much about, here's the rules and here's what you do and that kind of thing" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). Additionally, the long-term volunteers' mandatory orientation training did not take into account the volunteers' familiarity with the organization and prior work in other food pantries. For instance, Volunteer 3 and Volunteer 4, both long-term volunteers, had one or more years of experience working in other food pantries and mobile food pantries. Several training topics, including compassion for clients and information on food insecurity, were well-known to them prior to receiving training at the organization, while the information about the organization itself contained "nothing" useful. None of the volunteers, short- or long-term, felt that a long orientation training session would be the best use of their time, likely because there would be no immediate results or self-satisfaction derived from it. Essentially, anything beyond the most basic orientation training does not serve their altruistic or self-interest needs and desires, and the volunteers would view extensive training as an imposition.

The hands-on training received by all of the volunteers was viewed as inadequate in some way, though all described different issues with their training. As inconsistency was a known problem with training at the organization, this was not surprising. Though the long-term volunteers received extensive orientation training, they also felt that they received too little information on how to work in the pantry, what their roles would be, and practical guidance for using the check-in system.

> I want you to, okay, sit me down at the computer with the system that I'm gonna be working on. Don't talk about it as another entity when I'm somewhere else because, by the time I get to that system, I won't remember. (Volunteer 4, Interview, 2018)

Though their hands-on training was more thorough than the training for short-term volunteers, the long-term volunteers felt that the hands-on training could have been improved. The short-term volunteers found that their hands-on training, provided by other volunteers, left them underprepared, particularly for working at the check-in station. All of the participants in this study felt unprepared for the check-in role, regardless of the duration of service in the pantry

prior to check-in training. Most avoided the role, if possible, as they never became comfortable in the role and did not feel completely prepared even after long familiarity with the pantry. The staff recognized filling the check-in role as a problem, and volunteers who felt comfortable in the role often served in that capacity, despite check-in not being their preferred role in the pantry. As one volunteer who preferred the checkout role stated, "See, when I walk in here everybody automatically thinks I'm going to be the check-in. That's just kind of my role now. and each time, I come in and say 'I can do anything you want me to do'" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018).

Volunteers who had had limited experience with the underprivileged felt uneasy, uncomfortable, and/or helpless for up to several hours of their initial shifts in the pantry. At times, even seasoned volunteers felt uncomfortable. These feelings were heightened by the number of clients as compared to the limited number of volunteers. One volunteer described a common scene as follows:

> When you pull up for that one o'clock shift, there will just be a massive crowd of people around that door. It's like, 'I hope there are a lot of volunteers downstairs'. And then you get there, and it's you and one other person and a staff member or something. (Volunteer 6, Focus Group, 2018)

New volunteers often received training within the setting described above. Because the pantry was frequently understaffed due to a shortage of volunteers, who were also often in charge of training, a new volunteer sometimes required several hours in the pantry to learn how to complete tasks and feel comfortable in the space:

> I don't know if the other volunteers all the time were aware that they have that [training] responsibility. So, there was […] kind of an awkward period when I got there. Like, the first hour where I didn't really know what I was doing. I just kind of felt uncomfortable, and I don't know. I didn't really like that. (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018)

Though the staff members agreed that many volunteers never returned to the pantry after their first shifts, others returned because of the aforementioned self-satisfaction and immediate results, as they typically learned how to be useful in the pantry before the end of the first shift. Depending on disposition and personality, it often took several shifts to feel comfortable interacting with the clients as well, which may be one reason that the analysis showed a universal desire to build relationships—those who continued service (i.e. the study participants) fought

through the discomfort and reached a level of comfortability because for them, relationship building was one of the motivating and satisfying aspects of volunteer work.

4.1.3.3   Long-Term Support

The Perceived Failure of the Organization and Ownership and Responsibility themes appeared to be related to the duration service. Though present during the Emotional Involvement (four to eight months) stage of the volunteer lifecycle, they were particularly strong for long-term volunteers.

