

## January 2012

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### Upcoming Events...

ED Exchange:  
March 20, 2012 -  
Pickering/401 area

June 20, 2012 -  
London/401 area

November 15, 2012 -  
Oakville/  
Mississauga/QEW  
area

## Learning Forums: Spreading the Message While Reflecting On Our Partnerships

We had a unique opportunity in January to share the success of LEARNING FORUMS with the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Society of Association Executives at their winter summit. DCO

ED, Liz Fisk, presented a morning session on how DCO envisioned the concept, and managed and developed a high quality e- learning environment with limited funds, while continuing to provide topical and professional in-service training to our 1,500 volunteers and staff throughout the province.

Preparing for the session provided DCO with the opportunity to review the significant achievement of this service offering and the many people who have contributed to its success over the past two and a half years. This effort is an example of our membership living DCO's tag line - *Moving Forward through Partnership*.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance, hard work, and support of a large network of people and organizations to produce the LEARNING FORUMS e-learning project:

- The thoughtful and visionary **centre leaders and members of the DCO Education Committee** who understood the need to address the issue of in-service training for adult learners differently;
- Amy Herskowitz and the **Ministry of Health and Long Term Care** for understanding our vision and providing financial support to get the project off the ground;
- Many and various **content experts from partner organizations**, who generously and tirelessly provide their time and knowledge to each module so that our membership can experience a broader and more in-depth understanding of various issues that affect our service delivery;
- **Hughes Cormier**, our creative and supportive videographer who gently leads us through the process of filming and editing;
- **Dave Cooper**, our innovative and long suffering site developer and web master who keeps our environment current and live;
- **Leah Morrigan**, our initial administrative assistant and filming support, helping to set a high visual and production standard;
- **Lynn Brewin**, our Learning and Development coordinator whose countless hours developing all aspects of each LEARNING FORUMS module, and



LEARNING FORUMS

FROM DISTRESS CENTRES ONTARIO

Spirit Of Volunteerism Recognition nomination deadline: Saturday, March 31, 2012

SOV Selection Panel review date: April 4, 2012

DCO Board of Directors 2012/13 Planning Session: May 8, 2012

DCO AGM & SOV Recognition and Awards Dinner: Friday, September 14th, 2012

CASP 2012: October 15-17, Niagara Falls, ON

New content each month on [learningforums.ca](http://learningforums.ca)! Get a password through your volunteer coordinator.

DCO Committee Meetings for the remainder of 2012...

Board of Directors meetings (Tuesdays):  
May 8  
July 10  
September 11  
November 13

Education Committee meetings (Thursdays):  
April 19  
May 17  
June 21  
July 19  
August 23

- editing the videos insures all learning outcomes are satisfied;
- The many **centre contacts** who insure our remote filming venues are appropriate while sourcing excellent presenters on interesting topics;
- **Volunteers** who take a day out of their busy schedules to attend a filming day and form the interested and interactive audiences;
- **LEARNING FORUMS Centre Managers** who insure that the learning forums users are properly set-up and managed on the system.

This list is starting to feel like an Oscar acceptance speech, and in many aspects it should; many people working in collaboration make an excellent product and LEARNING FORUMS is no exception. However, as with an Oscar acceptance speech, we run the risk of forgetting to thank someone - our sincere apologies if we have forgotten to recognize someone or some group for their contribution, we certainly appreciate it! We are a little overwhelmed by the enormity of what we have managed to create.

Thank you one and all!

