



CHAPTER 27

THE NEED FOR VOLUNTEERING SERVICES IN THE EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Introduction

Volunteerism is an integral part of every society in most parts of the world, people render services to others without asking for a pay. This act of kindness shown to people in need all over the world has become so popular because of its benefits. The word volunteering according to Wikipedia is taken from the French language and is first traceable to the 17th century but started being used in the 18th century when people were willingly joining the military service.

Volunteerism is the practice of providing time and skills for the benefit of other people and causes rather than for financial benefit. The Collins English dictionary author and year?defining volunteerism states that volunteerism refers to the principle of donating time and energy for the benefits of other people in the community as a social responsibility rather than for any financial reward. In the same vein, Synder (2001), postulated that volunteerism is a form of helping in which people actively seek out opportunities to assist others in need, make considerable and continuing commitments to provide assistance, and sustain these assistance over extended period of time often at considerable personal cost. This type of volunteerism is different from the one that comes spontaneously in response to emergency situations like helping those affected by natural disasters or man-made crisis. *InitLive* on the other hand defines volunteerism as the act of contributing free labour to conduct community service or support a non-profit organisation. It is the principle of donating time and energy towards a greater cause. In volunteerism, volunteers most times do not know those they help in advance and have no prior bonds or obligation to help them, instead, volunteers seek out opportunities to help.

The history of volunteering has been traced to Britain in the medieval times where there was an urge to aid the poor and sick (Init live, 2021) and the activities of volunteers have continued to grow. The second world war also saw an increase in the development of volunteerism, women during the war organized themselves to help wounded soldiers, the women also helped in collecting supplies for people in distress. This type of organized volunteering started in the nineteenth century and reaching its peak in the twentieth century, some of the organisations like the



Rotary Club where people were organized to provide free medical care to people in need is still very active today. The YMCA full rendition at least for initial mentioning which was started in 1844 also helped in shaping the history and development of volunteering. The twentieth century saw the rising of more voluntary organisations like the Red Cross which was formed as a place for people of different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs to come together to exchange friendships and exchange valuable ideas, create friendship and make a change.

The coming of the internet has afforded people more opportunities to contribute in their own way. Through the internet, volunteers can communicate with others all over the world spreading awareness of volunteering without having restrictions due to physical barriers. The process of funding volunteer projects are becoming more formalized with more volunteer centres forming and new ways to find work appearing on the worldwide web through organizations like just serve and Amen corps (justServe 2017, Warburton, oppenheimer 2000).

Hughes (1984), reviewing literature on volunteerism in America states that a gallop survey taken in 1981 and 1983 showed that the number of Americans serving as volunteers has increased from 52% to 53% and that women volunteers are more than men. Similarly, the US census bureau discovered that the top national volunteer activities in the US are fund raising or selling items to raise money (36%), preparing or distributing food (34%), collecting goods and clothing (26.5%) and mentoring youths (26%). Volunteering for the education of children living with disabilities is not among the top four national volunteer activities in the United States of America; this shows that volunteerism for the education of children living with special needs in the United States has not been given the attention it deserves.

Nigerians have been volunteering to help members of their families who are in need long before the coming of organized volunteerism. Some of these volunteers were done on individual or group basis. It was common in those days to see young people organized themselves to go and work on the farms of the less privileged members of their communities. Individuals were seen going to help their relations that have disabilities on their farms or running errands for them. Some were also seen serving as guides to the visually impaired or carrying those living with physical handicaps around.

The coming of the missionaries saw a revolution in volunteerism; the missionaries brought organized volunteerism for people living with disabilities(PWD)s. This, they did through the establishment of schools and rehabilitation centres where persons with disabilities received free education, free vocational and rehabilitation services. They solicited for funds from organized voluntary agencies and from their churches overseas to run these programs. They also solicited for teachers who would volunteer to come to Nigeria and teach PWDs. These missionaries also solicited for funds from Nigerian government which came in the form of grants- in- aid to help those schools and centres. Today, some of these schools and centres no longer offer free services again because the



church missionaries have left and donor agencies no longer send funds for these schools and centres. It was after the civil war that the government took over the running of some of the centres and schools and built some new ones.

The education of PWDs is capital intensive such that the proprietors of the schools will always find it difficult to bear. Most of the equipment used in teaching children with disabilities are manufactured abroad and the cost of purchase and importation into Nigeria especially now is very costly due to the current exchange rate. There is also the problem of shortage of both teaching and nonteaching staff. In most of the schools, you will discover that academic staff in some subject areas are lacking particularly in arts and music. Guidance counsellors, school nurses and physiotherapists are also lacking in some of the schools. This may be so because of lack of money to hire the services of these professionals. This calls for volunteers to come in from time to time to assist in these areas since the schools cannot be able to employ the services of these professionals. The lack of volunteers has made the education of PWDs very difficult. This is probably because most people may not be aware of the needs in the schools or some people may not even know how to volunteer their services and some may not even know that their services are needed.

