

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM CONSUMER CONSULTATION: THE VOLUNTEERS' VIEWS

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

REPORT ON THE SURVEY OF VOLUNTEERS' VIEWS

Why was the Survey done?

Volunteers play a crucial role in the work of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Keeping in touch with volunteers (of whom there are over 1,000) and getting their feedback is of great importance to the Brotherhood. In 1999, a more general survey found that, whilst attitudes were generally positive, some volunteers consider there is a need for improvement. The Managers of Volunteer Services, Barbara Coleman and Rosa D'Aprano, wanted a survey which would show them where and what improvements are needed. This was undertaken during 'National Volunteer Week' in May 2000 through a short postal questionnaire and 'phone in' day. The Volunteer Services Managers would like to thank everyone who participated in the survey.

What did the Survey find out?

- That many volunteers appreciated the chance to have a say. Three hundred and seventy volunteers (over a third of all volunteers) replied, with either written or telephone comments. Responses were received from volunteers in many Brotherhood shops, services, programs and activities. (There is a list of these at the end of the report).
- That 85% of volunteers are very satisfied or satisfied, with the overall co-ordination of the volunteer program. Six percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This shows that there is some room for improvement in volunteer services. Nine percent did not reply to this question.
- That 91% of volunteers are very satisfied or satisfied with 'volunteering with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.' Three percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. A few did not answer this question.
- That the four most important things to volunteers are: 'recognising and valuing volunteers' work', 'communication with paid staff', 'offering volunteers the right type of work', and 'checking that things are going okay'.
- A detailed analysis of a random sample of 100 replies suggested that the areas in which the Brotherhood tends not to do as well as others are: 'two-way communication with paid staff', 'following up problems', and 'helping volunteers develop skills'. It is necessary to be cautious in interpreting this finding though, as for some of this question, up to 20% did not reply. (This is mainly because in a number of services ego auxiliary shops, there are no paid managerial staff).

- A detailed analysis was also made of any specific areas in which an aspect or aspects of a service, shop or program was rated as 'poor'. The results give a picture of which services, shops or programs, need to improve the way they relate to their volunteers.

What will be done with the findings?

The Managers of Volunteer Services, Barbara and Rosa, will be able to follow up, where there is a pattern of problems emerging, with the relevant managers, by focusing on the issues raised in the survey. These issues cover a number of areas of responsibility: 'type of work', 'orientation / information about duties', 'help to carry out duties and to develop skills', 'communication with paid staff', 'working conditions', 'checking volunteers are okay', 'following up problems/issues', and 'recognising and valuing volunteers' work'. Some volunteers added other issues, or expanded on the above and sent these comments back with the surveys. All of this information will assist the Managers of Volunteer Services to ensure the volunteer program is improved where needed.

This will need to involve a concerted effort by the Brotherhood at a number of levels:

- The Managers of Volunteer Services will need to follow up with each service, shop and program, to make it clear who is responsible for each of the above areas of responsibility.
- There will need to be continued liaison between the Managers of Volunteer Services and the Retail Operations Managers, Doug Looker and Helen Marinic, to check where procedures need improvement, for each area of responsibility.
- The BSL executive levels will need to consider whether the Volunteer Service has sufficient resources so ensure the capacity to manage a high standard volunteer program. In particular, this means ensuring the resources to provide the things volunteers said were important:
 1. regular communication with the Brotherhood, especially the Managers of Volunteer Services.
 2. regular, ongoing contact and information flow.
 3. regularly checking that volunteers are happy with their work and workplace, and following up any problems.
 4. recognising volunteers' contribution and valuing them and their work.

Where to Start?

A good place to start is with the specific suggestions and comments from volunteers themselves!

~Valuing and recognising volunteers and their contribution

- *I have skills that were not made use of*
- *I felt I was not taken seriously or valued.*
- *Some paid staff on rare or isolated incidents, tend to take you for granted and are not as friendly or tolerant as the others are. It's not a big deal but does create an uncomfortable feeling.*

- *(My) ideas have not received a reply.*
- *The only paid staff I know is the manager, and she is tops, very kind and knows how to get on with all of us volunteers. The other paid worker is good too. (But) the other BSL staff never come to see what we do. So I don't think the volunteers are really appreciated.*
- *We enjoy the periodic luncheon given by the BSL.*

~Two-way Communication: Information flow and Getting Volunteer Feedback

- *Utter communication between senior management and volunteers in relation to Brotherhood shop future directions.*
- *Meetings provide an opportunity for new volunteers to meet older members and everyone has a chance to openly discuss issues, toss around any fresh ideas, and hopefully, receive feedback and support from a Brotherhood management representative. Personal visits from a Co-ordinator or manager give inspiration to volunteers, whereas, in my view, research surveys provide nothing more than a cold communication tool.*
- *Utter effort seems to be made by Brotherhood management to keep in personal contact with volunteers.*

~Volunteer involvement in Policy and Decision-Making

- *At the Waverley shop we fill bags with good usable clothing which are collected by BSL each week. We have been told that they are not re-sorted now. As a volunteer of 18 ~ years, I feel it's so wrong to waste these things which people have donated in good faith.*
- *Volunteers care about how the organisation runs.*
- *Better policy on what is being thrown out.*
- *It would be great to be able to tell our customers we are putting a little bit back into the area.*
- *Shops are not, and should not be run as businesses. They are more than shops to the people who work there and the people who come in to buy.*

~Providing Adequate Workplace Conditions

- *Working conditions and toilet facilities are appalling; the only time it is cleared is when a meeting is held or a visit from 'head office'.*
- *Of particular concern to many of us is our shop fittings, three of which have to be put outside each morning and dragged in again at night. They are extremely heavy, too wide to fit easily through doorway and are very difficult to manoeuvre, even for the fittest of ladies. These racks are a 'workplace accident about to happen'.*

- *Frankston shop toilets required.*
- *Suggest a two-way speaker (intercom) to save disturbing the manager for minor queries...afternoon tea with nice biscuits, more staff in the afternoons and fixing price onto garments so can't come off.*
- *Parking is becoming a problem in the BSL carpark (Dandenong.) Can you look into this?*

~And keeping up the good work!!

- *I love my visits to the BSL. It's great.*
- *I greatly admire the paid staff, and how wonderfully they accept and help volunteers.*
- *I work on Monday and we have a good team and the manager is a good lady. We all get on very well and have a laugh with the people that come into the shop.*
- *Am very satisfied and feel I am contributing to the charity by giving my time.*
- *It's a real pleasure to volunteer my services there. I find everyone so friendly and helpful to work with. I feel part of the Brotherhood.*
- *I appreciate the knowledge gained whilst working as a volunteer as well as gaining new friends. Thank you.*
- *I'm very happy there!*
- *BSL is a good place to work for. It's a good environment. Friendly. I am gaining confidence and experience.*
- *Learning the till, writing lay-by docketts, sorting clothes for showing on the floor racks, contact selling to the customer (the public) were surely experiences to help build confidence and general knowledge.*
- *I believe that my five years as a volunteer have been very rewarding. Having left a highly stressful management position, the work I chose as a volunteer bus driver (initially at two BSL units) helped me to unwind into retirement and has been the best therapy that I could have received. I have made many friends with both staff and volunteers and also with the participating day care persons at these BSL units and will miss them all when I officially retire. It is my hope that other volunteers will be as fulfilled with their work as I have been with mine.*