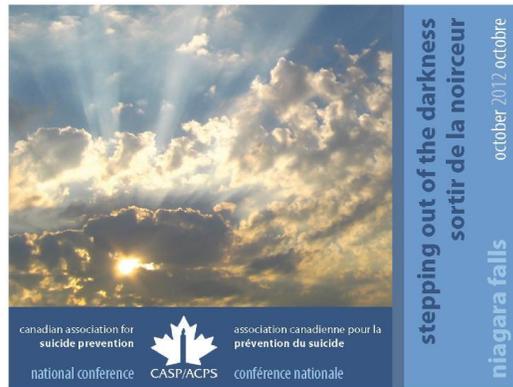
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## Mark the Date! CASP 2012 Niagara Falls, ON - October 15th - 17th

Distress Centres Ontario is hosting the 2012 Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention Conference in partnership with Suicide Prevention Councils throughout Ontario. The yearly conference is usually attended by 250 - 375 individuals, ranging from social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, crisis workers, distress line members, First Nations leaders, and suicide survivors, to name just a few.

This year, the conference will be held at the Sheraton Fallsview Hotel, directly across from the American Falls in Niagara Falls, with the main conference dates being October 15th to the 17th. We are working hard to expand our attendee's roster to include educators and young people and local political and service leaders. Pre- and post- conference activities are being confirmed. There will be a separate stream of programming for distress and crisis line staff, leaders and volunteers.

We have a wonderful Steering and Program Committee actively working to provide an educational and engaging program, but we would love your ideas or comments. We also need many individuals to provide volunteer support either



September 20  
October 18  
November 15  
December 20

**CASP 2012  
Scientific/Program  
Committee meeting**  
February 2

**CASP 2012  
Sponsorship/  
Marketing meeting**  
February 7

**CASP 2012 Steering  
Committee meeting**  
TBC

Join Our Mailing List!

during the event or with activities leading up to the main event. If you have an interest in the conference and suicide prevention, please register to receive information at [casp2012.ca](http://casp2012.ca). There is a link to provide comments or register to volunteer, or to be provided with e-blasts as new information becomes available.

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All Distress Centres within our province recognize that volunteers are the cornerstone of our service provision model and without their wonderful contributions we could not deliver the support to our communities. As we prepare to celebrate their wonderful contributions through the SOV - Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition, we need to also recognize some of the issues associated with volunteer management.

Recently, DCO Executive Director, Liz Fisk, met with various member centres and was struck by a recurring theme - how to respectfully deal with volunteers whose performance is falling short of the agencies' expectations, and how to manage long-time volunteers when their performance and contributions are not as strong as they were before.

At the latest association Networking and Strategy Setting sessions the membership spoke loudly about its wish to begin the journey to strengthen standards and service level expectations. This direction is intertwined with how we manage our volunteers. In support of the discussions the membership will be engaging in throughout 2012, we have taken this opportunity to consolidate some thought-provoking articles. We hope they will stimulate thoughts and discussions as we move forward.

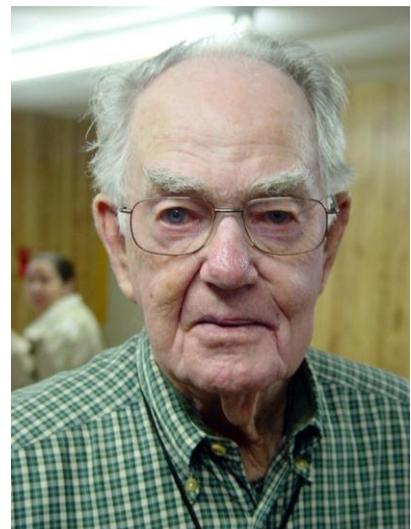
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## **Knowing When to Stop: How to Develop an Organizational Process to Help Volunteers Retire**

By Yael Caplin

One of the hardest things a volunteer manager may face is how to deal with volunteers whose performances fall short of the organization's expectations. This situation is exacerbated when a volunteer manager sees a volunteer who has been with the organization for a long time (perhaps longer than the volunteer manager), has "aged" during this time, and whose work has substantially deteriorated.

The Human Resources Department (HR)



with the Volunteer Unit at Yad Sarah has been trying to deal with this issue for almost eight years, not just on an individual volunteer's level but also on an organizational level. Over this time, a new perspective developed about why it is important to recognize that volunteering is not "for life" and why volunteer managers need the courage to "look old age in the eye." The group developed procedures to help their volunteers "complete their work" at Yad Sarah and retire from the organization.