This paper is set out to identify the different types/categories of volunteering that are available for people who want to volunteer their services to see to the success of the education and rehabilitation of persons with special needs. The paper will also discuss some of the skills that a volunteer is required to possess so that he can be effective in volunteering for the benefit of PWDs.

Types/categories of volunteering

Everyone can volunteer in some way, and there are volunteering roles out there to suit all interest, skills and ages. Volunteering can range from helping in the local community, special needs assistance and youth work to advocacy, fund raising and helping out in charity local shops. There are many ways to help and volunteer, for example, there are volunteer jobs that you do for some hours, a day and there are volunteer jobs that you do for a few weeks. On the other hand, there are also volunteer jobs that may take much longer time like one year and some that can even span a longer time like advocacy. Atieno (2022), outlined six categories of volunteering, these are; formal volunteering, non-formal volunteering, volunteering in governance, social action volunteering, project based volunteering and gap year volunteering. All volunteer activities or services fall into one of these categories.

Formal volunteering

Formal volunteerings according to Atieno (2022), are the types of volunteering programs that are run through a carefully structured and supervised way. Many a time, these types of programs are long term and usually require great commitment and regular attendance from volunteers. These types of programs



normally require trainers, supervisors and managers to perform the function of recruitment, training and supervision; they also check the outcome of the volunteering period. These kinds of volunteering programmes also involve a lot of policies and procedures. For example volunteering as a tour guide where the guide happily greets visitors and give them direction or volunteer in a hospital where the volunteer is serving meals to patients. The volunteer can also help to raise fund for large charities by contributing in printing and mailing of letters (live & learn 2022).

Non formal volunteering

Non formal volunteering is a type of volunteering that does not necessarily require many structures. Atieno (2022), stated that this type of volunteering program is very common in unstructured settings, or settings that do not receive any funds from any organisation. It is common among local communities and seen more as an act of kindness where the goal is just to help the local people. People who involve in non-formal volunteering see themselves as friends, family or members of the community. Example of this type of volunteering services according to live and learn (2022), are people volunteering as guest instructors, member of a neighbourhood safety patrol or street clean up. These people are involved in activities like teaching arts and craft, walking with a group around the neighbourhood to keep it safe, picking up trash and working with the elderly, PWDs and the vulnerable to help them with errands like grocery, shopping, picking up medication etc (live & learn 2022).

Volunteering in governance

This type of volunteering according to Atieno (2022), has to do with the provision of either leadership or direction to a given organisation by volunteers. The volunteers are often tasked with roles of planning as well as decision making throughout the organisation in question. In most cases, those who go for this type of volunteering usually pick organisations in which they have experience in the type of job they do or those in which they have some type of advocacy in relation to the organisation's focus. For example, serving as a member of the board of directors of a not-for-profit organisation, member of your religious administration board or a member of the parent-teacher association of an institution where one may be involved in attending regular meetings, taking of minutes if one is the secretary or keeping of the organisation's money if one is the treasurer.

Social action volunteering

Social action volunteering according to Atieno (2022), is a type of volunteering that involves the coming together of volunteers united by a common goal or some kind of advocacy. The volunteers often see each other as comrades. Some of the volunteers could have a set structure while others may not. This type of volunteering does not necessarily involve regular hours of volunteering; however, it involves a lot of passion and zeal attached to the specific cause. The



volunteers often work hard towards achievement of a specific social goal or change. Such volunteers are involved in activities like lobbying for political group, campaign for environmentalism, advocating for research/studies on a certain illness or disease. This they do by organizing or attending rallies, talking to people about issues and making placards.

Project-based volunteering

This type of volunteering involves time frames. The volunteers participate in different volunteering projects that have different time frames. For a volunteer to take part in a given project, they need a certain set of skills so as to achieve the goals that will usually be very clearly defined. It mostly involves presence of coordinators who instead of working as managers work with the volunteers instead. For example, a folklorama volunteer serving as member of a committee planning the anniversary of your town or an annual cultural festival of your town. This, the volunteers do by welcoming visitors, drafting a communication plan soliciting for advertisers for a commemorative book etc.

Gap year volunteering

Gap year volunteering according to Atieno (2022), is a type of volunteering that is usually targeted towards the youth, mostly students with a desire to experience what it is like to work for or with a non-profit organisation. In most cases, they join volunteering programs abroad, they work for a given time frame in which they live with the people and even immerse themselves in the community's local cultures.

