

Youth Volunteerism: Measuring the Benefits of Community Service Learning Programs

Report

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The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter "a".

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Youth Volunteerism: Measuring the Benefits of Community Service Learning Programs

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades Community Service Learning programs (CSL) have become a familiar part of Canadian educational curricula. Manitoba school divisions are no exceptions. Through independent processes they have created a number of different models. For instance, some models might require community service in order to complete a single course such as a leadership program. Another model might require community service in order to obtain a graduation diploma. The models might have different mandates, focus or terminology. What they have in common, however, is youth volunteerism.

For the purposes of our research, we used the definition of community service learning adopted by the Alliance for Service Learning in Education Reform (1993). It defines service learning as a method:

- by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are a collaborative effort between school and community;
- that is integrated into the young person's academic curriculum or provides structured time for a young person to think, talk or write about what s/he did and saw during the actual service activity;
- that provides young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities; and
- that enhances what is taught in the school by extending students learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others (p.71)

Given these characteristics and underlying assumptions of CSL programs, our research was directed at testing their impact on student's self-esteem and sense of social responsibility. These measures may provide insight into volunteer motivation, and links to or gaps in CSL programs.

Our research objectives were:

1. To measure by using a questionnaire the impact of community service learning programs on self-esteem and social responsibility. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS) would be used to assess the impact of the programs on youth.^{1,2}
2. To compare whether:
 - a) the type of volunteering (mandatory or non-mandatory) influences a student's level of social and personal responsibility (SPR);
 - b) the motivation of receiving or not receiving a credit or certificate for volunteering influences a student's SPR.
3. To examine the community service learning experience of academically *at-risk* youth through interview (Results are not presented in this report).³
4. To summarize the origins and guiding principles of community service learning programs in Winnipeg and identify some key requirements for good community service programming.

¹ The Social and Personal Responsibility scale consists of 21 items that measure a person's sense of responsibility toward others, their sense of competence to act on feelings of concern, and their sense of efficacy; i.e. believing that taking action can make a difference.

² This is a 10-item scale on which a respondent indicates level of agreement.

³ Risk can be defined in many ways; Landy & Tam (1988) describe risk as "...variables associated with the development of intellectual delays and /or mental and physical health problems in children" (p. 3). Risk variables are elements of an individual's character and their environment that contribute towards negative life outcomes (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). Rutter (1987) defines risk as any factor that contributes to a negative developmental trajectory and may include factors in the home, school and community. Rutter's conceptualisation of risk is slightly more precise because it acknowledges that first, multiple risk and protective factors are involved, and second, that the composition of these factors is dynamic, and sensitive to change within the individual's environment.

2. Literature Review

According to Putnam (2000) high levels of volunteer activity promote a general sense of social responsibility, build strong social ties, and contribute to a healthy society. The National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001) partly covered the volunteer activities of youth (15-24 years of age). Hall, McKeown & Roberts (2001) make clear that the characteristics of Canadian youth volunteers differ from the general population of Canadian volunteers. *"They are more likely to volunteer to improve their job opportunities (55% versus 16% for non-youth volunteers), to explore their own strengths (71% versus 54%) and because their friends volunteered (42% versus 28%). They are less likely to volunteer to help a cause in which they believe, ...because they were personally affected by the cause the organization supports (59% versus 71% for non-youth), to fulfill religious obligations or beliefs (19% versus 28% for non-youth)"* (p.46). Therefore the benefits associated with volunteerism for the general population may not be the same as for youth. These findings concerning volunteerism in youth are supported by the analysis of Reed & Selbee (2001).

Hall, McKeown, & Roberts (2001) noted that the volunteer landscape is changing in Canada with fewer numbers of individuals volunteering for an increasing number of hours. This trend is present in Canadian youth where the volunteerism rate dropped to 29% in 2000 from 33% in 1997 and the number of hours volunteered increased from 130 hours in 2000 compared to 125 hours in 1997. Although youth (those aged 15-24) were found in the 2000 NSGVP to have one of the highest rates of volunteering this was still a decrease from 1997 levels.

Community Service Learning

Literature and research related to the impact of volunteer experience in youth is limited and distributed throughout many disciplines. There are articles published in recreation, education, psychology, and social work related journals. While these articles are distributed through many disciplines, they provide both valuable insight about youth and community service learning and a lot of room for further research development.

Although the research is limited, publications in recreation, education, psychology and social work journals provide valuable insight into the impact of volunteer experience on youth. In general, youth are positive about their volunteer experience. For example, Parker and Franko (1999) examined high school students' attitudes toward service and their degree of involvement in service. Over 86% agreed that youth should be involved in service; nearly 80% agreed that youths could make a difference in overcoming social problems; and 78% of youth believed they would be viewed in a more positive light if they participated in service. However, senior high school students had less positive attitudes toward service than those in lower grades.