### **The Situation at Yad Sarah**

Yad Sarah is one of Israel's largest voluntary organizations, aiding sick, disabled, elderly, isolated, and housebound people with an array of services aimed at making home care possible. The organization was established 32 years ago; since then, it has expanded to 104 branches scattered around Israel. All branches are run and managed by volunteers from a pool of around 4,500 volunteers with 300 paid staff, who are mainly situated in headquarters in Jerusalem.

Around 68 percent of the volunteers are retirees. Twenty-two percent of the volunteers in Yad Sarah have been volunteering for more than 10 years. As a result of the demographic makeup of the volunteer pool, it was inevitable that Yad Sarah would experience a process of "aging in place." A number of branch managers and service managers have encountered difficult dilemmas when faced with letting a dysfunctional volunteer go. They felt themselves in a conflict of interest, weighing what they perceived was the most supportive thing to do for the volunteer versus what might be best for the organization as a whole. This situation manifested itself in questions such as: Should I be loyal to the volunteer and allow her or him to continue to volunteer, so as not to offend this long-time supporter and assure the volunteer a social support network? Or should I be loyal to the organization and, in the name of professionalism and quality of service provided, let go of the volunteer?

Initially, the volunteer unit drafted a scheme for volunteers who needed to retire from Yad Sarah. The scheme mainly focused on providing service awards and maintaining contact with the retired volunteers. The first step was to draw up a detailed set of criteria which specified who would qualify for this scheme, but through the process, a range of issues surfaced.

Although detailed and well thought out, this initial plan obviously concentrated on the final stage of the process of letting go of volunteers - outlining the benefits that would be given to the volunteers who retired from the organization. One could say they put in place the sweetener to take away the bitter taste felt by volunteer managers and the retired volunteers.

As a result of the study, one of the committee members coined a new term, which would also change the perspective in which this issue was viewed. Instead of "letting volunteers go", or "retiring volunteers", as the term was in Hebrew, they would "complete their work" within Yad Sarah, thus still remaining a part of the organization. There had been volunteers who had completed their work as managers and moved to work that was less demanding, while others had had to take a more passive role of just taking part in events.

The procedure for completing the volunteer's work covers the following three aspects:

- Determining the principles and policies in the area of concluding the volunteers' work;
- Determining the different stages of concluding the volunteer's work. The

first stage establishes that there is a problem in the volunteer's performance and examines the problem. The second stage focuses on finding alternative solutions to deal with this problem (e.g., retraining, redefining the job, transferring to another position); the volunteer manager will follow up on the progress of implementing the chosen solutions. If none of the alternatives are successful, the process begins for the volunteer to complete his work. This third stage includes preparing the volunteer for this reality and notifying the volunteer and relevant parties (supervisor, volunteer team) of the completion of the volunteer's work. If the need arises and is possible, it is also important to provide support to the volunteer;

- Looking at alternatives to keep in touch with those volunteers who have completed their work in Yad Sarah, while ensuring the volunteer still feels part of the organization.

There is an overall expectation from top management that volunteers should deliver the best service, and that those volunteers who cannot do so should be found alternative work or let go. Because of this, top management cannot just ignore the issue and leave it to be dealt with on an individual manager's level. It is crucial to develop an organizational process that entails all the stages that are outlined above. But given Yad Sarah's experience, it is recommended that organizations approach this issue in a different order. This is what was proposed:

1. The first stage should focus on raising the moral question: "Can we actually let go of our volunteers?" The necessary dialogue to come to an answer should involve different levels of management in seminars and discussion forums. Tools such as the survey we conducted can be helpful, as is developing the terminology most suitable for the organization's culture, just as "completing the volunteer's work" was in Yad Sarah.
2. During the second stage, all managers working with volunteers should be equipped with the tools to develop a process, which can be tailored to each individual case. One must incorporate in all volunteers - from new recruits to veterans - the concept that volunteering is not "for life." In addition, it is necessary to put organizational mechanisms in place, such as recruiting and training volunteers and staff who can provide support for volunteer managers who need to deal with volunteers who no longer can perform their assignments.
3. The third stage should focus on developing the different avenues of keeping in touch with the volunteer who has completed his or her volunteer job and the different perks that may be available.