With the recent technological advancement, other types/categories of volunteer have emerged. These according to live and learn (2022), include online volunteering and micro volunteering. Online volunteering work ranges from mentoring to counselling certain groups of people online. It can also make use of the telephone. Micro volunteering also exist, it consist of small actions done online that support a cause, for example donating through a crowd funding sites or joining campaigns by providing your digital signature eg open letters to the government on various issues through emails. These types of volunteering provides opportunities for those who have no time, unable to be physically present, household bound or are in far off places. This goes to show that as long as one is willing to help, the opportunity is available.

Skills a volunteer must possess

Anyone who wants to volunteer to work with children who have special needs must take note that volunteering with special needs children requires more than just the willingness to serve but it also requires that the person volunteering must possess some skills. A special education volunteer must:

- i. be able to adapt easily
- ii. possess good communication skills



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- iii. be great with special needs children
 - iv. have imagination, creativity and patience
 - v. the ability to remain calm in stressful situations
 - vi. have a non-judgemental approach
 - vii. must approach the special needs children with extra care and patience, this will encourage them to trust the volunteer
 - viii. friendly disposition to persons with disabilities
 - ix. willingness to repeat yourself many times
 - x. should not get angry easily
 - xi. should be able to calm down children who are throwing fits
 - xii. belief that the client will benefit from the services you are about rendering
 - xiii. philosophical belief in the inherent worth of every human being
 - xiv. have some knowledge about the psychology of the behaviour of the client
 - xv. punctuality and sense of humour

Areas to volunteer

There are many ways people can volunteer to help children with special needs. Some of these areas include:

Restoring mental health. A volunteer can restore the mental health of a persons with disabilities by devoting his or her time to play games with children who have special needs, listen to them as they talk and showing empathy, showing to them that you care helps them in restoring their mental health. This helps them to open up and gain confidence.

Teaching The volunteer can come in to help the children whether at home or in the school to teach them using things like games, activities and other things that may not be available in the school. Volunteers can also assist in teaching orientation and mobility skills, print reading to persons with visual impairments and sighted relations and friends of persons with visual impairments. Volunteers can also teach sign language to family members of persons with hearing impairments and also to elderly persons with hearing impairments who did not have the opportunity of learning sign language.

Counselling and Guidance

Children with special needs requir guidance in finding their way through life. They need guidance for finding the profession that they may want to go into, they need guidance in choosing the kind of person they want to get married to. They also need guidance to build their self-confidence and becoming independent. Guidance services in most cases are not available in schools or centres that cater for special needs children. Therefore volunteering in these areas of life can greatly help them.



Medical services volunteers can provide medical services to persons with disabilities in their schools or rehabilitation centres. This will reduce the burden of taking them to the health facilities which may be far to access these services.

Benefits of volunteering

The obvious benefit of volunteering is the good it gives back to the community, country and the world at large. The benefits of volunteerism can be in two ways, the children with special needs benefit from the services provided while the volunteer also benefits. Special education volunteers are contributing immensely in making life meaningful to some of the most vulnerable members in the society. In many cases, some of the schools serving children with special needs suffer from lack of funds. Because of this, the schools suffer from lack of staff in the different subject areas. Volunteers most times can help solve the problem of understaffing by supporting the fulltime staff.

Benefits of volunteering to people with special needs

Volunteering services contribute meaningfully to the lives of children with special needs by assisting in the schools and rehabilitation centres. Volunteers contribute by assisting teachers and staff in the classroom, providing one-on-one or small group tutoring, helping students with specific projects or providing basic care. Volunteers may also organise extra-curricular activities such as music, art and agriculture. In some cases, volunteers provide assistance to adults with special needs, helping them with daily tasks or working on skills they can use at jobs and in every in everyday life. By these activities, volunteers are helping to provide positive enriching experience for individuals in a special education environment.

Volunteering provides opportunity for students to surround themselves with new people and this helps them learn how to work together as a group, improve team work and relational skills, reduce stereotypes and increase appreciation of other cultures (Eyler 1999). Cello, Durkat & Dymnick (2011) and Boru (2017), stated that students participating in service-learning programs are shown to have more positive attitudes towards self, civic engagements, social skills and academic performance and such students are more likely to complete their degree (Astin, 1992).

Volunteering in special education promotes personal empowerment, whatever services rendered to persons with disabilities, whether teaching, or washing their clothes we are helping in promoting their personal empowerment. This is because most PWDs do have the support of their families and communities so whatever volunteering offered will help them to more independent and confident even when no one else provides that support

Humans are always passionate about some things, it could be computer, music, art or anything. We also have our hobbies, careers and interests that define us as individuals. By volunteering in special education, the volunteer is helping in sharing their passions with children with special needs and this will also help them



find their own passion. This can also improve their personal and social development.

