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Family volunteering:  
Making a difference together

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the implementation and evaluation of a family volunteering program, an initiative using a broad definition of family working together to: enrich the lives of others; strengthen family ties; and improve the quality of community life. Two families participated by volunteering together at a seniors' centre. Summative evaluation of the pilot and interviews conducted one year later suggest that participants experienced beneficial effects, describing the experience as enjoyable, meaningful, and integrative, as well as increasing their motivation to incorporate volunteering into the lives of others. This pilot confirms that family volunteering successfully combines community service and leisure into a gratifying and worthwhile activity for participants of all ages, extending the customary boundaries of the concept of family recreation.

(KEY WORDS: Family Volunteering; Leisure; Community Service; Benefits)

### Family volunteering: Making a difference together

Canadians are working harder today than ever before, which results in difficulty in balancing their work and family lives (Charrette, 1995). According to the Vanier Institute of the Family (1994), one third of all Canadians do not feel they are getting enough quality family time, and therefore, lack the opportunity to foster rich productive relationships with their children. Often, leisure activities are seen as the most convenient way of cultivating significant family bonds and enacting the parental role (Horna, 1989). The literature suggests substantial benefits for families in the domains of satisfactory relationships, health, quality of life, and family functioning when engaging in leisure activity together. In addition, trends towards more socially significant pursuits as a leisure option have also been identified (Cornish, 1986). Families are seeking new ways to spend their time together in meaningful ways, and are becoming more actively involved in social values and issues (Covey, 1997). This paper will describe the implementation and evaluation of a small family volunteering pilot project that attempted to meet the current needs of families who wished to combine leisure with community service. The overall objective of this endeavor was to build connections among family members, as well as between families and a seniors' centre by promoting volunteerism. Additional objectives were to build healthier families by increasing their sense of togetherness and connected cohesion, dimensions of family dynamics that have long been associated with healthy functioning (Olsen, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979), and to offer volunteerism as a recreational alternative. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of family volunteering as a leisure option and to investigate the lasting impact of this activity on the family.

### Relevant Literature

The dilemma of balancing work and family is a long-standing one. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, family bonding was primarily facilitated through shared work activities (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). However, throughout the 20th century, leisure time has become the foremost vehicle for promoting family relationships and cohesion. Burgess (1923) stressed the central role of leisure not only in deepening family relationships, but also as central to the process of changing internal functioning in the face of sweeping social forces affecting the family. Later, Burgess and Locke (1945) extended the concept of family leisure by including a companionship phase. In this phase family members began to consider their different needs for leisure time rather than to suppress them in favor of larger family interests. Family leisure came to be seen as a way not only to build rapport between members, but also to facilitate individual personal growth in the family environment.

#### *Family Leisure*

The premise that the family who plays together, stays together has been supported by research. Early studies (Levinger, 1964; Roper Organization, 1974) found that a shared leisure experience is one of the most important values that increase family satisfaction. In the 1980s, companionship and time spent with family were ranked highest on a list of objectives for American society (United Media, 1982). Furthermore, the therapeutic benefits of family leisure were identified (Bellah et al., 1985) and consistently supported over time (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Orthner & Mancini, 1980) since family leisure satisfaction promotes high family satisfaction, healthy interaction, and marital satisfaction. Family leisure creates channels for family interaction where shared values are transmitted and social bonding is created. Thus, according to a review of the early research on family leisure (Orthner, Barnett-Morris &

Mancini, 1994), spending time with the family was found to be extremely important to most adults.

More recently, the term family leisure has been defined in North America as recreational activities or free time that parents and (usually younger) children share (Shaw, 1997). Family leisure time continues to be linked to: 1) the enhancement of health at various levels, by reducing stress and promoting better physical and mental health (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Siegenthaler, 1997); 2) an increase in the quality of life (Smith & Smith, 1993) and positive family interaction (Orthner & Mancini, 1990); 3) the creation and enhancement of family roles and family stability (Orthner & Mancini, 1991); and 4) the establishment and maintenance of the boundaries in the family system and the development of a collective interest and identity (Marks, 1989). Similarly, leisure activities open the family up to opportunities for sharing common interests and to receive new inputs by promoting family adaptation to change (Orthner & Mancini, 1991).

Individual family members also benefit differentially from these activities. Family leisure has been shown to play a significant role in influencing children's leisure activities, which later impact on their leisure patterns (Kelly, 1983). If a family supports a particular child's leisure pursuit, there is a greater likelihood that as an adult he or she will continue to engage in this leisure activity (Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 1998). In addition, there is some support for the premise that shared activities between fathers and their children are associated with academic achievement (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). However, during adolescence there is evidence that children spend less time with their families (Hendry, Shucksmith, Love, & Glendinning, 1993) and experience lower levels of intrinsic motivation and less positive affect than parents during family leisure time (Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997). Nevertheless, the values adopted in the

family do seem to influence their future lifestyles, since adolescent leisure activities become a pattern for later adult leisure endeavors (Raymore, Barber, Eccles & Goodbey, 1995).

It is not only important for children to spend leisure time with family members but also for parents to spend time together in order to improve their marital relationship. There is significant documentation that shared leisure increases marital and family satisfaction, while individual leisure has a negative impact upon family communication (Holman, 1981 as cited in Orthner & Mancini, 1991; Orthner, 1976; Presvelou, 1971); this does not suggest, however, that there is an absence of leisure conflicts between spouses. Leisure conflicts can be high but not necessarily negative, since it can be a healthy way to reduce family tension and disagreements (Holman, 1981 as cited in Orthner & Mancini, 1991; Orthner & Mancini, 1980). Furthermore, during joint leisure time, spouses have an opportunity to negotiate their roles and needs and to reach equality (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). They also can develop social skills or task performance, which can become a valuable resource for the family and community. It is important to note that one study emphasized the quality of time, rather than the quantity, as the salient element for increases in marital satisfaction (Shebilske, 2000).

