

## THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL IN HOSPITAL SABAH WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37134/bitara.vol12.5.2019>

Received: 24 October 2019; Accepted 20 November 2019; Published 10 December 2019

### Abstract

The School In Hospital strives to provide formal education through fun learning approach to students receiving treatment at 15 hospitals throughout the nation. The School In Hospital (SIH) Sabah Women and Children's Hospital (SWACH) has a Volunteer Program in which NGOs and CSR initiatives could participate in. Examining the impact of the volunteer program is crucial to ensure that the volunteer activities are in line with the mission of the school. This will also provide the school with information that will be useful for future improvements in the volunteer program. Thematic analysis was done on the volunteers' reflective writing in the volunteer task sheet and on the teachers' focus group interview. The analysis reveals that the SIH SWACH volunteer program has had a positive impact on both the volunteers themselves and the students. Thus, the involvement of NGOs and CSR initiatives in the volunteer program is considered complementary to the mission of the school, especially through the volunteer activities they conduct. An area of improvement related to implementation of the volunteer program has also been identified.

**Keywords:** volunteer, corporate social responsibility, non-government organisations, school in hospital

### INTRODUCTION

The School In Hospital (SIH) program is a type of education service offered at 15 hospitals throughout Malaysia to ensure that children with health issues, especially those chronically ill and warded at hospitals have access to education. This is also in line with the United Nations' sustainable development goal of ensuring education for all. The fun learning approach is mandated in the manual for the implementation of SIH (Ministry of Education, 2012). Meaningful and fun learning activities are central to the teaching and learning at the SIH. Thus, educational and co-academic programs at SIH are planned accordingly.

The School In Hospital Sabah Women and Children's Hospital (SIH SWACH) has a volunteer program in which non-government organisations (NGOs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives could partake in. Volunteerism is common in hospitals around the world. Some volunteer offers medical expertise and support services while some volunteer programs functions as social support (Intindola, Rogers, Flinchbaugh & Della Petra, 2016; Lourens & Daniels-Felix, 2017; Latifi, 2019). SWACH has long term relationships with several organisations coordinating volunteer activities. The paediatric wards receive the most number of visitors and volunteers. The volunteer program in SIH SWACH serves as an additional avenue in which volunteer groups could engage with paediatric patients especially, in a more structured program.

The SIH SWACH Volunteer Program aims to have two different volunteer groups conducting volunteer activities in a year. These two programs are scheduled to happen during the school break. These programs are very structured because the volunteer groups that are involved are required to

submit a proposal for the perusal of the school and also the Special Education Division. After receiving endorsement and approval for the planned volunteer program, the hospital administration will be consulted. The volunteer program typically happens with representatives of the school serving as facilitators. Although only two volunteer programs are planned each year, volunteer groups are also involved in several other programs of the school. Thus, these programs also qualify as volunteer programs. These programs are planned by different management units in the school. Table 1 illustrates the programs and the management unit that is responsible for the planning and

**Table 1** Types of Volunteer Program at School In Hospital Sabah Women and Children's Hospital according to management unit

<b>Volunteer Program</b>	<b>Management Unit</b>
SIH SWACH Volunteer Program	Special Programs Unit
Festivals and Celebration	Special Programs Unit
Children's Day Celebration	Special Programs Unit
Birthday Parties	Student Affairs Unit
Indoor and Traditional Games Competition	Co-curricular Unit
Awards Ceremony Day	Administrative Unit

implementation. Each of the management units are responsible for the programs that they have planned. The involvement of volunteer groups is not essential but is encouraged. Volunteerism in hospitals around the world has shown to have positive impact on not only those receiving volunteer services i.e; patients and caretakers (Rogers, Jiang, Rogers &Intidola, 2016), but also on the volunteers themselves (Reasoner, Desai & Lee, 2018). The involvement of volunteer groups with activities in the school calendar has enriched these programs, especially with regard to scope, manpower and resources. Volunteer groups are observed to be relevant in activities for most of the management units in the school hence the importance of examining the impact of these volunteer programs.

## **Volunteerism**

Adler (2011) describes volunteer as people who make time to help community members without financial or material compensation, take responsibility for voluntary activities while looking for new experiences and personal gratification. The most common notion of volunteerism is that volunteers are primarily motivated by the need to help unfortunate others, characterised by elements of selflessness (Whittaker, MacLennan &Handmer, 2015). In volunteerism research, the term volunteer is generally used to describe non obligatory activities (between the helper and the helped) which are taken for the benefit of others either society as a whole or a specific organisation, without financial reward or remuneration and undertaken in an organised context (Wilson, 2012; Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

In their effort to map volunteerism and understand the roles of volunteers, Whittaker et. al (2015) argued for a broader definition of volunteers and that volunteers are not to be seen as one homogenous group due to the differing functions and volunteer activities that they partake in. Karl (1984, as cited in Brudney& Lee, 2017) described the military origin of the word volunteer; the willingness to act without coercion and providing services without monetary compensation. Cnaan&Amrofell (1994, as cited in Markos, 2018) described the origin of the word 'volunteer' in Hebrew as to mean "to willingly give" and is linguistically very close to charitable donations. In more recent years, volunteerism is redefined in broader terms to include varied acitivities, somewhat more heterogenous, that occurs along a continuum.