4.1.3.3.1   Perceived Failures of the Organization

The long-term volunteers had an acute awareness of perceived failures of the organization and/or its staff members. Because they had been volunteering in the pantry for a year or more, they recognized equipment that could be useful in the pantry as well as potential improvements for the efficiency of the pantry's systems and processes. The organization had not acted on most or any of the suggestions made by the volunteers, making them feel underappreciated at times. Below is an example from an Established Volunteer (one year of service):

> I mean, I've told them very specific things and actually gave them people's names to call up that would be more than happy to help them. It wasn't followed up at all. I mean even with equipment, you know? Equipment donations, things like that that I was really surprised that they would not fall over backwards to, you know, call up and say, "Hey, we need this. Can you provide that for us?". (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018)

Professional experiences and educational backgrounds sometimes aligned with the organization's needs, but the long-term volunteers did not feel that the organization utilized them as a resource. The volunteers also did not feel that the organization always recognized their abilities during the training process. During the volunteer focus group, a long-term volunteer described the feeling as it related to another organization through which she volunteered in the past:

> In a lot of cases, the people who are volunteering are professional people who have a lot of experience in the workforce. And in many cases, and I don't mean this to be an ageist comment, although it may sound like one, the people who are organizing the training for

the volunteers are entry-level, brand new professionals. And they underestimate the

people that they're trying to train. And I'm not saying that's what's happening here, but

I'm just saying that is an issue because a lot of volunteers are people like myself who are

retired. (Volunteer 12, Focus Group, 2018)

Though the volunteers did not express the feeling of being underestimated during training, their tone while describing their experiences would indicate that they experienced this to some degree. The long-term volunteers also remained with the organization through many changes in staff and through undesirable policy and process changes as well as promised changes that were not completed. For example, a Retiring (two or more years of service) volunteer several times mentioned the disconnect between the check-in system and the checkout, which "isn't really a system":

I was under the impression that soon, they were going to speak to each other. The two

systems were going to speak to each other so that when [clients] checked out, I was going

to be in the same profile recording their visit and their poundage, but that hasn't happened

yet. And I thought it was going to, but that maybe was a misunderstanding of mine as

well. But I think if you look at the check-in thing, there's a place for that. (Volunteer 4,

Interview, 2018)

Whether it was an example of a promise that went unfinished or an undesirable process change when the organization acquired new check-in software, it was clear the volunteer viewed it as a failure, even apologizing to clients while explaining, "These two don't talk to each other, so I just need your name". Each specific "failure" offered by the volunteers was minor and unique to their experience, but the theme was evident for all of the long-term volunteers as well as the short-term volunteers who had had extensive educations and/or careers.

4.1.3.3.2 Ownership and Responsibility

The long-term volunteers all had developed a sense of ownership and responsibility in the organization. The criticisms or perceived "failures" derived from a desire to improve the pantry, help more clients, and/or help the current clients in a more effective or efficient manner. For example, the volunteer focus group was adamant about the need to reinstitute consistent compassion training, insisting that the organization "could do a little bit better job on" preparing new volunteers for "dealing with clients face-to-face", not to make the volunteers comfortable

but to help them "treat [clients] like human beings" (Volunteer 8, Focus Group, 2018). The volunteers believed that the training was needed to teach people "to just be friendly" because, "I mean they're your neighbor. They're your people across the street. They're your community" (Volunteer 5, Focus Group, 2018).

 As mentioned, the long-term volunteers believed that they felt more ownership for the organization than did the staff members who ran the pantry, because "the turnover here is something else!" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). The volunteers took on more responsibilities in their roles at the pantry and felt pride when trusted with additional responsibilities. As one volunteer described his experiences in the check-in role: "I think [the former pantry manager] knew when I was in the front, 'don't have to worry about [interviewee], he knows what he's doing'" (Volunteer 3, Interview, 2018). The additional responsibilities were both willing and even enjoyable, self-satisfying aspects of the experience. For example, a volunteer in the Emotional Involvement (four months) stage was pleased when asked to train or mentor new volunteers, a new responsibility for him:

> It's gotten to where [the former pantry manager], or whoever's running the pantry that day, will just point them and say, 'If you have any questions, just ask one of these guys'. Or 'this guy,' pointing to me. It's pretty cool. (Volunteer 2, Interview, 2018)

As can be surmised from the above statement of a volunteer with four months of service, the process of taking on more responsibility and developing feelings of ownership appeared to begin sometime in the three- to four-month duration of service and became stronger over time. It was most strongly felt by the long-term volunteers but was in the early stages of development for short-term volunteers as well. Though not expressed explicitly, some volunteers also had a need for power and/or control and may have taken on responsibility and ownership as a means of satisfying this need, particularly if they were retired, had low-power jobs, or were client-volunteers who felt elements of their lives were out of control.