Together, these three stages are the cornerstones on which an organization can build a process to address the difficult problem of aging volunteers who lose their ability to serve as before, without leaving it to the individual volunteer managers. Although in Yad Sarah this process was developed "backwards" - from the third stage to the first - eventually it reached its goal to instill the concept that there is a start and a finish to all volunteer work. This concept has eventually become a part of the organizational ethos.

This article was originally published in *e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteerism Community*, 2010

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## Have Students, Will Achieve

By Elisa Birnbaum, edited by Leah Morigan

For a year now, Vicky Mah and Jillian Walsh, both second-year medical students at the University of Calgary, have been volunteering their time running the student-run medical clinic at the Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre, known as the DI, in the city's downtown core. The student administrators - who also head the program's executive team - are tasked with assessing patients, triaging them, and then sending them to be seen by a group of first-year university students.



### Win-win

Bringing students into the mix has proven an intuitively strategic decision, with benefits for both volunteers and the DI. For one, the program fosters student-physician mentor relationships, while providing clinical experience. "It was a way to let students have a role to play in healthcare," explains Walsh. "I personally was looking to gain clinical experience and to learn about healthcare economics," she says, adding the DI was a real eye-opener.

What's more, while the average medical student gains experience in teaching hospitals, boasting all the latest technologies and fancy equipment, these volunteers work firsthand with patients in marginalized groups, providing them with a different perspective, and a valuable one at that. "The population here is underserved; they face different barriers to healthcare access," echoes Mah. "We provide a service to them in a way that's convenient."

Always dedicated to helping the less fortunate, Mah did some earlier volunteer work with the DI before joining the medical clinic. She's set on working with this population in the future and credits the behind-the-scenes experience of running a clinic with giving her a real professional leg-up.

Despite the surplus work needed to keep all the balls in the air, the benefits are self-evident - energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence, plus, it helps organizations stay current in how they relate to the youthful demographic.

### Staying grounded

Having placements comes with its own challenges. "We do have to orient a new grouping of students every four months and that takes time," explains Barry Edington, manager at Sheridan College's Social Service Worker program which offers a three-day-a week placement for two students for eight months, "It helps us each get re-grounded on how we do our business and what our best practices are so it's repetitive but useful for us to go through."

"I don't think [taking on students] makes our jobs harder, it makes us feel that our job is having even more impact, reaching the student and then getting out the message," he says. "And our sensitivity gets transferred down the line."

**But remember....**

To make the student placements work effectively, however, one of the bigger lessons learned at Sheridan and the DI is the need to let go. "We take on a lot of responsibility and have to realize they're talented and that's why we brought them here."

"For organizations working with students, it's important to remember our schedules are complicated and things shift around a lot," offers Walsh.

In fact, organizations contemplating bringing students into their office as part of formalized plans, need to face a number of realities, says Karen Benzinger, Director of the Centre for Career Education at the University of Windsor. She oversees the Volunteer Internship Program that places 350 interns a year with a range of non-profits for a 40-hour internship each semester.

"It's an experiential learning program with a career development spin," she offers, adding the program, running for more than 20 years now, helps students gain skills, build networks, get exposure to community service and, ultimately, affirm their career paths.

"It's important for organizations to be prepared to welcome students in," Benzinger says, explaining her centre provides each nonprofit with an employer's handbook filled with tips and best practices. "Students need to be made part of the team and made to understand how their work fits into the bigger picture of the organization." Good communication is essential, as is ensuring points of contact are available for discussions and questions.

Citing the many positive testimonials from those who've gone through the program, challenges aside, Benzinger is a fan. She reiterates how, if done properly, organizations and students can co-create with great impact.

Read the whole story [here](#).

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