Despite the generally positive attitudes, less than 50% of those surveyed provided service in the last year, and that service consisted of an average of 11.15 hours per week. Parker and Franko recommend that greater effort should be made to educate youth about the benefits of service.

Using surveys, observations, interviews, and audits of attendance records, Shumer (1994) investigated the effect of community service on high school drop-out rates and grade point averages (GPA). Results

indicated both attendance and GPAs increased. Students attributed the results to having a choice over volunteer activity, there being a connection between the curriculum and the community, and having developed relationships with adults (teachers, role models and tutors) in the community.

Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier (2000) examined the impact of service learning on a group of middle school students. Student groups were compared on a wide range of measures including social responsibility, personal development, parent involvement, engagement in schoolwork, perceived scholastic competence, responsibility for academic achievement, grade point average, personal conduct, and goal orientation. Positive results were shown in many areas but particularly as regards:

- a) helping behaviours and concern for others;
- b) motivation to learn (this increased where the program had reflection on outcomes as one of its activities);
- c) pursuit of higher grades and personal development.

Variables that Impact Community Service Benefits

Gender

Female and male students tend to have different perspectives on community service programs and the likely benefits they might gain from engaging in such programs. In the article, "*Gender differences in adolescents' attitudes toward mandatory community service*," Miller (1994) demonstrated that females were more likely than males to have positive attitudes to such programs and support mandated community service. Males tended to be negative about the mandatory nature of the community service programs

regardless of whether their personal experience of the activities were beneficial or not.

Hamilton & Fenzel (1988) also researched differences between the sexes toward community service.

They found that girls gained more than boys from volunteering particularly with regard to their social and personal responsibility scores.

The goal of the pilot study conducted by Johnson & Notah (1999) on service learning rather than mandatory service was to *“investigate whether involvement in service learning enhanced self-esteem and responsibility...[and]...to determine if differences in affective growth might emerge due to gender or type of service performed.”* (p.460).

Their findings indicated that for both self-esteem and responsibility females showed slightly larger increases in the mean post-test scores than did males. Through coding and classifying the qualitative data, Johnson and Notah found that none of the female or male participants in their study made a negative comment about service learning.

Parental Involvement

A large percentage of Canadian parents volunteer and according to Jones (2000, 2001): *“The volunteer rates of both mothers and fathers were higher than were those of other adult women and men”* (p.70).

The one exception is women in the 15-24 year age-group. Women with children were half as likely to volunteer as women without children. Jones (2001) speculates this difference is associated with child-care responsibilities.

Parent volunteers stated that one of the greatest influences on their own volunteering was having a

parent who volunteered. Thus, it is possible that having a parent who volunteers may be a factor in a student’s decision to volunteer.

Mandatory Service versus Non-mandatory Service

Stukas, Snyder & Clary (1999) explored the concept of perceived control as it relates to mandated volunteering. In a field study, they found that a required program undermined the relationship between past experience and future intentions for those who felt more externally controlled by the program. In a controlled environment study, they found that mandated volunteering has a negative impact for people who are disinclined to volunteer of their own free will.

McLellan and Youniss (2001) examined two different mandated programs, one that provided service experience direct and one indirect.⁴ The direct service program allowed students to freely choose an activity to undertake in the community. The indirect service program incorporated the service activities into the curriculum to enhance skill building as well as create awareness of civic responsibility. The latter program was more successful in stimulating students to undertake voluntary activities. McLellan and Youniss conclude that, *“From the viewpoint of educational policy, schools can help students most when they organize service strategically and integrate service into the academic curriculum.”* (p.1).

4 Direct Service: Work directed at the achievement of an agency’s primary mission which often involves the provision of services directly to agency clients. Preparing meals at a soup kitchen, cleaning up a neighborhood playground, working as an aid in a child care center, tutoring, are all examples of direct service.

Indirect Service: Provision of skills and/or work to help an agency perform its functions or to impact upon issues of concern to the agency and the clients/ community that it serves. Examples of indirect service including setting up a computer program for agency use, helping with clerical tasks and lobbying of funding for HIV/AIDS research for an agency which works in the field of HIV prevention and education.

3. Methodology

The Questionnaire

Two quantitative instruments were selected in order to obtain information associated with factors that impact self-esteem and a sense of social responsibility in youth. These measures are the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (Conrad and Hedin, 1981) and the second is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Social and Personal Responsibility Scale

Conrad and Hedin (1981) developed the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPR) in response to the inappropriateness of currently developed scales on social responsibility. They developed the SPR based on the assumption that a person will act in a responsible manner when the following conditions are met: one must have a responsible attitude towards others; one must have competence to act upon feelings of concern for others and one must have a sense of efficacy which allows one to believe that taking action and feeling concern can make a difference for the better in the community or people's lives. Each of the subscales (Components of SPR: Social Responsibility, Duty to the Community, Competence, Efficacy and Performance) assesses the extent to which the students meet the conditions identified in the scale.