CHAPTER 5.   DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

How does training help or hinder the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers? The results of the study and its implications for retention and training program design were specific to the food pantry case. However, the information might be applicable in organizations with low skill requirements for volunteers and relatively obvious or straightforward missions, particularly those that provide direct contact with clients.

5.1   Implications for Training and Retention

Though not all themes uncovered during analysis directly related to training, there were implications for both training design and retention. The altruism cluster indicated that training activities occurring prior to client contact should be minimal and, if possible, occur immediately before entering the volunteering environment. This would allow volunteers to see for themselves the level of need and that their belief systems align with the work, while quickly offering an opportunity to assuage guilt over not volunteering and to begin relationship building. A short training on-site also may prevent most or all post-training, pre-service attrition. A shortened pre-service training period was also indicated by the presence of several self-interest needs, including interaction, entertainment, and self-satisfaction. The sooner volunteers fulfill these needs, the more likely they are to return for another shift, affecting their ability to commit. Volunteers may find it easier to walk away prior to discovering how the service meets their needs. Given the shorter timeframe for socialization through orientation training, a focus on the organization's values and alignment with volunteers' altruistic needs rather than mission, history, and other programs.

In contrast to the short pre-service training session, a more thorough hands-on training was indicated by themes in both the self-interest and organizational support clusters. Information necessary to "helping" must be covered during training, as it related to preparedness. This includes the physical activities and layout as well as tips for working with clients. Volunteers also should be supervised during early interactions with clients, as many were unprepared for the realities of working with the underprivileged. Though work in the pantry was not heavily reliant on skills, college-student and working-aged volunteers should be assured that there are

opportunities for development and growth, in particular for soft skills. When possible, volunteers should be trained for additional responsibilities, especially the long-term volunteers who may grow weary of performing the same tasks.

Several self-interest and organizational support themes indicated the need for strong lines of communication in the food pantry. The perceived failures of the organization were caused by a lack of communication between staff and volunteers. The volunteers' ideas for improvement were not listened to or acted upon by staff without a given reason. The safety concerns also indicated the need for better communication, as volunteers frequently could not locate staff members when needed and were not always aware of who was in charge on a given day. Interaction with staff was a primary motivation for many, in part because of the desire or need to replace co-workers for retired volunteers and to acquire recommendations for working volunteers. Training at the food pantry would be improved through delivery by a staff member, informing new volunteers of the communication structure, and active supervision, which may provide a opportunities for meaningful interaction with the volunteers. Retention for long-term volunteers also may be extended through stronger lines of communication with staff members, particularly those in positions less prone to high turnover rates.

The ability to commit theme indicated that the organization's flexible scheduling and lack of forced commitment from volunteers should continue, as it lessens guilt over missed shifts or rescheduling and allows volunteers to best control their time. For retention, this was crucial, and several volunteers mentioned it as key in their decision to sign up for their first shift as well. In addition to continuing its flexible scheduling, the ability to commit theme implies that primary training programs should not be performed only at certain times or on certain days. In short, the organization was on the right track when it chose to remove the mandatory one- to two-hour training program. Emailing important information upon signup and providing training to volunteers upon arrival was the best possible option, as it did not inconvenience volunteers and allowed them to maintain their own schedules.

5.2   Discussion

The essence of the volunteer training experience at the organization indicated the strong relationship of motivation and satisfaction with retention. Both motivation and satisfaction were tied to volunteers' altruistic interest and self-interest. Volunteers felt that their work in the pantry

satisfied their altruistic and self-interest needs, which was the reason for their motivation to continue service.

