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LEARNING BRIEF: VOLUNTEERISM IN THE AFTER SCHOOL SECTOR

This learning brief was produced by The Learning Trust in partnership with the After School Game Changer, a priority project of the Western Cape Government.

The After School sector is often dependent on volunteers for various functions, from organising and coordinating programmes, to tutoring and mentoring learners. This reliance on volunteers presents unique advantages and challenges for the sector. After School programmes (ASPs) grapple with the effective recruitment of suitable volunteers, as well as with the retention of excellent ones. As part of a growing sector, After School practitioners need to think creatively about accessing funding to train volunteers and also about establishing partnerships with stakeholders in other sectors.

This learning brief, based on the fourth After School Game Changer Community of Practice in 2018, will outline some factors for ASPs to consider in effectively recruiting, training and working with volunteers and will also address pertinent questions around volunteerism in the After School space.



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As a consequence of working in an under-resourced sector, ASPs rely heavily on volunteers to implement programming with intended beneficiaries. When selecting volunteers, it is important for an ASP to identify the personal characteristics of individuals who will advance its goals. Some factors to consider are age, experience, qualifications and skills, availability and location of volunteers.

The factors that drive and motivate one to offer up their time and skills to a non-profit are also worth much consideration. For some, it is a chance to give back to their own community or to connect with members of an underserved community. In this instance, volunteering could be a way of finding meaning and purpose. For others, volunteering is an opportunity to get work and life experience and to develop the necessary skills in preparation for a job or further study.

Groups who commonly volunteer in ASPs include:

- **Unemployed youth who volunteer to gain work experience and to give back to their communities,**
- **Community members looking to contribute to their communities, and**
- **Past participants and graduates looking to give back to the ASP they were part of, or one that is similar.**

There are advantages and disadvantages to working with each of these groups. Young people aged 18 - 25, for example, are often full of energy and act as good role models for young people, given their closeness to the experience of school themselves. Older individuals on the other hand, may have the skills and experience that are core to the work of organisations. Considering what qualities are essential to the best implementation of an ASP's work will help to establish whether age and experience are important factors.

Another thing to think about is the ease with which volunteers can access the ASP. Unemployed or retired community members looking to give back may be able to offer consistent commitment to a programme more easily than university students who have classes and exams, for example. Volunteers who live nearby the school or ASP centre will likely have fewer difficulties with transport than those who live far away or have to come from work.

It is also important to consider the characteristics and motivations of a volunteer in aligning with the goals and practical requirements of your ASP.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A pervasive dynamic in the NGO sector is that of 'the haves giving to the have-nots'. This is something which, given South Africa's racial and economic inequality, can be problematic for ASPs and can be a sensitive topic. On the one hand, people volunteering outside of their own communities can be seen as important bridge-building in a country that remains divided. It is worth giving a thought to whether volunteers see themselves as "saviours" of the communities they work in. Therefore, being open about these dynamics and setting clear boundaries for the relationships between volunteers and learners is critical.

B**RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS**

Once an ASP is clear on the kind of volunteers it requires, it needs to put energy into publicising the opportunity and selecting suitable candidates. Recruitment processes can involve some sort of formal application or interview. For some organisations, it is more effective to market the programme through a school or via word of mouth to find volunteers with a personal connection to the community or ASP in question.

When marketing, it helps to consider what benefit a prospective volunteer may derive from being part of a particular ASP. In advertisements, be sure to outline the advantages of volunteering with your programme and to highlight some benefits to your prospective volunteers. Language is important! Using positive messaging in marketing is a powerful way of challenging despondence and negativity. If the target volunteer is unemployed, their confidence may already be low. Being explicit about the level of skill required to volunteer in an ASP can give them a boost and make them feel bold enough to apply.

JAYMO REYNOLDS
volunteers with OLICO. He offered his time straight after matric as he didn't know what he wanted to do next and needed some experience. For Jaymo, volunteering helped develop his skills and gave him the opportunity to be mentored by excellent supervisors.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Should we recruit volunteers with a criminal record? Given that ASPs work with children, practitioners have a duty to guard their safety. On the other hand, volunteering can offer a past offender an opportunity to gain experience and reintegrate into society. Volunteers with a criminal record for sexual offences, dealing in drugs or crimes using a dangerous weapon should not be allowed to work with learners. In general, volunteers should not be left unsupervised with children.

