Role Conflict and Program Perceptions of ARCCorps Volunteers

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Introduction
APCCorps is a statewide program that recruits, trains, and supports volunteer advocates and guardians for individuals receiving services from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Developmental Disabilities Services Division (OKDHS/DDSD) throughout Oklahoma. The program is operated by Tulsa Advocates for the Rights of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (TARC), an organization dedicated to ensuring a high quality life to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in Oklahoma. ARCCorps volunteers are located throughout Oklahoma and support individuals with disabilities in need of assistance wherever they reside by serving as either their guardian or advocate. All individuals served by the program receive services from OKDHS/DDSD and are referred to TARC after they are screened by the individual’s interdisciplinary team. TARC staff search for a volunteer that is a good match to the needs, geographic location and personality of the individual with a disability. Once a potential volunteer is secured, the proposed match is presented to the individual’s interdisciplinary team for approval. In the case of proposed guardians, the match must also be approved by the Distict Court in the county in which the individual resides. After a match is approved, TARC staff train the volunteer and continue to support the relationship by providing ongoing technical assistance and support to the volunteer.

Purpose of Study
TARC contracted with The University of Oklahoma Applied Research Center in Tulsa (OUARC) to survey all active ARCCorps volunteers as of July 2008 to collect information that would assist TARC’s management and its stakeholders in evaluating current program operation and developing strategies to improve outcomes.

Methods
A questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information on volunteers, assess their perception of training and support provided by the program, and collect volunteer perceptions and attitudes regarding the ARCCorps program, their volunteer roles and their life satisfaction. This study sought not only to assess how the program was perceived by the volunteers within it, but to also gauge any role conflict among the volunteers if it affects their intent to leave the program. TARC provided mailing labels to the OUARC for all active ARCCorps volunteers. The OUARC mailed all volunteers an informed consent letter, the anonymous questionnaire, a letter from TARC encouraging them to participate in the survey, and a stamped return envelope addressed to the OUARC to ensure anonymity. Volunteers were assured that TARC would only receive aggregated data from returned questionnaires. Eighty-seven volunteers returned completed questionnaires. Typically, this survey return process would yield approximately a 10% response. However, 23.5% of the TARC volunteers participated in this process.

Demographics
Age—the average age was 54.5 years (SD = 12.8), with ages ranging from 25 years to 78 years.
Marital status—74% reported married, 9% reported divorced, 7.1% reported single, 5.9% reported widowed, and 3.5% reported separated.
Race/ethnicity—8.2% reported African American, 82.4% reported Caucasian, 2.4% reported Hispanic, 3.5% reported Native American, and 1.2% reported Asian.
Educational background—4.8% reported less than 12th grade, 15.7% reported high school/GED, 12% reported technical school, 19.3% reported some college, 38.6% reported college graduate, and 6% reported other, some including graduate school.
Employment—55.5% were employed full-time, 1.5% were employed part-time, 6% were self-employed, 28.9% were retired, 1.2% were unemployed and looking for employment, and 4.8% were unemployed but not seeking employment.
Length of service—Responding volunteers reported they have been a volunteer with the ARCCorps program an average of 4.2 years (SD = 4.03). The number of years volunteering in this program ranged from a low of less than one year to a high of 18 years.
Commitment to the program—Respondents reported devoting an average of 14.1 hours per month (SD = 20.1) to their volunteer responsibilities.

Discussion
Regarding role conflict, 48.8% respondents agreed that work limits their volunteering, 34.8% respondents agreed that family responsibilities limit volunteering, and 32.6% respondents agreed that life demands limit volunteering effectiveness. Only 19.6% and 14.3% (respectively) agreed that volunteering interferes with work and that they miss family activities because of their volunteering. Overall, responding volunteers agreed to some extent that work, family responsibilities and life demands interfere with volunteering or volunteering effectiveness; however, there is minimal agreement that volunteering interferes with work or family activities.

Conclusion
Responding volunteers indicated overall satisfaction and intent to continue volunteering for the program. Responses also suggest positive aspects regarding initial training, perceptions of staff support, contact by their coordinator, volunteers’ self-assessment, belief that TARC provides effective service, and an understanding of the overall mission and service. Some of the areas that warranted further study include preference for ongoing training, role conflict, and major life satisfaction from volunteering. For now, it is apparent that TARC’s ARCCorps volunteer program is beneficial to both the givers and receivers of care. A pattern among the responses to the open-ended questions developed with remarks explaining how valuable they felt, how great it was to help someone in need and how important it was to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Among the responses on the least favorite aspect were comments about the expense of driving to and from their matches, distaste for all the paperwork and feeling as though they do not have enough authority over their clients (mostly in medical situations). The overall remarks on the open-ended comments were very favorable, but it is important to note repeated remarks.

There was some role conflict among the volunteers, suggesting that numerous responsibilities could lead to an intent to leave. It is important to also note that 95.1% say they are satisfied with their volunteer experience with the program and 96.7% say they have intentions to continue participation in the program.

In summary, survey respondents offered an overall favorable response to their positions and responsibilities as an ARCCorps volunteer, a minimal amount of role conflict and a strong desire to continue volunteering.

References