

An Analysis of Undergraduates' Volunteerism in Community Summer Childcare——Based on an Empirical Survey of 471 College Students

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Abstract: Undergraduates' participation as volunteers in summer childcare can not only pass on the spirit of volunteering and maximize the impact of practical education in colleges, but it can also compensate for the shortage of teachers in after-school programs, enrich both details and the structure of summer childcare. Through investigating the current situation of college student volunteers' participation in community summer childcare by questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, the findings demonstrate a number of issues, including an excessively low percentage of undergraduate participation, a short program cyclicality, generally rewards and a deficiency in skills. Based on above results, we conduct a deep discussion and present recommendations from the government, colleges, communities and society by using the notion of synergy.

Keywords: undergraduates, volunteers, community, summer childcare

Introduction

The Ministry of Education of China released *The Notice on Supporting the Exploration of Summer After-School Programs* on July 7, 2021. The Circular "encourages schools to work together with the Communist Youth League, Women's Federation, communities, and other organizations to provide summer childcare for students." It furtherly points out that "undergraduate volunteers and social professionals should be actively involved in it."^[1] This provides policy support for college students who volunteers to participate in summer childcare. For example, Wuhan opened 172 municipal public welfare hosting rooms during summer vacation in 2023, whose targets are elementary school children across the city, and its staff include full-time cadres, community cadres, professional social service providers, program assistants and so forth. Furthermore, focus has been on recruiting college volunteers from colleges and universities to join in. This has resulted in the creation of a service model wherein the community supplies spaces, the municipal Youth League Committee finances it, and social service providers offer their professional services.^[2]

This paper examines a particular kind of community summer childcare: one in which the community serves as the main objective, using public spaces like libraries, youth centers, museums, gymnasiums and other jurisdictional resources. Social service providers and volunteers arrange for students to participate in a range of programs. Public welfare is the defining feature of this government-primarily funded paradigm. The participation of undergraduate volunteers in summer childcare can apply the theoretical knowledge to practice, increase the opportunity to contact with the society. At the same time, the community also needs high-quality volunteers to participate in the summer childcare, which lays the foundation for the collaborative cooperation between the community and the university faculties.

1. Research method

1.1 Research subjects

500 college students were chosen as the research subjects; 500 questionnaires were issued and recovered; and the valid questionnaire portion was 471, with an effective rate of 94.2%. In addition, the analysis also selected the director of summer childcare of Community J in Wuhan City (Interviewee A) and undergraduates who participated in programs (Interviewee B) to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

1.2 Research tools

A self-administered questionnaire, which composed of three parts: The first section contains basic information such as gender, grade, major, kind of institution, political appearance. The second section discusses college students' participation, including methods of participation, geographic area of service, time. The final section discusses the cognitive attitude of undergraduates, including the goal of involvement, the benefits, challenges and suggestions on summer childcare. The questionnaires were distributed online, and the related dates were finally counted and analyzed using SPSS 25.0.

The Semi-structured interview schedule was separated between students and program leaders. The student interview focused on participation channels, purpose of participation, gains, obstacles and ideas. The leaders interview focused on the fundamentals of after-school programs, the quantity of recruiting volunteers, the satisfaction and needs of volunteers' job.

2. Research results

2.1 Low percentage of college student volunteers participating in summer childcare

Of the 471 college students, 74 have engaged or are engaging in summer childcare, while 397 have not, for a participation rate of 15.71%. Overall, very few undergraduates participate in community summer childcare.

This study further investigated 74 undergraduate volunteers who had participated in summer childcare. In terms of participation channels, they mostly engaged in summer childcare through school networks, independent registration, and social organizations. Among them, 50% said they participated in campus organizations. In terms of service geography, College students' engagement areas are primarily concentrated in province capital cities (45.95%), with prefectural-level cities, county (district)-level cities, and townships accounting for less.

2.2 Short cyclicity of college student volunteers' participation in summer childcare

The survey finds that fewer than five days account for 27.03% of college students' summer childcare employment duration; 6–10 days and 11–15 days make up 18.92%; 16–20 days or fewer make up 8.11%; and more than 20 days make up 27.03%. The data indicates that over 60% of undergraduate volunteers during the summer programs for fewer than five days, and almost one-third of them serve for just five days. This suggests that college student volunteers typically have shorter program cyclicity and are unable to establish a consistent and long-term service regime.