However, this accepted definition which has guided much of the research on family leisure has serious limitations, since it does not consider the diverse family structures that flourish today. New definitions of family include those who consider themselves to be a family with a past history, present reality, and a future shared expectation of connected relationships, but may not be related through the traditional blood or legal ties (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). Examples of this are gay and lesbian family leisure time (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997) and communal or cohabiting family leisure pursuits (Kelly & Kelly, 1994). In addition, individuals are living longer lives, and the multigenerational extended family is becoming more

commonplace (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). Family recreation programming is being restructured because of these changing family patterns and McCormick (1991) went so far as to suggest that the word “community” be substituted for family in order to attract more people as the traditional family form declines.

In this broader context of understanding family, leisure also can no longer be limited to its customary meanings. Understanding leisure merely as "free time" raises the question how much freedom a family has to experience in order to have "leisure". Some family roles and responsibilities, such as being involved in children's sports activities can be part leisure and part work, since engaging in them creates joy and satisfaction for family members; however, these activities may also have an obligatory dimension (Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 1988).

Furthermore, family members do not share the same amount of freedom and pleasure when they engage in leisure pursuits. There is considerable evidence that mothers' and fathers' experiences of leisure are different according to the amount of obligations they perceive (Larson et al., 1997). Mothers' participation and enjoyment of family leisure tend to be connected with the role of family caretaker (Horna, 1989; Shaw, 1992) or outside work demands (Bryant & Zick, 1996), while fathers find this time as an opportunity to relax and enhance their relationship with their children (Bryant & Zick, 1996; Freysinger, 1994). Thus, understanding leisure as free time also must consider how “free” family members feel when they share their leisure time.

### *Volunteering as Leisure*

Currently, individuals are searching for a quality of life that embodies more than just happiness, but also includes goals that give meaning to one's existence (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). This perspective has given rise to the trend of individuals of all ages to seek fulfillment by spending their leisure time in volunteer activities (Cornish, 1986; Harootyan & Vorek, 1994;

Hettman & Jenkins, 1990). Increased numbers of seniors are deliberately seeking community service activities as a leisure option (Bass, 1995), since expressive service to the community was identified as a significant developmental need with important psychological benefits (Tinsley, Teaff, Colbs, & Kaufman, 1985). College students are viewing volunteering not only as a way to build skills, but as a valid leisure option (Collison, 1989).

Family influences have been identified as having key importance in the adoption of socially responsible thinking and behavior, and in fostering the development of a "socially responsible" identity that will carry on into adult life (Pancer & Pratt, 1999). Parents influence their children in this aspect of their development by serving as role models of altruistic behavior and providing opportunities for them to care for others. Encouraging families to pursue service avenues as sound alternatives for family leisure may be an important way to reconcile the sometimes conflicting needs for recreational activity and to make a difference in the community (Covey, 1995).

*Family-volunteering model.* Family volunteering is an community service initiative that attempts to link the inclusion of evolving family forms, shared leisure activity, and a family's desire to be of service. It attempts to include all members who considers themselves to be a family in working together to enrich the lives of others, in order to strengthen family ties and improve the quality of life in the community. It is being proposed by various community organizations as a good solution for Canadian families to spend quality leisure time together and to connect with an entire network of other families and individuals engaged in making a difference for society.

In the United States in 1991, the Points of Light Foundation spearheaded a nationwide movement, entitled *Family Matters*, to integrate family volunteering into voluntary

organizations. A national research project was then financed by W. K. Kellogg Foundation in 1993, to investigate the possibility of increasing the number of family volunteers in seven volunteer centres. After three years, the results of this pilot were extraordinary; the number of family volunteers in these centres was increased by 583% (Family Matters, 1998). In Canada, the Calgary Volunteer centre, supported by the *Family Matters* organization, has assisted institutions in implementing the family-volunteering model. The results of these initiatives compiled over the past ten years (McCurley, 1999) have shown an increased interest from families and positive effects on services rendered by community organizations.

This innovative model, which combines family leisure time with community service, fits well with the current situation of many organizations that are finding it more difficult to respond to the increasing needs for services in the community. A Gallup International Institute poll (1994), commissioned by *Family Matters*, found that 97.6% of agencies with family volunteering programs evaluated it to be very effective. Moreover, the survey indicated that family volunteering "offers an elegant mechanism by which families not only can increase their degree of interaction with each other, but can, in a productive fashion, learn about, connect with, and assist in the greater community" (McCurley, 1999, p.3). Furthermore, family volunteering can increase the number of volunteers and the quality of services in the community, as well as create a future generation of volunteers. It opens channels of communication and trust in which values can be effectively discussed and reinforced (Eyre & Eyre, 1993). Thus, family volunteering can provide young people with positive role models and help them to learn the value and benefits of helping others.

*Project description.* This pilot family volunteering project was implemented over a three-month period at a seniors' community centre in Montreal in partnership with Catholic

Community Services, Inc. and a student family life educator from the Department of Applied Human Sciences at Concordia University. A short-term goal of the pilot was to provide a means for families to volunteer together by planning and setting up activities for seniors at the centre; a long-term goal was to sensitize family groups of different cultures and ages to the needs of seniors and to promote family interaction and cohesion. This was accomplished by families organizing and participating in two special events and by implementing a friendly visiting program. Time spent at the seniors' centre was shared equally by all members, since families went as a unit to the day program.