The Attitudes Toward Being Responsible is further subdivided into components of social welfare and duty. Statements associated with the social welfare subscale focus on the extent to which an individual feels concern about problems and issues in the wider society. The duty subscale focuses on the extent to which one feels bound to personally meet social obligations.

The competency subscale has statements that are associated with the respondents' competency to act in a responsible manner. Conrad and Hedin provide this example: *"...if one sees a drowning person and feels a sense of responsibility toward helping him, he still may not be able to do anything about the problem (and thus not truly be 'responsible') if he does not know how to swim."* (pg.8).

The statements associated with efficacy, the fourth measure in the scale, refer to the willingness or belief the respondent has that by taking action there will be an impact on the social or physical environment.

Finally the SPR examines the extent to which students perceive they do act in responsible ways which is the performance subscale.

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

This scale measures the self-acceptance aspect of self-esteem. It was designed specifically with brevity and ease of administration in mind in order to facilitate its use with a high school population (Robinson & Shaver, 1973). This measure of self-esteem is based on a Gutman one-dimensional scale. This means it is a cumulative scale where if the respondent agrees with any particular question on a list, they will have to be in agreement with any previous questions on that list. For example if there are the following questions:

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
3. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others

If the respondent agrees with 3, then they will obviously agree with 1 and 2 as well. For the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, there are 10 questions.

Sometimes the questions are couched positively, such as the three questions on page 5 and sometimes negatively e.g. “I am unable to do things as well as other people”. The idea is to arrange questions such that the continuum of questions ranges from initial ones that even those of low self-esteem will endorse to later questions that only those of high esteem will answer. So if the person has agreed strongly with question 8 (a high esteem question), then they are in agreement with the previous seven questions and so on. There are four levels of response to a question from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Each level is given a score 1 for “strongly disagree” and 4 for “strongly agree”; the scoring is reversed for some of the questions.

Its wide use within studies that focus on students, high acceptance, and ease of administration make the Rosenberg an especially useful scale for this study.

The *Social and Personal Responsibility* scale and *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* were selected for their ease in use and reliability. In addition to these two scales, a general demographic questionnaire was used to have respondents describe several aspects of the community service learning program or community service in which they were involved in the previous 12 months and their plans for community service for the next twelve months. The demographic details provided the information necessary for the breakdown of the questionnaire results into the respective independent variables.

Distribution of the Questionnaire

The questionnaires were distributed in several locations. For each location, parental consent forms were distributed prior to any distribution of the questionnaire. Only students with parental consent

forms completed will complete the questionnaire. First the questionnaires were distributed in the Grade 10, 11, and 12 classrooms in two Winnipeg School Divisions, St. James-Assiniboia and Seven Oaks. These two school divisions were selected because they have different approaches to community service. St. James-Assiniboia School Division had mandated 40 hours of community service in order for their students to obtain a St. James-Assiniboia graduation diploma. This mandated volunteerism was not in place during the time of this study. The Seven Oaks School Division incorporates community service into its mission statement and encourages students to participate in the community but they do not have a community service requirement for graduation.

In addition to the school divisions, volunteer organizations across Winnipeg asked their volunteers in any of these three grades to complete a questionnaire. It is estimated there would be approximately 1500 students in each school division eligible to complete the questionnaire. The target for this study will be 25% of this population (750 students) the total number of questionnaires returned was 76 about a 5% return.

Compilation of the Questionnaires

The responses for each item in the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale and Rosenberg Scale were entered into a statistical software package for analysis. We compared means statistically between different demographic populations of respondents. In addition to the comparison of means, the responses to questions that were more open-ended were summarized and then the percentages for common responses were tabulated.

4. Results From the Questionnaire Survey of School Students

Demographics

Seventy-six (76) respondents came from thirteen different schools within six different school divisions, with the majority (52%) coming from a single division. This is estimated to be about a 5% response rate. Eighteen students were in Grade 9 (25%), twenty-nine students were in Grade 10 (40%), and fourteen were in Grade 12 (19%).

There were twenty-nine (29) male and forty-four (44) female respondents. Sixty (60) people came from two-parent families, and sixteen (16) from single-parent families or were living with guardians.

For the majority of students English was their first language, however, many spoke other languages in the home. Examples of the second and third languages spoken at home were French, Tagalog, Cantonese, Greek, Italian, Ukrainian, Japanese, Kiswahili, Punjabi and Pangasinan.

Figures 1 to 8 show the type of volunteering experiences open to students, their motivations for volunteering and those volunteering in order to attain school credits.