The organization's volunteers did not express socialization as a motivation. Essentially, they were not motivated by a desire to become part of the organization. Rather, socialization was tied directly to satisfaction in this case. The data indicated that many socialization elements in training design may not be necessary for retention if both altruistic and self-interest needs are being met by an organization. The food pantry program had not provided orientation training to socialize all volunteers to the organization, and in general, the volunteers who received orientation training were dissatisfied with the experience. However, the volunteers felt satisfied with their experiences in the pantry and, in particular, with their earliest experiences in the pantry, suggesting that improved and thorough hands-on training would improve satisfaction with the training program. Additionally, some of the volunteers developed loyalty, ownership, and the desire for more responsibilities in the organization, despite having no knowledge of some programs offered by the organization, its history, its staff, and other key socialization elements. The key elements of socialization in this case were a better understanding of their role in the food pantry (rather than the organization as a whole) and improved lines of communication with staff members. Both could improve retention, and both may be integrated into hands-on training.

There were several elements in this case that may have contributed to the reduced importance of the socialization factor for the participants. First, the volunteers had direct contact and interaction with clients, allowing them to see for themselves the level of need, the organization's mission, and the importance of that mission. Second, hunger is a cause with which anyone can relate because it is a requirement for sustaining life. Volunteers were aware, on a basic level, of the cause (i.e. people need food) and how the organization alleviates the problem (i.e. by giving people food). Causes less familiar to potential volunteers may require further socialization than was needed at this organization (e.g. education on the underlying issues, client demographics, and precisely what the organization does to help alleviate the problem). Third, the volunteer opportunity offered by the organization filled both the altruistic interests and self-interests of the participants, which may not be the case for every organization or volunteer opportunity. Fourth, the tasks required of volunteers, though sometimes emotionally and physically demanding, were not complex or skill-based. The volunteers did not feel that they needed extensive training to perform the tasks and believed that nothing they did in the pantry

could have a far-reaching negative effect, leading any "training" session to be viewed as unnecessary. This may not be true for skill-based types of volunteer activities or those in which mistakes could lead to significant damage (e.g. answering calls at a suicide hotline). Finally, the staff was aware that the volunteers were necessary for completion of the organization's mission and treated volunteers in a respectful manner. A high level of appreciation for volunteers was part of the organization's culture. The volunteers did not come to know the staff well but believed they were kind people, if overworked. There was no major struggle between the staff and volunteers for resources or power. The diminished importance of socialization as compared to the motivation and satisfaction factors may be contingent on some, or all, of the above elements.

5.3   Recommendations

The following were practical recommendations for the organization's food pantry training program, based on the results of this study. Though specific to this case, the recommendations may be of use in other organizations experiencing similar retention and training issues.

5.3.1   Training Program Design

The analysis suggested several improvements for effective training at the organization. In this case, the duration of the training session should be short. The participants indicated 15 minutes as a desirable length and believed that the necessary information would fit within this time frame. Anything longer may lead volunteers to feel that their time has been wasted and decrease the likelihood of individual retention. The data suggested that the organization should include orientation, compassion, and hands-on training within the 15-minute timeframe while continuing to provide optional monthly training opportunities for those who wish to participate.

The bulk of the training (10 minutes perhaps) should consist of hands-on training in the pantry and cover information such as where to locate items to restock, what items should be stocked that day, and any other necessary information for the performance of pantry tasks, including basic food safety. The hands-on training session should include introductions to other volunteers, encouraging the fun and social elements of volunteering. Training should ensure that new volunteers know who to contact in the case of emergencies and who to ask if they have

questions. Volunteer mentors are suitable for supervising new volunteers and may increase the fun factor, but for consistency, staff should train new volunteers until satisfied that volunteer mentors are prepared and available for each shift. The focus on hands-on training will prevent experienced volunteers and retirees from feeling that young staff members, new to the workforce, are lecturing them on topics already understood as well.