C TRAINING AND RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS

In order to fulfil the mandate of an ASP, volunteers will usually require a combination of content training, as well as tutoring or facilitation training. The nature of an ASP's participant engagement will determine the kind of training that volunteers require. For example, if the role of the volunteer is limited to administrative responsibilities, they may require specific planning and administration training. If the volunteer is working with a number of learners at a time, they will need instruction on managing groups and connecting with young people.

Regular on-the-ground mentorship and supervision assists volunteers to implement lessons from their training and can be a useful way to help them develop in their role. It also ensures that the standards of the ASP are being met and programming is delivered correctly. Volunteers also feel supported if their work is supervised, and this can go a long way in ensuring retention. For some ASPs, the psychosocial and professional development of volunteers is an additional stated aim of the programme. In this case, creating an open environment which allows volunteers to learn from mistakes or get guidance on their own goals, makes them feel valued.

REFILWEHAPE MOFOKENG works at Fundza Literacy Trust. She became a volunteer with the Year Beyond programme after she survived an accident and suffered from mental health problems. Volunteering was a powerful experience for her, because she received personal growth training which helped her to develop her emotional intelligence. It also helped her feel less isolated because she felt connected to a community through the programme.

TOP TIP

Set out expectations in writing from the start. Show how the skills developed through volunteering and training will put the volunteer in a better position to find employment or get further education. Setting it out in writing will minimise the potential for miscommunication or unfulfilled expectations and increase the chances of retaining volunteers.

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COLLABORATING TO FIND VOLUNTEERS

The ability of an organisation to offer some form of remuneration or stipend to volunteers can be an important part of enabling volunteer participation and ensuring retention. This small gesture can attract volunteers who would otherwise be in low-skilled work to rather make a valuable contribution in the After School sector and build skills that may help them get a better job. It can also make it possible for volunteers to pay for transport where necessary. However, with the continued challenge of funding in the After School space, it isn't always feasible for non-profits to fund this additional budget line item. Partnering with government or the private sector can open up a new channel for funding to enable organisations to afford volunteers.

The Western Cape Government's Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) aims to combat unemployment by providing training and temporary employment on short-term Public Works projects. Non-profits can access some of this funding allocated to the EPWP by applying for a grant through the Department of Social Development as a way to fund skills training for volunteers. It is also possible to access funds through the Yes4Youth programme which subsidises youth training and employment.



On a different end of the spectrum, highly skilled volunteers working in private companies may be interested in volunteering to feel that they are contributing meaningfully to society, but struggle to find the time to do so. One successful project that has tried to work around this was a collaboration between PwC, an accounting firm, and the Dream Factory Foundation. Through the NGO, PwC's actuarial department 'adopted' a group of learners from Salt River High School and tutored them maths from Grade 9 - 12. The company paid for learners to travel to PwC's offices once a week, rather than have the volunteers use up their volunteering time in traffic. ASPs can leverage off the fact that commercial firms employ highly skilled potential volunteers. To tap into this cohort, it is a good idea to start with one person who will support a volunteering collaboration from inside the firm.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Know the difference between a stipend and a salary. In many of the communities that ASPs work in, economic opportunities are so few that a volunteer may depend on a small stipend to largely cover expenses associated with participating in your programme. While ASPs are under financial strain as it is, they should nevertheless NOT exploit volunteers for their time and commitment. This requires being clear on the training and opportunities the experience will provide for volunteers.

The use of volunteers in the After School sector requires us to think carefully about matching the needs of our beneficiaries to those of volunteers. Volunteers give their time to projects for various reasons, including personal fulfilment and a desire to gain work experience - understanding these motivations is important for After School practitioners. By delivering good training and supervision to volunteers, ASPs are better able to improve retention and ultimately get the best out of their volunteers. In bolstering their human capacity with limited financial resources, there is much potential for ASPs to enter into government and private partnerships to fund skills training for volunteers, or to collaborate with corporates to recruit volunteers with specialised skills.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

- For more information on the **EPWP**, visit the Department of Social Development's website at www.westerncape.gov.za/dept/social-development or the EPWP website at www.epwp.gov.za
- To learn more about the **Yes4Youth** programme visit the website here: www.yes4youth.co.za
- To learn more about the **PwC 'adopt a class' model**, visit the website here: www.pwc.co.za/en/about-us/corporate-responsibility/community-engagement