Long term regular volunteerismsits at one end and occasional or episodic volunteerism at the other end (Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal& Handy, 2008; Whittaker et al., 2015).Hospital volunteerism occurs somewhere within this continuum, with many nearing the occasional volunteerism end. Occasional volunteerism has gained popularity in recent years, especially among youths (Smith et al., 2010; MacLean, 2018). Wu, Lin & Wang, (2019) studied the link between hospital volunteers' experiences and their satisfaction and loyalty; i.e continuing to be involved in hospital volunteerism. The hospital

volunteers in the study generally reported a sense of satisfaction, although to varying degrees. Feigin, Owens and Goodyear-Smith, (2014) discussed positive correlation between volunteer motivation and volunteer satisfaction. Several studies established links between volunteer motivations, volunteer satisfaction and actual volunteering experiences (Bassous, 2015 and Erasmus & Morey, 2016). The impact of volunteerism could be understood through volunteer motivation as they are closely linked. Yeung's (2004) identification of volunteer motivation is useful as a thematic view on volunteerism's impact and they are: altruism, social contact, personal interest and emotional need.

### **Altruism**

Altruism is often seen as inseparable from volunteerism. It is the “intentional and voluntary act performed to benefit another person as the primary motivation and either without a conscious expectation of reward (altruistic approach) or with the conscious or unconscious expectation of reward (pseud altruistic approach)” (Feigin et al., 2014, p.1). A pioneering discussion on altruism by Monroe (1996, as cited in Ricard, 2013) defined it as a behaviour to benefit another even when it poses a risk of possible sacrifice on the actor's part. Ricard (2013) extensively discussed altruism as an action driven by the need to serve others, with the essential components of valuing others and being concerned about their situation. Although altruism is related to self-sacrifice, Smith et al., (2010) saw altruism as an inner tendency to help or offer meaningful services to others as a means of increasing self-satisfaction. Thus, the act of volunteering is altruistically motivated and will offer a sense of satisfaction to the volunteer. Altruism is volunteering for the sake of doing a good thing.

### **Personal Interest**

Studies on volunteer motivation uses the social exchange theory as a framework to understand volunteerism (Glavas, 2016; SitiRabaahHamzah, TurimanSuandi, JasminArif Shah, IsmiArif Ismail &AzimiHamzah, 2016; Paraskevaidis&Andriotis, 2017). The social exchange theory suggests that people contribute to the degree that they are rewarded (Cropanzano& Mitchell, 2005 as cited in Paraskevaidis&Andriotis, 2017). The rewards of voluntarism are mostly intangible but valuable. Yan, Wang, Chen and Zhang (2016) described having a sense of self-worth as the intrinsic reward of volunteerism and the extrinsic rewards being: face, reputation and social support. Several other studies also described the benefits or intangible rewards of volunteerism such as respect, recognition, personal skill development, sense of self-worth, career choice, civic responsibility and sheer enjoyment (Wilson, Son, Smith &Grotz, 2016; Tse, 2018; Thomas, Pritchard & Briggs, 2019). Several studies have also shown that youths are the ones that benefits most from participation in volunteer activities (Glendinning, 2017; MacLean,2018; Lund, et al., 2019).

### **Emotional Needs**

In addition to perceived benefits of volunteering, the need to volunteer is also a factor in volunteer motivation. The need to volunteer is linked to self-interest thus it correlates positively with the impact of volunteerism. SitiRabaahHamzah et al. (2016) illustrated the link between self-interest and volunteering within the social exchange theory framework by describing the social exchanges that happens; the act of volunteering and the probability of someone helping us in the future if they saw that we are willing to undertake volunteerism. Hallmann, Zehrer, Fairley and Rossi (2019) termed this as social capital, which comprises of potential resources which are linked to having a network of mutual acquaintances and recognition (Webb et al., 2017). Putnam (1993, as cited in Peachey, Bruening, Lyras, Cohen & Cunningham, 2015) defined social capital as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. As such, volunteerism can be considered a reliable way of building a network of professional contexts, employment leads and social relationships. Social capital could also be in the form of volunteerism lending a sense of status, especially when it involves prestigious events (Herrman et al., 2019). Even the social capital or network itself provides rewards for helping behaviours in the form of increasing positive attitudes from significant others and increased prestige on the part of volunteer (Siti Rabaah et a., 2016).