A Thanksgiving day project was organized by the family members which involved baking pies for a luncheon, creating and hanging the holiday decorations, attending the luncheon, and friendly interactions between the family members and the seniors. All members of the family were involved in all aspects of the project: fathers and mothers, adults as well as children, shared equally in all of the activities, regardless of gender, age or role status. Participants were free to choose which specific tasks they would accomplish and the student facilitator was charged with the responsibility to make sure everyone was able to contribute. In addition, a crafts bazaar and rummage sale as a fundraiser to support the centre's activities was organized. Family members were equally involved in collecting items, setting up tables, selling the items, and interacting with the seniors and other individuals who attended the bazaar.

Additional long-term goals were to provide families with an opportunity to spend quality time together, and to provide a forum for families to share meaningful experiences, common goals, and a sense of purpose. Eight biweekly two-hour training sessions for the family members were designed and facilitated by the student which included distinctive experiential activities to achieve these goals, using a family life education pedagogical model and methodology (Gross,

1993). These meetings, held at the centre, were an additional dimension added by the researchers to the family-volunteering model and were conducted in English, the most common language to all participants. These sessions created a space for families to:

- ∞ explicitly share their perspectives and thereby strengthen family connectedness;
- ∞ increase their insight and knowledge into their family life;
- ∞ explore attitudes and values through the volunteering experience;
- ∞ build communication and cooperation skills to be used in the volunteering experience and in their families; and
- ∞ to empower families to enrich their own lives and the lives of others.

Topics included in these sessions were: inclusion activities to acquaint the two families with each other, communication and communication barriers, listening skills, promoting the acceptance of diversity, appreciating self and others, and activities and discussions related to the individuals' perceptions of themselves within their family and in the volunteering situation.

Furthermore, the stakeholders involved wanted to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the family-volunteering model and prepare it for future implementation within the agency. To this end a representative of Catholic Community Services, Inc. was present at all of the sessions and provided input into the evaluation process.

## Methodology

### *Theoretical Perspective*

The research project was guided by research principles and frameworks of analysis that view the family as a system whose members are interrelated with and interdependent on each other to form a whole (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Additionally, a social constructivist framework that rests on the assumption that individuals actively contribute to the process of

constructing their social reality informed the research methodology. Therefore, influences such as ethnicity, age, and gender were considered when framing the interview questions and facilitating the social interactional dynamics of the focus group sessions.

Each family was approached from a case study perspective, focusing on what was common and what was particular about each family (Stake, 1994) in order to explore their communal experience as a unit involved in volunteerism. A guiding theoretical principal during the collective interview process was that language and narrative actively shapes meaning in the family's social realm (Yerby, 1995). Therefore, the interviews concentrated on the participants' memories of the experience and how they have incorporated this into their family story.

### *Participants*

Two families with children ranging from ten to twenty seven years of age with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and representing various stages of the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999) were involved. Since it was a major concern of the agency to maximize success, participants were recruited internally by contacting a member of the family who has already been involved in volunteering for the organization. The family member (Mohammed, the father in one family, and Lucille, the mother in another family) had previously undergone an interview process, and they were then invited to participate in the project with their families. Both were very intrigued and enthusiastic about the project and about volunteerism, and were eager to have their families collaborate in the project. Criteria for inclusion in the pilot included having all family members participate and to complete a structured program of eight training sessions.

Initially, the family members had an information session to introduce them to the concept of volunteering as a family unit and to explain the evaluation dimension of the project. Consent

to participate was gained from all family members. In total, eight individuals participated in the pilot project and the training sessions: four adult women, two adolescent girls, and 2 adult men. One family was bilingual and native to Montreal; the second family had immigrated to Canada one year previously from the Middle East, and spoke English, French, and Arabic. The Canadian family consisted of a middle-aged couple with two adult daughters, one of whom was a teacher and another who was a university student. At that time both the mother and father were employed. The second family consisted of a middle-aged couple, with two young daughters, nine and twelve years of age. At that time the father and mother were both unemployed waiting for clarification concerning their immigration status and were attending language classes. Being involved in some meaningful activity as they awaited the finalization of their permits was a motivating factor for involvement in the family volunteering project for this family.

Furthermore, both families had different histories with volunteer experience: the Canadian family has been involved individually in various volunteering projects over time; however the immigrant family did not have an opportunity to volunteer in their home country. Having moved to Canada the father began to be actively involved in volunteering, while the mother and the daughters had never been volunteers before.

### *Research Design*

This project used a mixed-methods design (Altschuld & Witkin, 2000), combining quantitative evaluation methodology with qualitative case study techniques. This approach was selected since the project: 1) was both testing hypotheses and helping to develop hypotheses (Newman, 2000) concerning a particular approach to family volunteering as a leisure option and 2) allowed for multiple lenses and meaningful tracking of implementation, an exploration of program models, and validations of important long term program outcomes (Kopacsi & Walker,

2000). In addition, using multiple techniques enabled the researchers to strengthen design, analysis, and inference, as well as improve comprehensiveness in order to illuminate understandings of this social phenomenon not possible with either approach alone.

Formative evaluations were used to tailor the training session topics and the student's facilitative style to the needs of the participating families. Dimensions of emotional climate, amount of airtime during discussions, comfort levels regarding self-disclosure, interest in the topics discussed, and any concerns about the volunteer experience were the main foci of these evaluations. Leadership and group process interventions were instituted the following week in order to provide ongoing maximum effectiveness of the training sessions and to immediately address any emergent issues concerning the volunteering experience.