The orientation aspect of training should highlight details about the organization that relate most strongly to the volunteers' altruistic interest and self-interest. For example, relating the level of need through an explanation of how many families receive help each day in the food pantry may relate to a volunteer's altruistic needs. Explaining how much the staff needs and appreciates volunteers would support a volunteer's self-interest needs (i.e. appreciation) while imparting information about the organization's values and culture. A focus on values and culture may be more beneficial than explanations of mission, vision, role in the community, and the volunteer's role in the organization, which all can be inferred with relative accuracy in this case. The organization's policies on giving as much food as possible and requiring no proof of need may be particularly beneficial inclusions in the brief orientation training, as staff and volunteers agreed that it serves as a point of dissension for some volunteers and loyalty for others. Essentially, a new volunteer's "fit" with the organization may rely on these policies. Additionally, the organization may achieve greater levels of buy-in from volunteers by allowing them to experience the mission in action. As socialization is, in this case, not closely related to the volunteers' desire to continue service with the organization, the orientation instead should assure new volunteers that the organization aligns with their needs while being as brief as possible (one to two minutes may suffice in this case).

The remainder of the time should be spent on compassion training to build empathy for the clients and provide some tips on volunteer-client interactions. The use of an anecdote may be sufficient to humanize clients enough for new volunteers to feel comfortable getting to know them on their own. The participants who displayed the most empathy for clients insisted that compassion training is necessary, frequently commenting on the importance of understanding that the clients are human beings, but they also insisted that the training does not need to be lengthy or extensive to impart the compassion message. Surprisingly, the "fun" activities and learning games previously used during compassion training were viewed as a waste of time by the volunteers, which also suggests that a succinct lesson may be beneficial for retention. One

anecdote should impart the potential for client aggression and how it was handled to make volunteers aware of the potential risk while assuring them that, when the situations arise, they are handled effectively with no harm to the volunteers.

In general, a shortened and consistent training design would be valuable for the organization. However, hands-on training for the check-in station may require a longer period of supervision, as all of the participants (both staff and volunteers) noted that this role is more complex and difficult to master. Explaining the role before training begins and offering the volunteer an opportunity to decline the role may prevent some negative experiences. In addition, it is crucially important during training for volunteers to be informed of who to contact if they have a problem at check-in, as the check-in station is distanced from other volunteers and staff offices. Because of the isolation from other volunteers and staff members, the check-in role should be avoided for volunteers' first shifts if possible. For young, working-age volunteers, it may be beneficial to explain also the skills the volunteers will gain from serving in this role.

5.3.1.1   Training Materials

The proposed training program includes a considerable amount of content to be delivered in a short allotment of time. Because of this, the researcher recommends developing a training checklist as well as a thorough guide for the check-in role. The checklist should include the key values to be discussed during the orientation portion of training, who to contact with questions or in case of an emergency, and an introduction to a volunteer. The hands-on portion of the checklist should include a brief walkthrough of storage areas for each section of the pantry, immediately useful information about what is to be stocked that day, basic food safety and restroom/handwashing locations, and an explanation of how the pantry process works. Finally, the compassion section of the checklist should include two anecdotes, one for empathy and one for safety. Though the checklist does not need to be performed in order, it will ensure that all of the key information has been imparted during training. It also will serve as a guideline for new staff members and volunteer mentors.

The check-in guide should be thorough and include screenshots of every page the volunteer will use during intake, profile updating, and by-proxy client signup and sign-in. The screenshots should indicate each area that must be clicked or filled and may serve as a series of infographics. All pink warning banners should be included as well with instructions for what, if

anything, volunteers should do when they appear. Additionally, each process should include a written list of steps and actions to be taken. The comprehensive guide will aid in the training process and provide reassurance for volunteers new to the check-in role. An extended period of supervision is still recommended following check-in training.

5.3.1.2   Online Training

The current online training program may be improved by focusing on the elements of orientation training outlined in the proposed training design. The training provides considerable socialization materials, which may be more effective if included as links to additional materials. The compassion lecture in use focused heavily on awareness and atypical clients rather than empathy-building. There is room for improvement. Creating a video in the food pantry with actual clients relating their stories may be more effective. Whether changes are made to the online training or not, the in-person training will reinforce the key information provided.