## **Social Contact**

Volunteerism provided ample opportunities for the development of social competencies important for successfully carrying out projects and interacting in society (Schvaneveldt & Spencer, 2016). Aside from that, hospital volunteerism also provides more opportunities for patients undergoing treatment to have social contact with others in a positive context. Social contact benefits both the volunteer and the patient at the hospital (Lourens & Daniels-Felix, 2017). Duret, Johnson, Zhang, Sim and Wren (2019) highlighted the advantages of youth volunteers in helping other young people, particularly their proximity in age and experiences (Smith et al., 2010). The similarities and proximity between youth volunteer and patients enables a more empathetic approach that appeals to the patients (Hilton & Jepson, 2012).

## **Volunteerism in hospitals**

In addition to social contact, the type of activity conducted during a volunteer program is also significant for the program to have a positive impact on the receivers or patients. Students of hospital schools face difficulty in concentrating and focusing on learning activities due to their health issues (Au Yeong, 2014). Volunteer activities such as arts, music or even clowning activities have shown to have therapeutic effect on paediatric patients (van Venrooij & Barnhoon, 2017; Lopez-Bushnell & Berg, 2018; Stokes et al., 2018). The similarity of these studies lies in the integration of the fun learning approach and arts to plan and implement volunteer activities. A similar study was conducted in Malaysia by SitiFarhana Md. Yasin, MohdAzimSharim and NurulNadiyahSahimi (2014) when they found that patients who were involved in their arts based volunteer program showed positive changes in their emotions, enthusiasm and social interaction.

## **OBJECTIVES**

A number of studies have shown the impact and significance of hospital volunteerism. Previous studies have shown that volunteerism benefits both the volunteers and the people receiving volunteer services. The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of the SIH SWACH Volunteer Programs on volunteers and patients. Positive impacts will encourage volunteers to persist with volunteerism. Positive changes in students are also an indicator that the SIH SWACH Volunteer Program implementation is aligned with the mission and vision of the school. From the administrative perspective, it will help the school plan future volunteer program and advise future volunteer groups on their planning of volunteer activities. Given the importance of volunteer programs at hospitals, the purpose of the current study is: 1) to extend the research on hospital volunteerism and 2) to identify the impact that the SIH SWACH Volunteer program has on both volunteers and also the students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative in nature. The impact of the volunteer program on volunteers is examined through a volunteer task sheet or questionnaire. Convenience sampling method was used. The sample consisted of volunteers that were involved in different volunteer programs. 17 of these volunteers completed their volunteer task sheet. The volunteers are to complete the questionnaire prior to and after the volunteer program. However, the volunteers were not obliged to complete or return the task sheet. The volunteer task sheet was supplied by YayasanNurulYaqeen (2015).

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part is to be completed before the program or activity. The first part covers demographic questions and also the volunteer's expectations and opinion on the activity that they were about to do. The second part of the questionnaire requires the volunteers to write a short reflection about what they did during the volunteer program, especially when it involved interaction with the students. The third part of the questionnaire is an evaluation of the volunteer based on six aspects; confidence, delivery, interaction with students, content of the program and the adherence to fun learning approach. Only information from the first two parts was obtained. The questions in the third part were used as talking points in the focus group interview.

The focus group interview was done with a group of three teachers from the school. The teachers were facilitators during various volunteer programs at the school. They were asked to share their observation on the student pre, during and post volunteer activities. They were also prompted to share some insights about the volunteers that were involved based on the aspects detailed in the third part of the volunteer task sheet.

There were 10 female and 7 male respondents that have completed the questionnaire. 10 of them are youths aged 15 to 24 years old. 4 of them are adults aged 35 to 44 years old and the rest are aged 25 to 34 years old. 12 of the respondents volunteered their time, labor and conducted some activities with the students. The other 5 volunteered their time to do some activities with the students and also gave material donations. The youths were from local universities doing internships and industrial training under a local youth organisation. Two of the adults are volunteer coordinators from the youth organisations. The rest of the adults are staff of a local university and companies doing their annual CSR program.

**Table 2** Analysis of volunteer written statement and reflection

Theme	No of reference	Example extract	Volunteer Group
Altruism	15	'..I could serve those in need..'	Youth
		'..I want to volunteer something I can do'	Adult
		'..I want to spend some time with the children..'	Adult
		'..I want to entertain (celebrate) them..'	Youth
Personal Interest	27	'..I have gained exposure to children experiencing health problems..'	Youth
		'..this (volunteer work) will benefit me as a Psychology student..'	Youth
		'..I have gained a lot of new experiences..'	Youth
		'..I wish to learn new knowledge..'	Youth
Needs	13	'..It is a privilege to be here..'	Adult
		'..it will help (me) in my future career..'	Youth
		'..we all agreed to come...do something good for the students..'	Adult
Social contact	6	'..the patient responded positively..'	Adult
		'..I have learned ways to approach children with health problems, especially how to talk to them..'	Youth
		'..the boy is very cheerful..committed to the activity..displayed leadership..'	Adult
		'..I learn how to conduct myself when facing children with (chronic) illness..'	Youth

## RESULTS

### Impact on Volunteers

A thematic analysis was done on the written statements and reflections of the volunteer to see the impact of the volunteer program. The framework for analysis was using the social exchange theory and Yeung's (2004) identification of volunteer motivation.