2.3 General rewards to college students volunteering in summer childcare

This study investigated the question of "difficulties faced by college student volunteers in participating in summer programs". The first item is "not receiving appropriate compensation and shortage of funds," which accounts for 63.27%. In reality, college students who have engaged in summer childcare reflect that the obligations they have taken on are not easy. For example, the interviewee discussed: "Teaching assistants are in charge of preserving order, helping them in dictating spoken language, and generally assisting children with their summer homework. It may also be important to contact with children's parents. In the afternoon, you also have to wait for the parents to pick up the children and ensure their safety, and if the child requires any assistance, we provide it." (Interviewee B) It's evident that the issue is more pressing than the accountability and benefits received by volunteers.

2.4 Lack of practical skills required for college student volunteers to participate in summer

childcare

College student volunteers who participated in community summer childcare felt that they "lacked custodial experience and found it difficult to get started" (55.41%); "lacked the necessary teaching skills and knowledge and experience in sustainability" (39.70%); and "lacked the necessary teaching skills and knowledge and experience in sustainability" (39.70%). It can be seen that although the college students participating in summer childcare are all excellent who are receiving higher education, their practical experience is still far from enough to rationally apply their skills to process. "It is preferable for custodial volunteers to major in teacher education" (Interviewee A) However, among the university students participating in summer childcare, as many as 80.51% of the non-teaching students. Due to their weakness of professional skills, they often feel overwhelmed when organizing project activities.

3. Discussion

3.1 Single channel of participation

The survey found that 53.65% of college student volunteers who did not participate in summer programs because they did not get timely information. The blocked channel is the important reason that prevented them from participating in summer childcare. It can be seen that community summer childcare is relatively small in scale, and generally do not recruit volunteers on a large scale, but only cooperate with colleges and universities which have a cooperative relationship with them, so many college students do not have a way to participate in summer childcare.

3.2 Absence of safeguard measures

Firstly, responsibilities of college student volunteers are vague. Summer childcare requires the cooperation of social service providers, parents, street staff and volunteers. However, during the implementation of summer programs, undergraduate volunteers lack the opportunity to communicate closely with other partners, they do not form a solid collaborative nurturing mechanism. On the other hand, there is a lack of a clear framework between participating subjects, unclear rights and obligations and unclear division of labor to undergraduate volunteers. In some cases, there will be overlapping or lack of subjective responsibilities. Volunteers who are outstanding in their professional fields are often unable to show their own areas of expertise.

Secondly, the evaluation system of college student volunteers is not well. The community is not own comprehensive assessment of the quality of their participation. In some cases, the criteria are based on the number of attendance and hosting courses, while the communication skills, professionalism, and details of services are neglected, which may affect the attitudes of college student volunteers.

3.3 Inadequate incentive system

Summer childcare are generally oriented towards children within their own communities, which are small in scale and are usually free of charge or appropriately fee-paying. However, due to the over-reliance on government funding, leading to a lack of funding and difficulty in establishing material incentives, which affects the motivation of volunteers to participate in. The survey found that when it comes to the question of "difficulties faced by college student volunteers in participating in summer childcare", nearly 60% of college students said that they do not receive appropriate compensation, and the absence of rewards discourages college students from joining in the volunteer enthusiasm.

3.4 Lack of specialized training

In the practice of summer childcare, problems such as differences in the educational background of service personnel, low level of professional training in custodial service have led to the ineffectiveness of summer childcare. It lies in the lack of relevant professional training for the current college student volunteers involved in summer childcare. The survey also found that 53.29% of college students believe that they must receive specialized training before participating in service projects. Interviewees also talked about: "There can be a volunteer induction training, because many people have not been exposed to this program, and a lot of things we learn now are still subjective, and I think that if we can participate in the

pre-induction training, it will make us more professional." (Interviewee B)

4. Recommendations

4.1 Government: Improving institutional design and providing adequate financial support

Firstly, the government should formulate a detailed system for the participation of multiple characters in summer childcare, answering questions such as "who will provide summer childcare" and "how will college volunteers participate in summer programs". By referring to the strategies of developed countries in formulating a series of laws to guide the participation of multiple characters in after-school programs, we can see that improving the employment system of summer childcare at the national level is the basic guarantee for the effective implementation of summer childcare. Therefore, local governments should issue rules to introduce the participation of multiple actors in summer after-school programs to ensure that are carried out in an orderly manner.