Figure 1: Types of volunteer experiences in the year prior to 2005

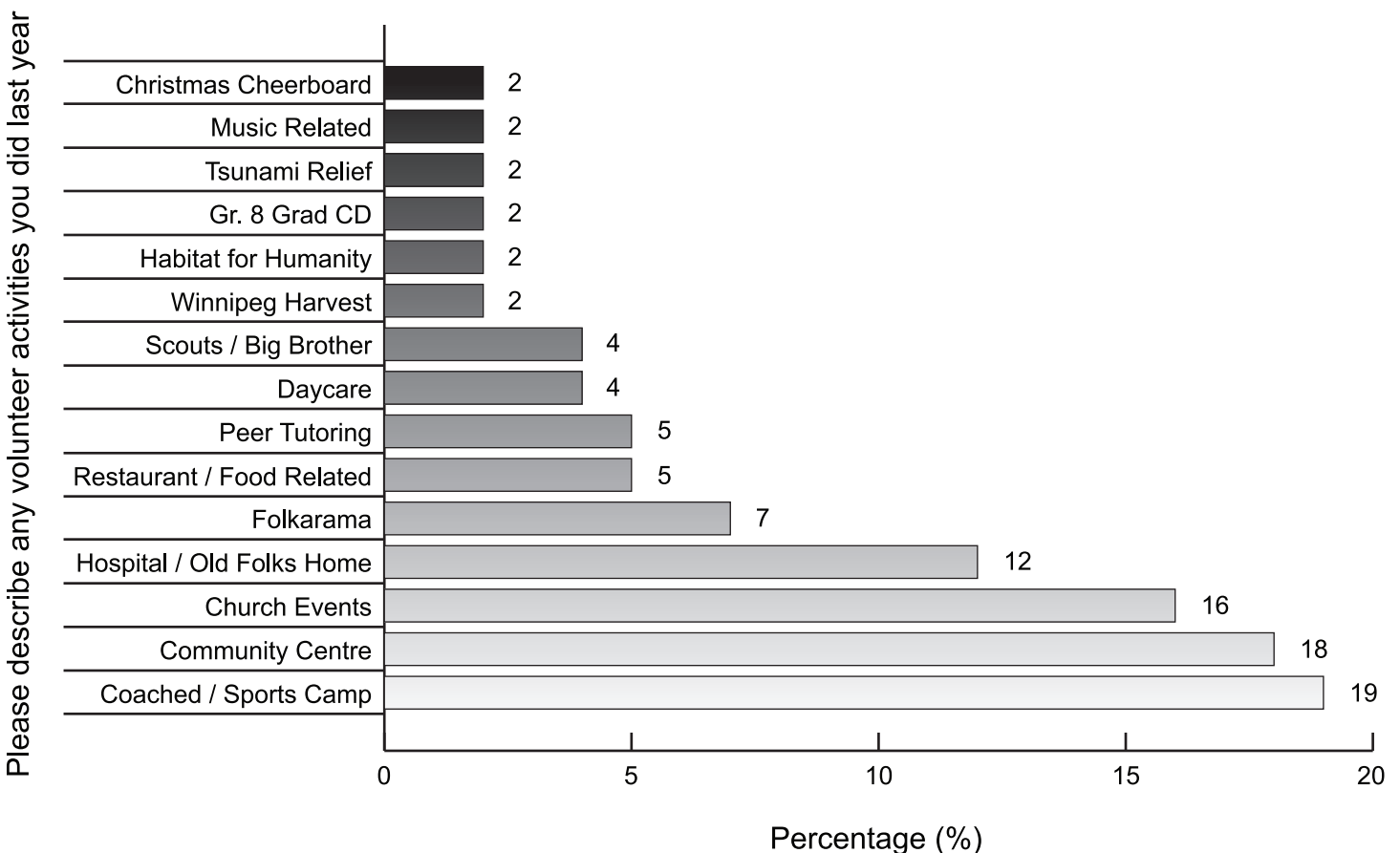


Figure 2: Reasons for volunteering in the year prior to 2005