A summative evaluation using a survey questionnaire was conducted after the completion of the volunteer projects at the seniors' centre and during the training program's closure session in order to measure the impact, outcome, and process of the implementation of the family volunteering program (Posavac & Carey, 1997). Each family member anonymously completed an individual evaluation form. Questionnaires used a 5-point Likert rating scale with 1 representing poor to 5 representing excellent with option 3 as a neutral midpoint; the questions centered on:

- ∞ an overall rating of the family volunteering program;
- ∞ an assessment of the student family life educator's effectiveness in leading the training sessions; and
- ∞ as evaluation of the impact the program had on their actions or beliefs about seniors and volunteering.

Open-ended questions were also used in the summative evaluation to gain richer explanations and a fuller picture of the program's impact. These focused on:

- ∞ the least and most interesting aspects of the entire family volunteering project;
- ∞ whether they would participate in another project of this type;
- ∞ learnings they gained about themselves, other members of their family, or the seniors at the centre as a result of their participation in the pilot; and
- ∞ suggestions about how the program could be improved.

One year after the pilot was completed, participants in the family volunteering project were re-contacted in order to explore the long-term impact of their involvement. All of the original family members, except one adult male and one adult female, consented to be videotaped and interviewed as a family; the adult female was now living in a city quite distant from Montreal but consented to fill out a protocol using the same questions used in the interview with her other family members. The adult male declined to participate in the second phase because of personal issues (he was too shy to be interviewed and videotaped), but renewed his consent to provide his data from the summative evaluation in phase 1 of the research.

Interviews to illuminate the long-term impact of participation in the project on family cohesion and ideas about volunteerism as leisure were conducted and approached as a collaborative and interactive process, minimizing a hierarchical relationship in favour of a joint enterprise approach (Oakley, 1981). Using an open-ended conversational format in order to facilitate the development of trust, rapport, and maximum exploration of the phenomenon, families were interviewed together and there were attempts to elicit stories from the participants, since this is reflective of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). The interviews focused on reconstructions of the program's highlights and limitations, perceived benefits and drawbacks,

and their assessment of the impact on their family relationships, concentrating on eliciting feelings, thoughts, intentions, and meanings.

Since a major theoretical assumption of this project was that a family is a system, the interviews were conducted using a focus group methodology. This was done in order to gain the advantages of the assistance of the participants in verifying commonalities and identifying differences within the family group, as well as provide a versatile, dynamic source of data directly from participants (Morgan, 1997; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Both the student family life educator, who was most familiar with the participants, and the senior researcher, an experienced focus group facilitator, moderated the family groups to encourage participants to be open and honest about their experiences and to maintain a balance of input from all members. Guidelines concerning equal airtime for each participant were established, and every question was posed to each of the family members. Children were assured that their opinions were as important as their parents, and an examination of the frequencies of response showed that children answered the questions as often as their parents did. In this way, participants were able to voice their opinions and perspectives, since domination by one member can be a disadvantage to this approach.

Interview sessions were video taped, and the format of the three-phase interview (Seidman, 1991) was used. This included: 1) an orientation and overview, which addressed issues of informed consent and the purpose of the interview; 2) a focused exploration, proceeding to a narrative reconstruction of their experiences in and perceptions of the family volunteering program; and 3) a member check phase, in which participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences, in light of the data generated, in order to comment on its accuracy, analyze its meaning and implications, and clarify any ambiguities or inconsistencies.

### *Analysis Procedures*

The response rate for the summative evaluation form was 100 percent. Given that the sample of survey respondents was small, the results of the questionnaires were only subjected to a simple descriptive statistical analysis. Mean responses, as well as the range and mode, were calculated on the questions using a Likert scale.

The open-ended questions in the survey were arranged thematically, i. e. all responses whose content was similar were grouped together. Interview data were processed whereby: 1) the data were unitized in an ongoing manner by provisionally categorizing the responses that seemed to relate to the same content into propositional statements (Miles & Huberman, 1984); and 2) rules for categorizing the data were developed and given a metaphoric title which captured the essence of the rule for inclusion. Review of all the data was followed to check for consistency and relevance. This proceeded until the interview data fulfilled the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): exhaustion of data sources, saturation of categories within the interview transcripts, emergence of regularities within the data, and overextension. The data were also subjected to various criteria and procedures to insure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Categorical saturation was achieved following open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), using a thematic conceptual framework (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997) when no new information emerged from the data.

### *Results*

Generally, the families' responses to the formative evaluations indicated that they felt comfortable and safe with the format of the training sessions and how the family volunteering project unfolded. They also emphasized how important it was for them to be involved in discussions and how engaged they felt with the topics. Efforts to enrich the group life and

relationships between the two families emerged spontaneously. For instance, the Canadian family brought a cake to celebrate the finalization of the status of the immigrating family. In addition, the Canadian family members who were more experienced in volunteering provided support and encouragement to them during the meetings.

Table 1. condenses the results of the summative evaluation of the family volunteering