Because none of the new volunteers with whom the researcher became acquainted had taken the online training or knew of its existence, it is recommended that the organization make a few adjustments to the manner in which information is displayed in the welcome email as well. At the time of the study, the training was linked within a paragraph of text near the bottom of the email under an "Additional Information" heading. As volunteers also appeared to be unaware of the other "Additional Information" included in that section, including the suggestion of arriving 10 to 15 minutes early and wearing closed-toed shoes, the researcher believes that volunteers are not reading the emails. First, the subject line of the email should note that there is important information inside. Second, the use of a brightly colored image link could be helpful for gaining the volunteers attention, particularly if placed at the top of the email. The image also should note the importance of the training.

5.3.2   Non-Design Recommendations

In addition to training program design, the analysis indicated five other changes that could aid in volunteer training and retention. First, the Pantry Manager position was greatly helpful for volunteers, providing a point of contact with staff as well as supervision, training, and an authority figure when situations required one. It is recommended that one staff member's job description include training volunteers and oversight of the pantry. Second, the organization

should track retention rates for volunteers. This will provide a means of evaluating the training program's effectiveness and permit adjustments. Third, the researcher recommends the creation of two volunteer surveys, each two to three minutes in length. One should be a survey for new volunteers, asking for their thoughts on the training program, improvements that could be made, and aspects that could have been better. The other should be akin to an exit survey, asking volunteers who have not been active for length of time (e.g. 6 months, 1 year, 18 months) for feedback on why they left, which could remind the volunteer of the organization's continued need for volunteers as well as provide information useful to the organization. Fourth, an additional brief training program should be created for volunteer mentors. The training should illustrate how to use the training checklist to ensure all information is provided to new volunteers. Shadowing a staff member during several training sessions and being supervised during the mentors' first attempts at training are recommended as well. Finally, volunteers wanted responsibilities within the organization. The fifth recommendation is to provide opportunities for increased volunteer responsibility. The most obvious way to do this is to make mentoring or training new volunteers an earned responsibility, available only to volunteers who are reliable and interested in improving the food pantry. Training the mentors is an investment of time and energy that likely would not go unnoticed by the volunteers and possibly would make them feel appreciated and needed. It is also recommended that the check-in role be made into an earned responsibility for regular volunteers. If the role comes to be viewed as a rite of passage and something to be earned, it could alleviate some of the avoidance of the role and perhaps turn it into a coveted position as well as providing the added responsibility that volunteers wanted.

5.4 Conclusion

This study sought to develop a deeper understanding of how training helps or hinders the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers by examining the phenomenon within one food pantry program for which volunteer were crucial. The program struggled with volunteer retention as well as the development of a training program that was practical and effective. Volunteers also chose not to participate in the optional online training and often received very little hands-on training. Six staff members and 12 volunteers from various stages of the Haski-Leventhal & Bargal (2008) Volunteer Stages and Transitions Model provided insights into the training and retention experience through a series of interviews and focus group sessions. Data

analysis uncovered the essence of the participant experiences with training and retention, which included themes within clusters of altruism, self-interest, and organizational support. These themes were Belief System, Level of Need, Relationship Building, Guilt, Interaction, Entertainment, Self-Satisfaction, Ability to Commit, Career, Safety, and Preparedness with additional themes of Perceived Failures of the Organization and Ownership and Responsibility being especially important for long-term volunteers. Based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2, socialization through orientation training should have had a major impact on retention for the organization. However, in the case of the food pantry, socialization was the least important factor for the development of a desire to serve or continue service, and lengthy orientation training was viewed less positively than the complete absence of orientation training. Instead, the participants' retention relied most heavily on meeting altruistic needs and self-interest needs tied to the motivation and satisfaction retention factors. This suggested that the food pantry program would be most successful with short training sessions focused on organizational values that are supportive of volunteers' altruistic needs, hands-on activities to prepare volunteers for service while providing opportunities to meet both self-interest and altruistic needs, and heavier involvement of the staff members in the training and supervision of volunteers. The food pantry program's training program will be successful if it provides what volunteers need without unnecessary delays to the self-satisfaction gained from helping those in need.