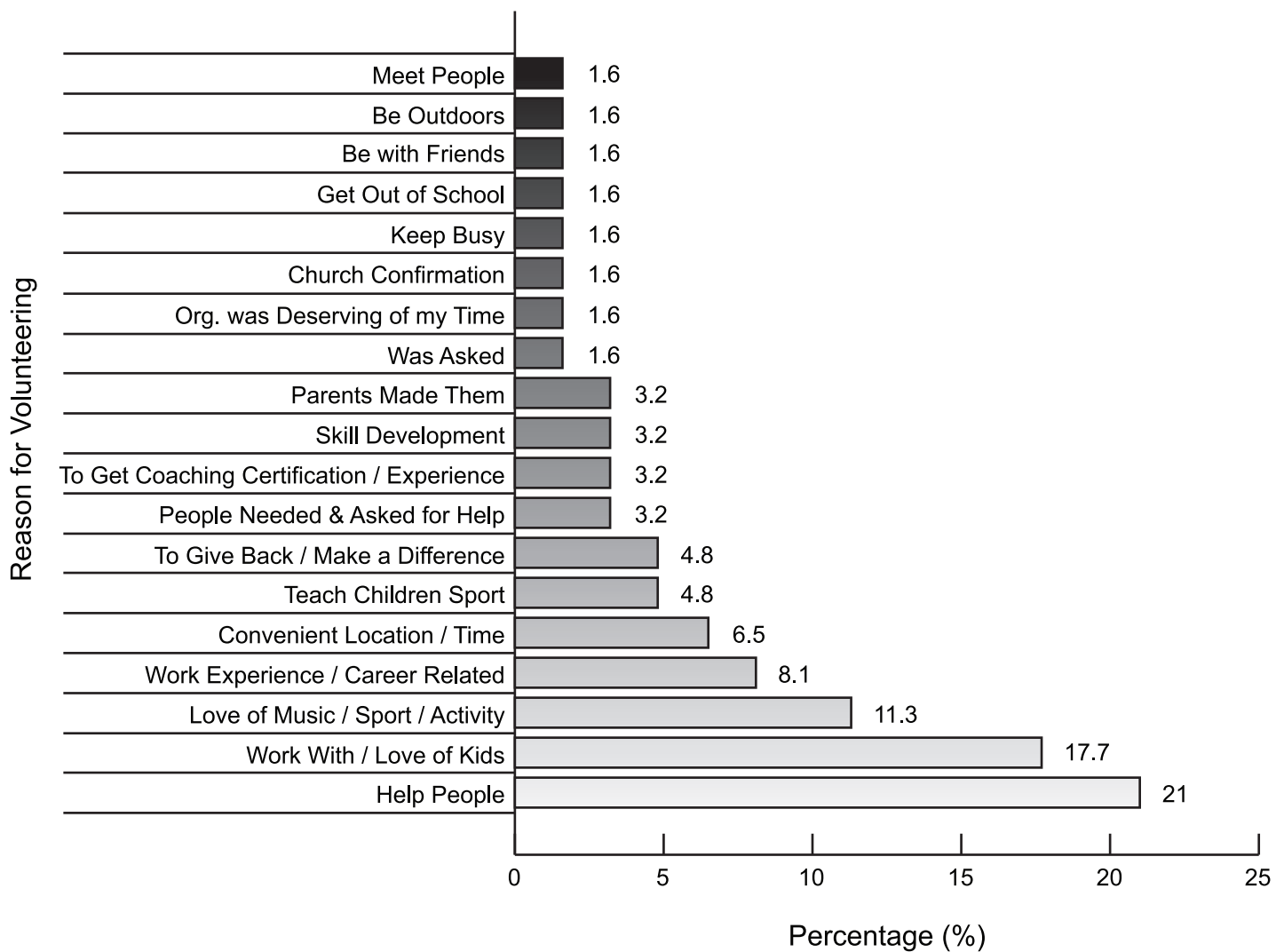


Figure 3: Current volunteer activities

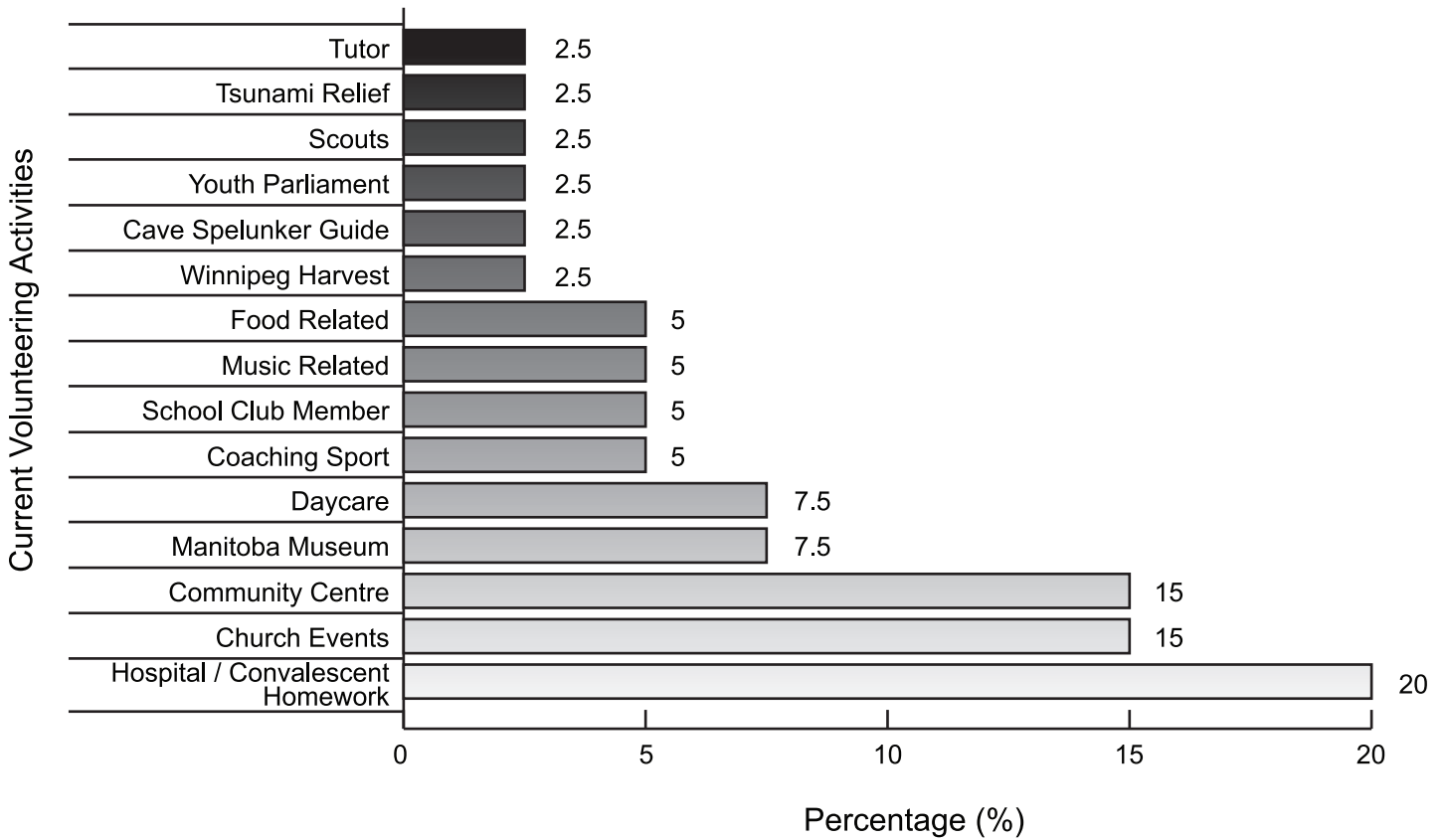


Figure 4: Reasons for volunteering currently

