

Building Capacity for Volunteerism and Social Support at Leeway, Inc., a Skilled Nursing Facility

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Background

Of the 10,727 people living with HIV in Connecticut, the city of New Haven has the second highest rate, with 1,494.6 cases per 100,000 people.³ Studies show that an estimated 48% of HIV-positive individuals suffer from a psychiatric disorder, with 16% of individuals experiencing generalized anxiety disorder and 13% facing both mental health and substance abuse issues.⁴

Leeway, Inc. is a skilled nursing center serving residents with HIV/AIDS in the New Haven area. Leeway residents often have accompanying comorbid mental health and substance abuse issues. Studies have found a high prevalence of comorbid mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety among individuals with HIV/AIDS.¹ These comorbidities can pose additional complications such as interference between medications for mental illnesses and those for HIV/AIDS.²

Methods

- We conducted a realist literature review to investigate effective volunteer programs for skilled nursing homes with similar backgrounds as Leeway.
- We conducted semi-structured interviews with four Leeway administrative staff members (30-45 minutes), nine residents (10-20 minutes), and two current volunteers (20-30 minutes).
- We analyzed and revised volunteer training and orientation materials in the context of interview findings.



Objectives

Develop a sustainable volunteer program structure that will:

- Increase social support for Leeway's skilled nursing facility residents
- Serve as a model for similar institutions
- Eventually decrease prevalence of depression and anxiety, leading to reduced reliance on psychotropic medication

Key Findings:

Realist Literature Review

- Social interventions such as peer support groups have been shown to have positive effects on individuals with HIV such as decreasing dependence on antidepressant medication⁵ and improving psychiatric symptoms.⁶
- High social support and low viral loads have been found to be positively correlated among men with AIDS.⁷
- Long-term volunteers in programs involving working with people with HIV/AIDS were more likely to stay involved for personal and professional development and relationship building, rather than pure altruism.⁸ Younger volunteers are motivated by skill and knowledge development and building relationships, while older volunteers are driven by a sense of civil commitment.⁹

Key Findings

Semi-Structured Interviews

- Resident interviews revealed that residents had predominantly strong positive feelings towards college-aged volunteers, roughly equivalent interest in group vs. individual activities, and a generally open attitude towards engaging in new activities.
- Staff interviews found the need for a more practical and efficient process of volunteer recruitment and training, given the staff's time constraints. They also expressed the desire to implement a program that balances individual preferences for group and "buddy" programming.
- Volunteer interviews raised concerns about burdensome training requirements that may discourage interest among potential volunteers. In addition, the current forms of communication between Leeway and the volunteers is fairly informal, and volunteers are interested in providing greater input with regard to programming.

Recommendations

Based on interview findings, we recommend that Leeway consider:

1. Digitalizing the volunteer application form
2. Hiring a part time volunteer coordinator
3. Implementing a semi-structured program with a mix of optional one-on- one and group activities (Figure 1)
4. Holding seasonal orientation sessions in the fall, spring, and summer (Figure 2)
5. Restructuring the volunteer training by converting paper packets into a PowerPoint presentation, that could potentially be made available through an online webinar
6. Implementing program evaluation tools: volunteer weekly feedback forms, informal resident feedback, and volunteer coordinator weekly summary

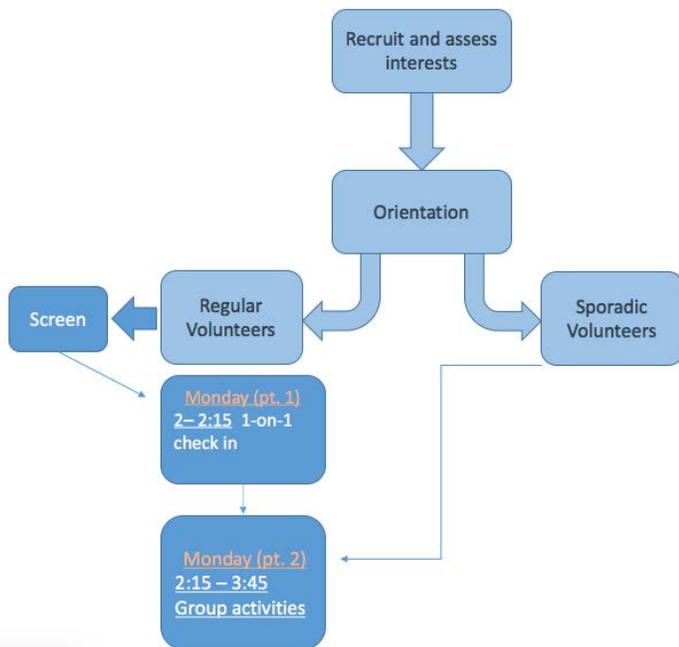
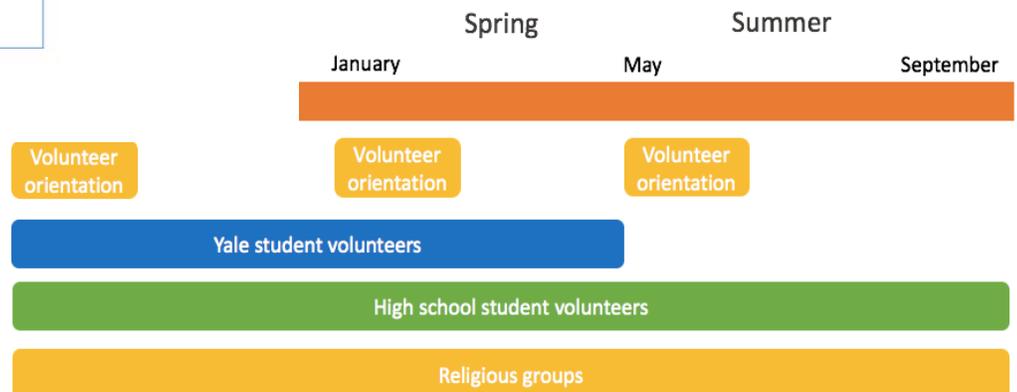


Figure 1. Flow and structure of the proposed program. The proposed training and programming structure aims to incorporate the distinct requirements and abilities of the various volunteer pools. Additionally, this model allows for a flexible hybrid of sustained one-on-one relationships and group interactions.

Figure 2. Allocation of seasonal orientation sessions throughout the year, indicating the types of volunteers



Limitations

- While resident interviewee selection criteria were developed with the help of Leeway staff, differences in English proficiency, speech ability, and willingness to be interviewed may have led to selection bias.
- Our qualitative analysis of interview data was thematic. Thus, some interpretations may be subjective.
- As some new tools that we propose are yet to be tested in the field by Leeway staff, the first months should be treated as a pilot period.

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