5.5   Future Research

As this was a phenomenological case study, the findings were accurate for the organization that participated in the research, but other types of nonprofit human service organizations and volunteer opportunities may require training programs focused on a different balance of retention factors. This suggested the need for further research on the role of volunteer socialization through orientation training for retention in nonprofit human service organizations. Studies of volunteer experiences across multiple food pantries and/or multiple types of human service programs may expand the research community's understanding of training and retention. Repeated single-program studies of the training and retention experience of volunteers in organizations with non-hunger causes could serve as a means of comparing and contrasting results. The use of programs that provide for basic human needs other than food also could be

enlightening. Additionally, because there were few strong themes concerning individual activities or lessons included in the training design, the research suggested further study on particular components of orientation, on-the-job, and compassion/empathy-building training programs that may help or hinder the retention of nonprofit human service volunteers.

APPENDIX A. SURVEYS

Volunteer Interview Questions

An Exploration of Nonprofit Human Service Volunteer Training and Retention

<u>Basics</u>: Age; Education; How long have you lived in Indiana?

<u>Past volunteer efforts</u>: How long, what type, did you receive training there, why leave, favorite/least favorite aspects?

Why did you choose to volunteer for this organization?

How much did you know about the organization before you volunteered?

What training have you received (orientation, hands-on, mentor)?

Describe your experience with _____ (ask for each type of training received).

      Which type did you find most useful?

      Were any not useful to you?

      What parts of the training made you excited to volunteer? Concerned about volunteering?

      Did you have opportunities to meet people during training?

How did training for the food pantry differ from training at past organizations?

What was your favorite part of training? Least favorite?

What aspects of the training process did you find frustrating?

What aspects of the training were most unenjoyable?

How well did training prepare you for volunteer activities? (Adequate?)

How did the training process introduce you to the organization (mission, vision, culture, your role)?

How well did the training program inform you about the underlying problem the program hopes to solve?

Do you feel that the training program enlightened you about the problems faced by the clientele?

Do you feel that the training was time well-spent?

If you could change anything about the training program, how would you change it?

Describe your most memorable experience during training. (Positive or Negative?)

When you finished training, how well did you understand the importance of your volunteer efforts?

How well did training highlight the effect your volunteering would have on the community?

After training, did you know what the organization's role was? And your role in the org?

When you worked your first shift in the food pantry, how did you put into action what was learned during training?

Did you know who to report to or contact if there was a problem?

What did you expect your first shift to be like?

How did the actual experience differ from your expectations?

How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in your food pantry role?

What is the most satisfying aspect of volunteering in the food pantry?

Have you made friends with other volunteers? Clients? Staff?

Do you feel like you make a difference as a volunteer in the food pantry? Explain.

At what points have you considered leaving the organization?

Under what circumstances would you stop volunteering here?

What is your primary reason for continuing service at the organization?

Volunteer Focus Group Questions

An Exploration of Nonprofit Human Service Volunteer Training and Retention

Why do you think people choose to volunteer for this organization?

What training have you received (orientation, hands-on, mentor)?

Describe your experience with _____ (ask for each type of training received).

Which type did you find most useful?

Were any not useful to you?

What parts of the training made you excited to volunteer? Concerned about volunteering?

Did you have opportunities to meet people during training?

How did training for the food pantry differ from training at past organizations?

How has volunteering here differed from your experiences at past organizations?

What was your favorite part of training? Least favorite?

What aspects of the training process did you find frustrating?

What aspects of the training were most unenjoyable?

How well did training prepare you for volunteer activities? (Adequate?)

How did the training process introduce you to the organization (mission, vision, culture, your role)?

How well did the training program inform you about the underlying problem the program hopes to solve?

Do you feel that the training program enlightened you about the problems faced by the clientele?

Do you feel that the training was time well-spent?

If you could change anything about the training program, how would you change it?

What's your most memorable experience during training? (Positive or Negative?)

How well did training highlight the effect your volunteering would have on the community?

After training, did you know what the organization's role was? And your role in the org?

When you worked your first shift in the food pantry, how did you put into action what was learned during training?

Did you know who to report to or contact if there was a problem?

What did you expect your first shift to be like?

How did the actual experience differ from your expectations?

How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in your food pantry roles?

What is the most satisfying aspect of volunteering in the food pantry?

Have you made friends with other volunteers? Clients? Staff?

Do you feel like you make a difference as a volunteer in the food pantry? Explain.