Based on the thematic analysis of the volunteers written statement and reflection, the theme that receives the most number of mentions is personal interest at 27, followed by altruism at 15, needs at 13 and finally social contact at 6. These show that the volunteers have mostly felt that they have reaped a personal benefit from the volunteer work that they have done. As Metzger et al., (2018) and Wilson et al., (2016) had posited, participation in volunteerism could be rewarding not only

intrinsically but also extrinsically in the form of skills development. Most of the youth volunteers mentioned that the volunteer activity will enable them to gain new experiences and knowledge.

After personal interest, altruism received the most number of mentions at 15. Respondents from both the youth and adult groups expressed satisfaction at having met their altruistic goals during the volunteer work. Both the adult group and youth group mentioned altruism in their written statement, regardless of whether they are volunteering just their time and labour or together with material donations. Needs came in third in mentions. The volunteers described hospital volunteerism as a privilege and an opportunity. Only one volunteer, an adult volunteer, explicitly mentioned that the decision to choose hospital volunteerism as one of her company's CSR initiative is achieved as a consensus between members of her company. This matches Hallmann et al., (2019) discussion of social capital, which entails having potential resources and a network of mutual acquaintances and recognition, as the motivation and reward of volunteerism (Wood, Berger & Roberts, 2017).

The least mentioned theme is social contact with only 6 mentions. Only one youth volunteer made a mention of the required skills to communicate or approach children with health issues. The rest are mentions by adults describing the positive impact of the volunteer activity on the patients' communication skill and leadership qualities. Social contact is very significant to youths volunteers as it involves the development of social competencies important for successfully carrying out projects and interacting in society (Metzger et al., 2018). It is expected that the youth volunteers could benefit most within this theme but only one of them made an explicit mention.

#### Impact on students

A focus group interview was done with three teachers. They were asked to share their general observation on students during volunteer programs. Aside from that, they were also asked to share their experiences working with the volunteer. The thematic analysis on the interview will be based on SitiFarhana Md. Yasinet. al. (2014) findings on the positive change that occurred after volunteer programs. Table 3 illustrates the Analysis of focus group interview on volunteerism program impact on students.

**Table 3** Analysis of focus group interview on volunteerism program impact on students

Theme	Example extract
Emotions	‘..the students were entertained (by the singing and guitar playing)...they smiled..’ ‘..they (the students) are happy with story telling..’ ‘..at first they (the students) frown and sulk but later they smiled and joined the fun..’ ‘..they love the clowns and magic shows, even the quiet ones..’
Enthusiasm	‘..some wants to join (volunteer activities) but some doesn't..’ ‘..they enjoy colouring with them (the volunteers)..’ ‘..they (the students) were really attentive during story telling..’ ‘..they (the students) tried their best even though they are not good at singing..’
Social Interaction	‘..students are quiet when the volunteers can't engage them..’ ‘..students gradually warm up (to the volunteers)..two way communication occurs..’ ‘..we (teachers) have to be facilitators..’

The teachers reported that generally all the students are very receptive and responded positively to volunteer activities. The change in their emotions is usually evident. The students of the school generally showed enthusiasm when asked to join activities such as sing along, colouring and games. Arts based activities such as these has been shown to have positive impact on paediatric patients (SitiFarhana et al., 2014; Lopez-Bushnell & Berg, 2018). Although the students may initially show

some reluctance to join the fun, they would warm up. A teacher mentioned that at times teachers of the school may have to step in as facilitators as volunteers may need some assistance in communicating with students. The teachers also observed that due to the volunteers' differing backgrounds and life experiences, some require additional assistance in communicating with students. This observation corresponds with the volunteers' written statement and reflection where social contact or interaction is the least mentioned.

## CONCLUSION

The volunteer program at SIH SWACH has had positive impact on the volunteers and students. Volunteers had optimistic expectations on their volunteer work and later reflected positively about their volunteering experiences. The student also responded positively to the volunteers and the volunteer activity. Insights gained from the focus group interview suggest a possible area of improvement for the SIH SWACH Volunteer Program is social contact or social interaction. Overall, the SIH SWACH Volunteer Program has a positive impact, especially on the students who benefits from the fun based activities and engagement with the community. This complements the mission of the school and the goal of providing education for all.

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