Secondly, provide sufficient service funding to ensure that the multiple service providers involved in summer childcare are reasonably remunerated. The government can invest sufficient funds to establish a system of incentives in order to increase volunteers' motivation. Based on Kellman's three-stage theory of attitude change, volunteer participation motivation can be classified into three stages.^[3] In the compliance stage, volunteers participate in after-school programs out of the need to "avoid harm", and then material incentives become part of the volunteers' needs. In the recognition stage, the most important need of volunteers is self-recognition, volunteers expect their services to be accepted by society. When it comes to the final stage of internalization, the volunteering service itself can stimulate the volunteers' endogenous motivation and satisfy their psychological and spiritual needs. Therefore, we should build a long-term incentive system to improve the motivation of undergraduate volunteers who have excellent performance in summer childcare. For example, if funds are available, material incentives such as meals or transportation subsidies should be provided; service time should be counted as volunteer hours, volunteer certificates should be issued, and volunteers' personal volunteer stories should be written into newsletters and published in social work organizations and other media platforms to give volunteers spiritual incentives.

4.2 Colleges and universities: Creating a teacher-training plan that combines educational practice and summer childcare

In the United States, professional volunteers and philanthropic groups often host volunteer events. Additionally, students in American schools must complete a predetermined amount of community volunteer practice in order to graduate.^[4] By doing this, volunteers' mobility is limited and a steady supply of volunteer resources for after-school programs is guaranteed.

China's teacher-training education closely combines the two aspects of "education theory" and "education practice", education practice has become a continuous progression from Traineeships to internship. The practice of education has become a continuous whole, which is carried on progressively.^[5] The two-way activation of professionalized theory and practice has become a useful supplement to the current after-school programs. Summer childcare is another practical path for the quality of pre-service teacher education and the level of future professional development of new teachers following the regular educational internship for teacher trainees. Through after-school programs, it increases the pre-service education practice opportunities for teacher trainees, and promotes the coherence of pre-service and post-service by perceiving the professional characteristics of primary and secondary school teachers.

In addition, the participation of college student volunteers in summer childcare should be carried out under the leadership of professional teachers or social service organizations, and their cognitive attitudes and practical abilities should be enhanced through strengthening professional training, and then outstanding volunteers should be selected to supplement summer childcare to take on tasks of special courses counseling and after-school student management.

4.3 Communities: Opening up efficient recruitment channels and networked management of

volunteers

Community institutions should break the plight of information silos, and open up efficient channels for college students. On the one hand, social organizations can build a "volunteer service platform", in which communities can get in touch with university students in a timely manner; university students can obtain information on the demand side. On the other hand, the community should link up with colleges, increase publicity, and convey relevant information about summer childcare activities in time through the Youth League Committee, student unions, volunteer clubs and other school organizations.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the stability of the volunteer team, it is recommended that college student volunteers in the region be managed on a grid basis. For example, the government can update the latest policies on after-school programs and supervise public opinions; the community can receive information on volunteers' punching cards, attendance, class scheduling, class inspections and transfers; colleges and universities can share learning information and the latest service dynamics in a two-way manner with the volunteers; parents can upload information on payment of fees and feedback evaluations.

4.4 Society: Strengthening the supply of resources and the supervision and evaluation of service providers

Drawing on the experience of Nanjing Xuanwu District's "15-minute Education Circle", under the direction of the Municipal Education Bureau, Xuanwu District has adopted the following measures. These include the construction of red national defense resources, the establishment of museums close to the landscape, and the overall creation of the "15-minute education circle" to move after-school programs off campus and into the venue.^[6] It can be seen that the regions can also with universities, cultural centers, gymnasiums, libraries, and all kinds of practice bases to set up curriculum research and development collaborators, attracting the participation of experts, organizing clubs, scientific and technological knowledge education, red education and other activities, revitalization of social resources.

The Japanese government has been focusing on after-school programs evaluation since 2004, and a mature evaluation system has been formed by 2019. Japanese after-school program organizations are not only required to conduct self-assessment from time to time, but also subject to third-party evaluation by the Life and Welfare Section under the Welfare Department every year.^[7] Drawing on the above experience, China can carry out third-party evaluations through social organizations to supervise the summer childcare of college student volunteers from an objective perspective, publicize the high quality and the areas that need to be improved. The mechanism of evaluating can also play an important supervisory role for the synergistic parties, assisting staff in accurately positioning their professional roles, and providing all kinds of services for custodial clients in a more professional manner.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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