At what points have you considered leaving the organization?

Under what circumstances would you stop volunteering here?

What is your primary reason for continuing service at the organization?

Staff Focus Group Questions

An Exploration of Nonprofit Human Service Volunteer Training and Retention

What do you believe is your biggest challenge concerning retention?

In what areas have you been successful in retaining food pantry volunteers?

Do you believe there is a link between training and retention in the food pantry? Explain.

Describe your current training process. [Trained in groups?]

Would you say that your latest changes to the training program have been successful?

What were the reasons for making the changes?

What are your biggest challenges concerning training?

Under what circumstances are volunteers most likely to continue service?

Which parts of the training program do you believe are most effective?

Which parts seem most enjoyable or satisfying for the volunteers?

When you had mandatory orientation training, did you ever have retention issues post-training but pre-service?

What feedback have you received from volunteers about the training program?

How much has volunteer feedback informed your training design?

What differences have you observed between volunteers trained with different methods?

Has there been difficulty communicating certain information to volunteers? Explain.

Has there been difficulty keeping them all informed? Explain.

How long do you think it takes food pantry volunteers to feel comfortable in their roles?

At what point do you think the volunteers understand the organization's mission, values, and communication structure?

How much time does a volunteer spend with each client?

How much opportunity do volunteers have to get to know clients? (Regulars?)

How much opportunity do volunteers have to get to know other volunteers? Staff?

How would you describe your own relationships with the volunteers?

Have there been any conflicts between volunteers? Volunteers and clients? Volunteers and staff?

What was the cause of the conflict?

Based on your experiences with the volunteers, why do they choose to volunteer?

What is the most important factor for whether a volunteer stays or leaves?

Does the role in the food pantry succeed in fulfilling their motivation to volunteer?

How long does the average food pantry volunteer continue service?

Over the course of a year, how many volunteers do you have in the food pantry? How many come back to work a second shift?

Have you found any differences in retention or training when volunteers are part of a formal group?

In an ideal scenario, what would your training program look like?

APPENDIX B. APPROVAL

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY

HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

To:	JAMES MOHLER
	YONG 170
From:	JEANNIE DICLEMENTI, Chair
	Social Science IRB
Date:	03/21/2018
Committee Action:	**Expedited Approval - Category**(6) (7)
IRB Approval Date	03/20/2018
IRB Protocol #	1802020198
Study Title	An Exploration of Nonprofit Human Service Volunteer Training and Retention
Expiration Date	03/19/2019
Subjects Approved:	32

The above-referenced protocol has been approved by the Purdue IRB. This approval permits the recruitment of subjects up to the number indicated on the application and the conduct of the research as it is approved.

The IRB approved and dated consent, assent, and information form(s) for this protocol are in the Attachments section of this protocol in CoeusLite. Subjects who sign a consent form must be given a signed copy to take home with them. Information forms should not be signed.

Record Keeping: The PI is responsible for keeping all regulated documents, including IRB correspondence such as this letter, approved study documents, and signed consent forms for at least three (3) years following protocol closure for audit purposes.

Documents regulated by HIPAA, such as Authorizations, must be maintained for six (6) years. If the PI leaves Purdue during this time, a copy of the regulatory file must be left with a designated records custodian, and the identity of this custodian must be communicated to the IRB.

Change of Institutions: If the PI leaves Purdue, the study must be closed or the PI must be replaced on the study through the

Amendment process. If the PI wants to transfer the study to another institution, please contact the IRB to make arrangements for the transfer.

Changes to the approved protocol: A change to any aspect of this protocol must be approved by the IRB before it is implemented, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. In such situations, the IRB should be notified immediately. To request a change, submit an Amendment to the IRB through CoeusLite.

Continuing Review/Study Closure: No human subject research may be conducted without IRB approval. IRB approval for this study expires on the expiration date set out above. The study must be close or re-reviewed (aka continuing review) and approved by the IRB before the expiration date passes. Both Continuing Review and Closure may be requested through CoeusLite.

Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events: Unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, serious adverse events, and serious noncompliance with the approved protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately through CoeusLite. All other adverse events and minor protocol deviations should be reported at the time of Continuing Review.

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