Benefits of volunteering to the volunteer

The volunteer also benefits from rendering help to other people, Oishi, Diener and Lukas (2007), reported that a worldwide survey was conducted and the result showed that people who experience the highest level of happiness are the most successful in terms of close relationship and volunteer work. Another study by Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma and Reed (2003), discovered that helping others is associated with higher levels of mental health above and beyond the benefits of receiving help. Volunteering may also reduce the risk of depression among people aged 65 years and above (Filges, Seren, Fridgebers & Nielsen 2020). In another research, Lederer, Autry, Day and Oswalt (2015), discovered that students who volunteered 1 - 7 hours per week were less likely to feel depressed than students who did not volunteer. The various types of work done as a volunteer and the psychological effects of such works contribute to a larger and more fulfilling life. A systematic review conducted by Filges, Seren, Fridgebers and Nielsen (2020), showed that adults over the age of 65 years who volunteer may experience improved physical and mental health and potentially reduced mortality. Thus, volunteering is associated with reduced symptoms of depression, better self-reported health, fewer functional limitations and lower mortality.

Volunteering in special education helps the volunteer to gain relevant work experience. This is because the specific skills the volunteer can learn are wide and varied. Volunteers can help one to advance their career much faster, in the same way by volunteering, the volunteer is enlarging his or her curriculum vitae. This may help during employment interview. Most employers value the services one has voluntarily offered to the community. This will help the volunteer to be the preferred candidate among many applicants.

Volunteering gets the volunteer closer to the school organisation, it puts the volunteer in touch with what matters and who matters in the school or the organisation. This helps the volunteer to know more people/professionals in his chosen career and thus establishing lasting relationships with some of them. Volunteering in special education also helps in building relationships between the volunteer, the students, the staff and management and other volunteers in the organisation and other organisations. Trust and relationships are formed when people work on a common goal.

Volunteering is a great way to expand the overall network of mentors, peers and other persons with special needs. Having a great and diverse network that one can call on for career advice or future job or project opportunities can make a big difference in the life of persons with disabilities. Everything today thrives more on networking. Swain (2021), listed the following as benefits of volunteerism:

- i. volunteering at a school gives the volunteer the opportunity to observe and learn from experienced teachers.



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- ii. the volunteer gets more knowledge of the national curriculum/ education system of the country
 - iii. it brings to light the evidence of the volunteers commitment
 - iv. the volunteer gets practical classroom based examples that he or she can use in interviews, such small group leading and lesson planning
 - v. volunteering in a special needs school helps the volunteer gain experience in a variety of ways especially working with children with special needs.

Implication for special education

Volunteerism has a lot of implications in the delivery of special education and rehabilitation services. Some of these implications are:

- i. volunteers that are professionals can help solve the problem of shortage of man power in the schools and rehabilitation centres thereby making the children graduate with required skills for further education or employment.
- ii. volunteering in special education and rehabilitation can reduce or totally eliminate the problem of equipment and facilities in our schools and rehabilitation centres.
- iii. the involvement of professionals like rehabilitation nurses, vocational counsellors, job placement officers etc as volunteers will help clients acquire skills that will qualify them for gainful employment on graduation.
- iv. volunteers in rehabilitation will help in diversifying the training in the centres. Many people will now have the opportunity of being trained in the skills of their choice. This will also open doors for more people to be admitted for training in the centre.
- v. proper training of clients in skills of their interest will reduce the problem of unemployment among persons with disabilities.

Suggestions

Volunteerism is one area in special education service delivery in Nigeria that has not been given the desired attention it deserves. Many people feel that the education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is solely the responsibility of the government and so they have nothing to contribute but even government in the most developed countries cannot provide everything, they need the services of volunteers. Many people in Nigeria who donate equipment or money to special education do so for political reasons. The author suggests the following:

- i. the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) which exists in most schools that take care of children with special needs in Nigeria should be strengthened.
- ii. volunteerism should be taught as a course during special education teacher preparation.



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- iii. university and other college students should see the teaching practice programme organized for them as part of their course content as well as an opportunity for them to volunteer their services for the people living with disabilities.
 - iv. students can also volunteer their services to a school by teaching some subjects that teachers are lacking during vocation. This is called service-learning which combines elements of education and volunteerism.
 - v. special schools and rehabilitation centres in Nigeria should put up advertisements in areas where they need volunteers in their schools on internet or social media as it is done in other countries.

Summary

The history of the beginning of the education and rehabilitation of PWDs in Nigeria cannot be complete without the role played by various voluntary agencies and the activities of the Christian missionaries. Government's participation in education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the earlier stage came in the form of grants-in-aid. The cost of providing education and rehabilitation services for PWDs is very high so governments all over the world will always appreciate the services of volunteers who may want to come in and volunteer their services. Unfortunately, many people do not know the types /categories of volunteers that are available and the one that fits their interest and so do not volunteer their services, many also do not know that the little they can offer will go a long way in meeting somebody's needs. Volunteering in the education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities has a lot of benefits to the volunteer and the PWDs, therefore individuals and organisations are called upon to volunteer their services for the course of PWDs.

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