**Table 1**  
**Results of Summative Evaluation Questionnaires for Family Volunteering Program (n = 8)**

| Dimension Measured   | Mean Response  | Response Themes to Open Questions   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Program process:</b><br>Overall satisfaction rating of program      | <b>Mean = 4.12</b><br><b>Range = 3.5 to 5</b><br><b>Mode = 4.5</b>   | * sharing and getting together<br>* fun new experience<br>* learned from each other   |
| <b>Program process:</b><br>Effectiveness of facilitator                | <b>Mean = 4.54</b><br><b>Range = 3.5 to 5</b><br><b>Mode = 5.0</b>   | * personal qualities facilitated learning process<br>* created stimulating & relevant activities for project  |
| <b>Program outcome:</b><br>Program's impact on attitudes / behaviour   | <b>Mean = 3.13</b><br><b>Range = 1.0 to 4.5</b><br><b>Mode = 4.0</b> | * if program was longer, it would have had a bigger effect<br>* discussion had a change effect<br>* brought family closer<br>* saw volunteering in a new way                        |
| <b>Program process:</b><br>Least interesting aspects of program        | Not applicable   | * 100% of respondents stated nothing  |
| <b>Program process:</b><br>Most interesting aspects of program         | Not applicable   | * interaction/discussions with families<br>* planning of special projects<br>* being at the centre and interacting with the seniors<br>* meeting new people and learning new things |
| <b>Program outcome:</b><br>Future participation in family volunteering | Not applicable   | * 100% of respondents stated they would participate in another project or volunteer in another capacity   |
| <b>Program impact:</b><br>New learning about self                      | Not applicable   | * about own capabilities (being responsible, have something valuable to contribute, self-optimism, etc.)<br>* one can make a difference<br>* one's role and place in the family     |
| <b>Program impact:</b><br>New learning about family / family members   | Not applicable   | * the family's strengths<br>* similar thoughts, feelings, and values among family members<br>* how much the family can contribute   |
| <b>Program impact:</b><br>New learning about seniors                   | Not applicable   | * how kind and nice they were<br>* broke down stereotypes regarding their closed behaviour to others/crotchety attitude   |
| <b>How program could be improved:</b>                                  | Not applicable   | * program should be longer<br>* more families should be included<br>* spend more time at the centre interacting with the seniors  |

program, including the responses to the open-ended questions. The mean of 4.12 (range: 3.5 to 5 and mode: 4.5) indicates a high level of overall satisfaction with the program. Being an experience that allowed members to share a fun new activity in an atmosphere where they could learn from each other were major elements that contributed to its success. Therefore, one could draw the conclusion that family volunteering is a valid leisure option. In terms of the influence of the facilitator, her role was seen as an important adjunct to the process and her effectiveness was rated at a mean of 4.54 (range: 3.5 to 5 and mode: 5.0); the use of her own personal qualities as a component of human service delivery and the experiential activities during the training sessions were noted as beneficial. With regards to behaviour and attitude change, the impact was less dramatic, with a mean of only 3.13 (range: 1.0 to 4.5 and mode: 4.0); this points to the difficulty that a short-term program may have in effecting change. It may also indicate that many of the participants' attitudes were congruent with a positive volunteerism outlook.

The most positive ingredients of the family volunteering programs that were identified in the open-ended questions of the summative evaluation were: the interactions and discussions with family members in the training sessions, actually working with the seniors at the centre, and meeting new people, suggesting that the main objectives of the project were also the most rewarding and interesting ones. This implies the successful combination of expressive service sought by many and a strengthening of family cohesion. All of the respondents said that they would volunteer in some capacity in the future, indicating that participation in this project at the very least strengthened positive attitudes towards community service, potentially building a deeper pool of volunteers for the future. A surprising and interesting finding was that this program acted as a vehicle for life-long learning, in that all respondents notes some learning that emerged regarding themselves and their role in the family, regarding the family's strengths and

potential, and about building a more realistic picture of seniors. Finally, the biggest improvement to the program suggested by the participants was to make it longer than eight weeks and to spend more time with the seniors since it was so enjoyable. This suggests that the program encouraged a prolonged engagement with volunteering and that it was a pleasant experience.

The following descriptions are the common emergent themes that emanated from the interview data.

*The importance of sharing.* "Sharing" was an initial theme that was identified in the summative evaluations the previous year, and persisted in being one of the most significant effects. This was the single most common word used by all members of both families, and therefore a dominant theme, to describe the most enjoyable and beneficial aspect of the family volunteering project. However, there were two equally important sub-themes to this category: sharing with individuals outside of their family and sharing with members of their own family.

Sharing with individuals outside the family, both the seniors and the other participating family, was seen as beneficial in bringing members closer together. Lucille, mother of adult children Kari and Cathy, was most affected by the final session, when the two families shared food together after the family volunteering experience. *"The final meeting, as well, when we all brought something... We shared the food. I still think about that."* Kari noted that the sessions were particularly important to her *"...because it might be people we wouldn't normally.... never have a chance to associate with. And we were thrown together and we became close because of that in that short period of time. We shared a lot of things."*

Mohammed, a father of 2 girls noted that the family sharing time with the seniors was an important dynamic. *"...it's really a nice thing to do .... And I am sure most of the people at that time, the seniors at the Thanksgiving lunch, they were so happy.... Especially when they see also*

*the family ... all were sharing, especially if they have kids.*” Even though at one point he had to travel and did not participate fully in one of the events he felt connected to the group and the seniors. *“I was sharing at that time, but I was not there.”* Claire, his wife said, *“ That's, I think, the main idea. We shared. We liked it more when so many things happened, so we can share. Why not?”*

As well, Erica, one of the adolescent participants, responded positively to the sharing the events promoted. *“It was really nice. I really liked that kind of thing to help all those people.”* Anne, her teenage sister, felt that she was able to grow personally by sharing responsibility for planning and implementing the special events. *“Well, it was a very nice experience. Especially to have to ... we were responsible for certain stuff to do. That was different because usually I'm not ... that responsible for doing stuff.”*

The training sessions were also seen as an important dimension to promoting family cohesion. For Cathy, just sharing time with her family at the centre was a big plus. *“On a personal level, I enjoyed spending the time with my family, and feel that it helped me get to know them a little better.”*

Claire also emphasized the significance of the impact of the time spent sharing time together as a family. *“I feel that it brought the family closer together. ”* This was also true for the younger participants. The sharing in the family sessions particularly influenced Erica, Claire's preteen daughter. *“And everybody got to speak and ... to share. We [all] got to say something.”*