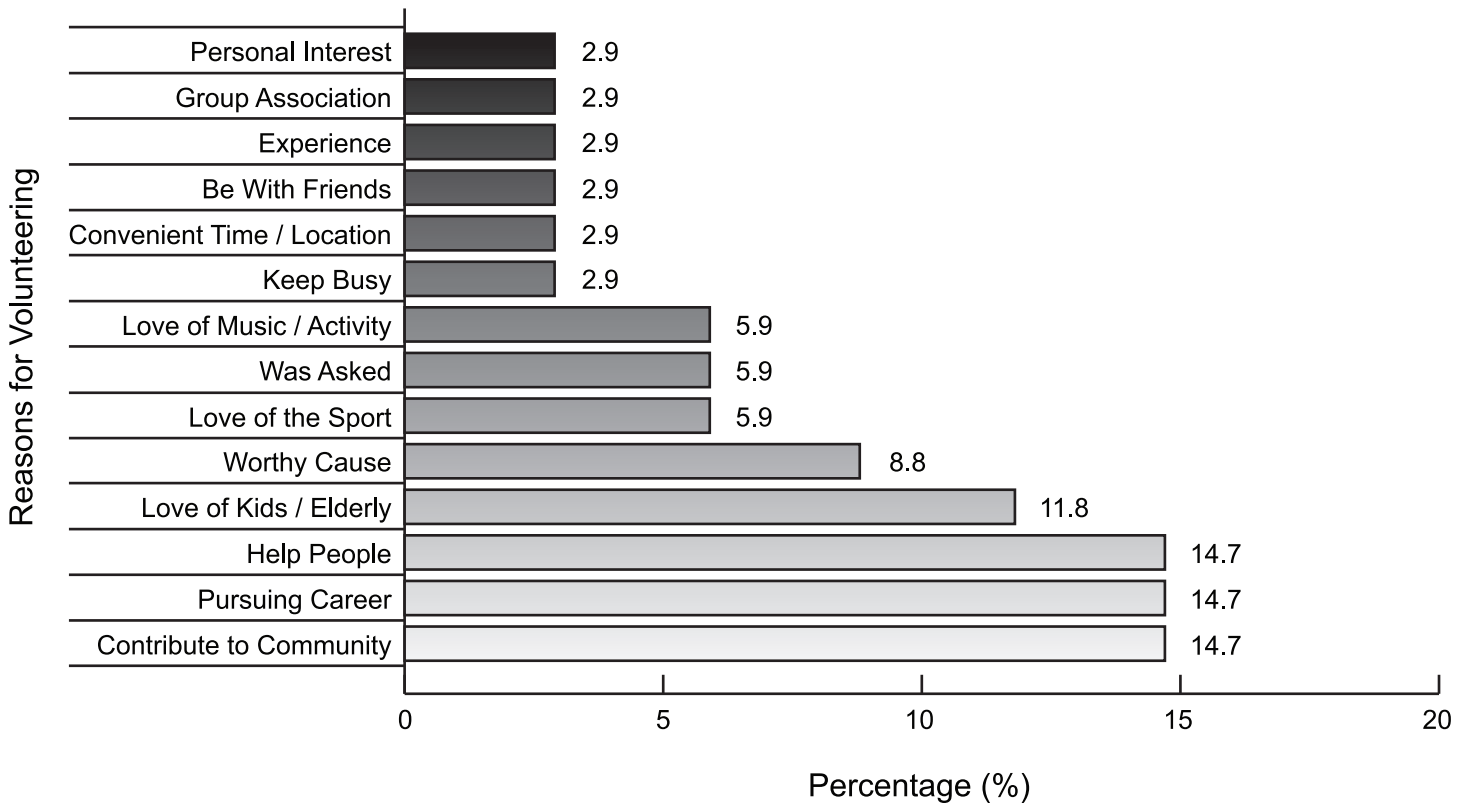


Figure 5: Types of volunteer opportunities acceptable for school credit in the year prior to 2005