*Volunteering as enjoyable and meaningful.* Another strong and dominant theme mentioned by all of the participants was the fact that the volunteering experience was both fun and represented something meaningful and significant, and therefore could be a viable leisure option. Cathy found enjoyment from meeting new people, but was also aware that this pilot

might form the foundation for a larger project. *“I very much enjoyed the opportunity the project gave me of meeting new people. On a different level, it is positive to think that participating in the project may help bring awareness to family volunteering, and may help promote it to other families.”* In addition, she observed, *“the project benefited me in the sense that I got to meet new people, got to spend quality time with my family, and also added new things to my experience as a volunteer, which may help me out in the future.”* Lucille has been a longstanding volunteer, mainly because she enjoys it. *“Yes. I feel that if I'm asked to do volunteer work ... if I have time, leisure time, I'll go for sure. If I can't, I can't. But if I can, I'll go. But I'm not going to say, 'I was supposed to read a good book. I'm not going to go there.' I'll go. Because I like doing volunteer work.”* Kari echoed her sentiments by stating that, *“Volunteering has always been a part of that [leisure], I think, for a very long time. And when we can do it together, it's even better. You know, it's always more fun when your family is there. And you work together.”* She also mentioned that she had fun in the sessions with the other family. *“Oh, yes! It was very, very pleasant. The family was very nice. And it was interesting to speak to them. And the meetings were good and interesting and fun as well.”*

Claire emphasized the significance of the activity for herself and her family. *“Doing family volunteering as leisure made the time more meaningful ... it was much more useful [to the community] than window shopping.”* For Mohammed, the service to others was extremely significant. *“The one thing I want to add, when you do the thing voluntarily, from yourself I mean, without pay, you feel more productive and more happy then if it is paid to you... Because this you do it from yourself. I mean, nobody asks you to do this work, because they're going to pay you. So you are so proud of yourself that you do something without payment.”* The memories

of their participation in this pilot as enjoyable and meaningful persisted from the summative evaluation to one year later.

*Family volunteering as integrative.* A surprising minor meta-theme, that is a broader connective abstraction (Ely et al., 1997), mentioned by three of the adult participants of the project was one of integration, though this took different subcategories or directions for the two families. For Lucille and her husband, this represented an integration into a more centralized place within the family. *“We’ve been through rough times when he was very sick... And he’s kind of a new man, because he doesn’t drink anymore. I’m not shy to say it. Now this is something that he’s proud of, when he goes now to do volunteer work with the children. That’s something now that he’s very proud of, that he shares that with his children. Because when he was drinking, there was not much sharing.”* Kari saw this process as central to her father regaining his role within the family. *“I think it was... an open door open for him. That was his first step in going to the family volunteering.”* This was the first time this family dynamic was ever mentioned; when probed if this was a reason why they decided to participate in the family volunteering project, both Lucille and Kari did not think it was an initial motivating factor. It is unfortunate that the father did not wish to participate in the interview process in order to gain his perspective.

For Claire, this was a way for the family to integrate into a different culture and into the wider community. *“It was so many occasions we never celebrated. You know, our traditions... We didn’t celebrate these dates [or ways of doing things] ... it [family volunteering project] came at a time when we were new in the country. It was very nice.”* Claire’s family was able to use this experience as one way to learn more about Canadians and a dimension of the Canadian way of life to facilitate their immigration and integration process. Therefore, there is a possibility that participation in family volunteering can have an integrating consequence for members,

promoting healthy functioning in those families that have experienced difficulties or are in a new environmental context. What shape this facet of integration may take could largely depend on which dimensions family members feel marginalized.

*A volunteering ripple effect.* A final and interesting minor theme mentioned by the younger participants, was the fact that participation in this family volunteering program touched other individuals not directly involved in the program, increasing the pool of individuals contributing to the process. Kari, an elementary school teacher drafted her class to help with the decorations for the Thanksgiving event. *“Oh, they loved it. They loved it! They worked very, very hard on [the decorations]. Very hard. They [the staff at the centre] sent us pictures as well. So we had those up on the wall. And the children could see what they had done. And the staff had the seniors pose with the drawings up on the wall.”* This positive effect has prompted Kari to do this again this year with her class. *“We're planning a Christmas breakfast where my students will go and serve breakfast to the seniors. And sing songs. And do things like that with them.”* She also observed that other family members were becoming involved. *“And my brother has gotten into volunteering, as well now. So that's nice. He's doing some tomorrow actually, so it's become a real family thing. And we can get together just like this and discuss things. That's nice as well.”*

Anne, in talking to her adolescent friends, mentioned her participation in the family volunteering program; they were intrigued. *“Yes, I told the friends that we were doing something on Sunday... that we were going to do a meeting, then volunteering. They would sometimes start asking, ‘Oh, what was it? What did you do?’ They were very interested.”* Mohammed stated that the family’s experience was so positive that they are looking for another experience. *“I think we like it and we can do it again. I mean any community that calls us or that needs our volunteering,*

*we can do it. We can go and work with them happily, because we know what you are going to do, because we have some experience for that. So I think that we can do it again.*" In the initial summative evaluations, volunteering as an enduring activity was identified; a consequence of this may be to also create a desire to include others in this positive experience.

Though many beneficial effects were identified by the interviewees, it is important to note that one participant suggested that this type of project may not suit everyone. Lucille mentioned, *" But you have to make the people understand that. Because there [are] a lot of people that think we're a little...odd. They don't understand. It's not everybody who [likes to do this]... I'm not bragging, but it's sad that the people don't understand that. If more people would do that, there would be maybe more peace [in the world]."* Though not consistent enough nor confirmed by others to be granted the status of a theme, it is an important consideration to take into account when contemplating the implementation of any family volunteering program.

### Discussion

Analysis of the results of the initial training and volunteer project suggested that family volunteering was a success and fulfilled the objective set out initially. The evaluation indicated that families appreciated this program because it initiated and stimulated positive feelings and allowed individuals to draw on their own potential.

When examining the data from the interviews conducted one year after the pilot terminated, a number of themes corroborate trends identified in the literature. It was very clearly expressed by each of the participants that community service and leisure could be successfully combined into an enjoyable and meaningful activity, thereby extending the customary boundaries of the concept of leisure, and confirming an established trend to promote individual personal growth within the family environment. As Anne mentioned, this experience allowed her

to develop the skills and attitudes to successfully interact with older adults, something she was lacking. *"For us [her and her sister, Erica], it was the first time... because we never were with seniors ... with older seniors. It was nice... So I had to learn to understand them."*

This program not only provided a context for participants to play a role in increasing the quality of life of the seniors in their community, but members also spent optimum time together. Spending time together has long been linked with satisfactory and deep family relationships, not only between parents and children, but also between adult partners. Both adult children remarked how they had learned more about themselves and other family members through this experience. As Kari observed, *"And even within our own family it was nice. We got to learn some things about each other, as well, and how we saw ourselves within the family, the roles that we thought we had. It was very interesting"*.

The family volunteering project also created an opportunity for parents of the two adolescent girls to role model and socialize their children about the value of social responsibility, increasing the likelihood of their continuing this pattern into their adulthood. Established trends in the literature have shown that participation in community service promotes the adoption of socially responsible thinking in young people. Erica, in particular, was quite proud of her participation in the project and the impact she had made in the seniors' lives. During the interview she went into her bedroom and brought out two crocheted dolls. She showed them to researchers with pride. She explained how she was touched by the fact that the seniors had made these for her and Anne. *"This reminds me of how I did something very important."* Community organizations can benefit from the on-going family volunteering programs since children who volunteer with their parents have a tendency to become adults who volunteer.

In addition, this approach was able to demonstrate that family volunteering offers a different kind of leisure for the family that can provide an environment for positive family interactions, and act as an avenue for social bonding. By allowing members to share time and information about themselves with other family members, and to act on shared values, participants created meaningful interactions and memories with each other, whose effects were felt a year later. This can have a tremendous impact on healthy family functioning, a key goal for shared leisure activity. This was true for both parents and children. Participants reported that they felt closer to each other as a result of participating in family volunteering. Mohammed emphasized this as a major impact on his family. *"... it's a nice memory to give us... a nice memory, you know. We are remembering the way it was done... the things we did together. How we enjoyed when we go for a meeting weekly, while we are preparing for the special occasions, for Thanksgiving and for the party and for bazaar. It is nice that you have something in your mind, something about working together to do good. It's nice and it's kind of fun. And for us it's a new thing ... a new thing for us. So we always keep this nice memory in our mind and we are thinking it can be done again and again."* And as Kari noted, *"It's not work, but it's an effort. But it's a cooperative effort. With people that you love, who love you back. It's been wonderful. You work together to find a solution to help others, what could be better?"*

This is a particularly important and unique finding when examining the relationship patterns between parents and adult children who no longer live at home. By participating in family volunteering, parents and adult children can augment the context in which they interact, thereby expanding the nature of their relationship outside of the boundaries of prescribed social roles. Joint participation in this project helped to strengthen the sense of family membership created by the time that the families spent together in meaningful activity to service the

community. As Cathy revealed, "*It was nice to spend this time with them, and, as I mentioned, I feel that it made me know more about them.*" The discovery of new roles and new abilities was not confined to the adult children; both adolescents, Anne and Erica, stated that they felt as if they were becoming more responsible people as a result of their participation in this pilot, indicating personal growth within the context of the family environment. Instead of spending time watching TV and playing computer games, volunteer work with their family helped them to meet different people and to communicate with them, as well as expand their identity into new territory.

Another finding that was singular and not found in the literature was that participants reported that this program allowed them to develop intergenerational connections with other families who were interested in community service, thereby enlarging their social networks to include individuals they might not otherwise meet. Lucille summarized the experience a year later by remarking that "*I got richer with the experience and meeting new people and all that. So it was very positive for me.*" Furthermore, family volunteering created a value of seeing the family in the context of other families and to put their personal problems into perspective. When faced with a family who was new to Canada and inexperienced volunteers, Lucille and her family were able to extend a helping hand to help them. The family was able to create a network of support and aid in the integration process of Mohammed's family. Children were able to appreciate their family and what they can do for others.

The therapeutic benefits of volunteering as a leisure activity were also confirmed. Family relationships that had been disrupted by alcohol were given an opportunity to be rebuilt in meaningful shared activity. Lucille's husband, from his wife and daughter's perspective, was able to re-establish healthy interactions with family members, and claim a more centralized role in the

family. Family volunteering, therefore, can have a therapeutic outcome for the families who deal with the problems that isolate them from others. It can relieve this isolation and help a family to gain the sense of belonging in an enlarged network.

In addition, new trends were identified. Though not considered an integral part of the traditional family volunteering approach, the training sessions were seen as an important adjunct to the process. The exploration of the topics through discussion and skill building provided not only a foundation for effective volunteering but also a milieu for family interaction. Volunteers were able to improve communication skills and self-confidence not only for use in their volunteer work, but also in their interactions with each other.

A surprising finding was the theme that volunteering can be a venue for exploring and celebrating diversity. One family who had recently immigrated to Canada from the Middle East emphasized the benefit that this program had for their adaptation to a new culture, and the opportunity they had to meet others from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They expressed the need for more sessions, more families, and additional projects, and were motivated to continue volunteering together, as well as to include additional family members and friends into their volunteering circle. Through participation in this project, children and parents learned together how to appreciate and engage with different cultures, generations and socioeconomic classes. Family volunteering is an approach that can help families to look beyond the boundaries, to open new perspectives about themselves and about other people. The family is then empowered with an enlarged perspective that facilitates a family's ability to adapt to change, while it creates something good for the community.

One finding that has ramifications for service organizations is that family volunteering can increase the number of volunteers and the quality of services in the community. The children

in both families became ambassadors for volunteering in their individual milieus; Kari was able to draw in her elementary school students to support the volunteering effort. This ripple effect increases the number of potential individuals in the volunteer pool, expanding the concept of volunteerism as a viable leisure option.

However, this may not be a beneficial activity for all families. Though initiatives such as the Points of Light Foundation have spread during the last ten years, there still are constraints in acceptance from families and agencies. Scheduling was one such issue identified by the participants. Not only will individuals have to have the time and ability to provide assistance, but they may also be required to provide assistance at specific times of the day or week (Harootyan & Vorek, 1994). Given the hectic context of family scheduling, family volunteering may inadvertently multiply problems regarding finding common time for volunteering together. As Cathy remarked, *“The only drawback for me was that the project took place in the middle of the school semester, which is a very busy time for me [as a student]. So on one hand being involved in the project took up some of my time; while on the other hand, because it was the middle of the semester, I was so busy with school that I could not give all the time I wanted to the project.”* Therefore families must be matched to the volunteering project, and flexibility regarding volunteering contributions would be a necessary element to any program.

Thus, family volunteering could create a source of family conflict if not seriously planned and discussed. First, family needs and interests must be identified collaboratively, and methods to match families and agencies must be carefully developed. Next, family members need to feel free to communicate honestly and genuinely about their volunteering experience and be able to determine if they wish to continue or not (Jenkins, 2000). Therefore, family volunteering needs to be an inspiration for all members who are included in it in order to have positive outcomes.

On the other hand, agencies also need to develop well-defined and structured assignments adapted for different types of families. Family volunteering is more complex than individual volunteering. It means that organizations have to approach it more seriously and to develop appropriate tasks and activities to carefully match different families and diverse abilities.

#### Limitations and Implications

There are several limitations that constrain the scope to which these results can be extended. The first concerns the small number of participants. Eight individuals are a small sample on which to make large-scale recommendations. This number, however, was set by the agency, since they felt this was the most they could comfortably handle. Additional projects need to include more families in order to judge its effectiveness and viability.

The second concerns the fact that volunteering was a preexisting activity for several participants. Lucille, Kari, Cathy and Mohammed already had some experience with volunteering; they, therefore, may have been predisposed to react positively. Again, this was a condition imposed by the host agency, since volunteer screening is a norm for their organization. Though additional inexperienced family members did react positively, further study of individuals with little or no experience is key to understanding if family volunteering has the potential to be a popular mode of leisure activity and community service.

In addition, only group interviews were conducted. Different perspectives and attitudes may have been elicited if individual interviews had been organized. Though the researchers took care to eliminate any pressure to conform and sought to balance interactions, and explicitly sought out disagreement and exceptions, participants, especially the adolescents, might not have felt totally free to express their opinion. This is a common hazard of research done with family units. Supplemental individual interviews may serve to minimize this limitation.

As well, it must be noted that the impact of certain societal influences, such as gender, employment status, social roles such as "caregiver", and socioeconomic class, which impact upon the active social construction of a "volunteer" identity, were not fully explored due to the population characteristics of the participants. Traditionally, women tend to participate in volunteer work that mirrors the private and domestic realm (Dominelli, 1995; Wekerle, 1980) and social roles dictated by societal norms. Though two men did fully participate in the volunteering and employment status was varied, there were not enough points of commonality or difference due to the small numbers for a distinct pattern to emerge from the data. Future research must incorporate these concepts into the initial formulation of the research and the subsequent analysis.

Because of limitations of resources and a lack of participation by one member in the second phase, theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was not achieved in the category of integration, especially with regards to the father's reintegration into the family fabric following his problem drinking. Since the father did not participate in the second phase of the research project, saturation was not possible, and therefore should be viewed as a limitation to this study, since this theme lacks precision and density.

However, the results from this pilot have demonstrated a discernible need and appreciable benefits for families who volunteer together as part of their shared leisure activity, and that it can create wonderful possibilities for the community. Both families included in this program have recognized these benefits and have attempted to share them with others by acting as "volunteerism ambassadors" and thereby increase the number of potential or real participants involved in volunteering. However, future research needs to determine if diverse family structures can reap the same or similar benefits, or may suffer from role strain, and how to

include family diversity in the program planning to maximize benefits and to minimize drawbacks.

Another fruitful avenue of research would be to create family volunteering programs that cultivate intergenerational linkages by including grandparents and other senior members of the extended family, along with the youngest members. Though research shows that volunteering for older individuals tends to be more episodic or event-centered, while for children and teenagers it tends to be more structured and repetitive (Harootyan, and Vorek, 1994), family volunteering may prompt a change in approach and preference. The Points of Light Foundation has already developed Family Matters Clubs where families have the opportunity to decide how they want to volunteer and have an opportunity to provide the leadership functions through their volunteering experience.

Finally, the Family Matters initiative has revealed that large corporations can encourage family involvement in community service through family volunteering programs. These corporate-sponsored programs improve the image of the company, employee moral, and positive attitude in the workplace (McCurley, 1999).

In conclusion, the family-volunteering model could benefit Canadian families and society by enhancing family functioning and leisure time, in addition to providing volunteer services. The report of this pilot project in Montreal demonstrates that families can benefit from stimulation and support to enrich their own life and the life of their community.

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