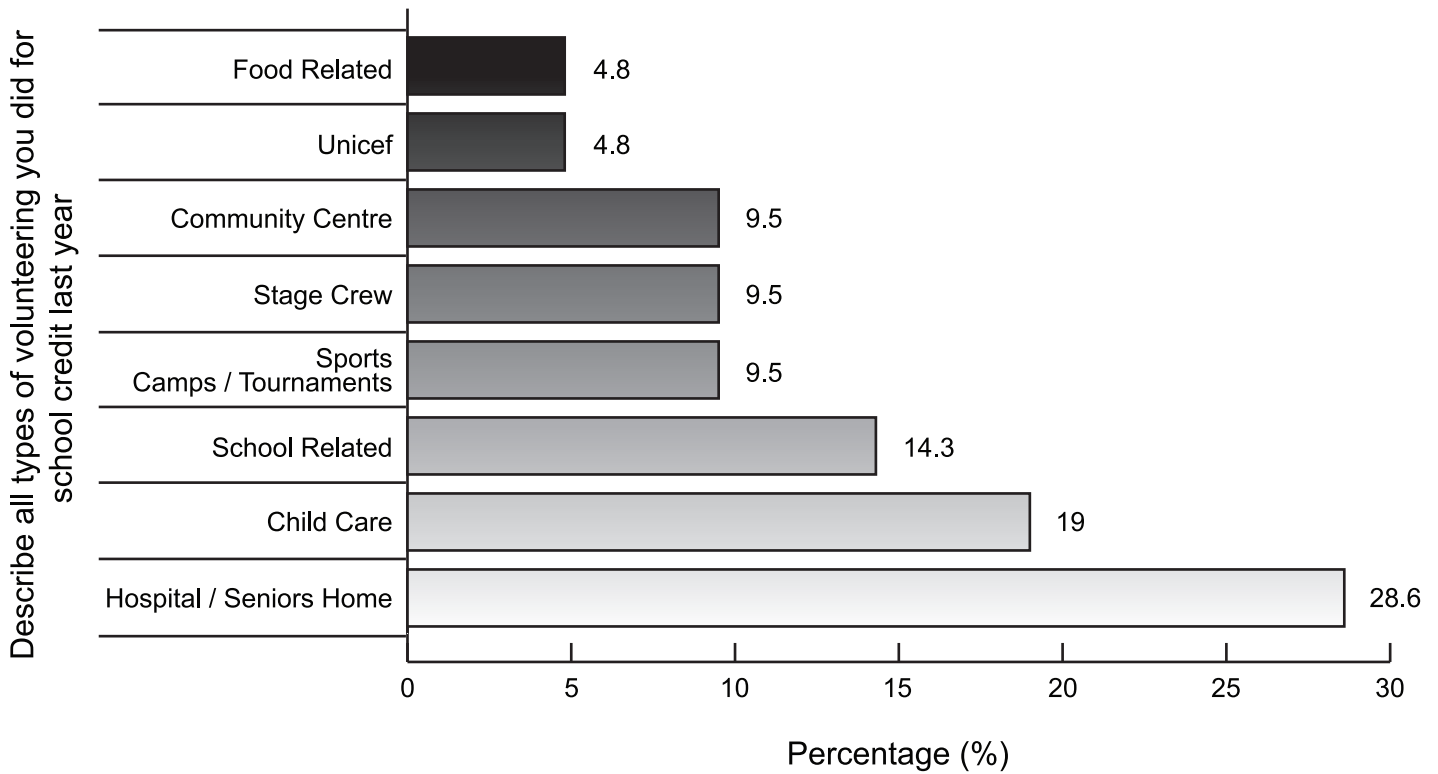


Figure 6: Reasons for volunteering

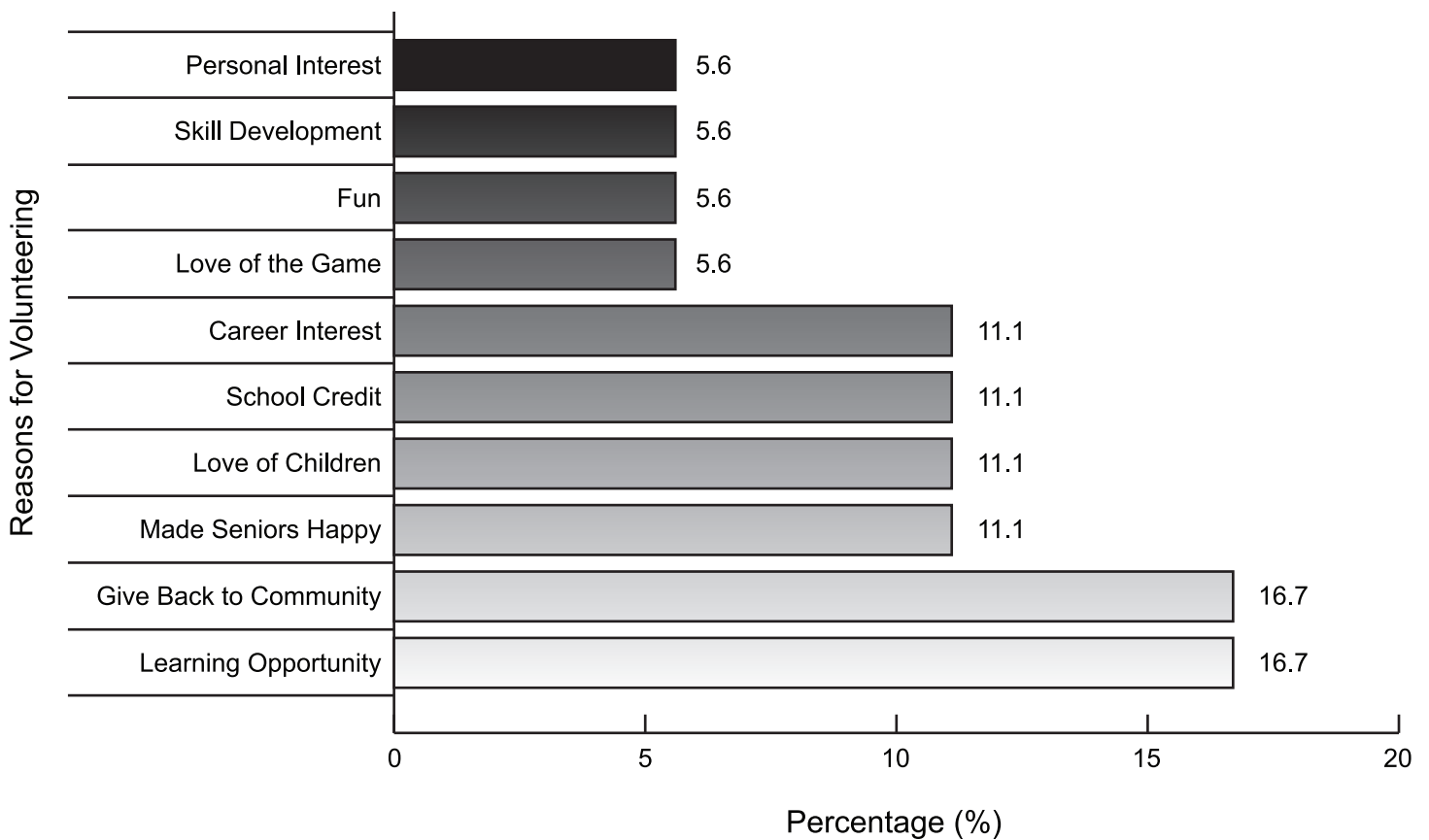


Figure 7: Types of volunteer opportunities for school credit conducted by respondents in the current year

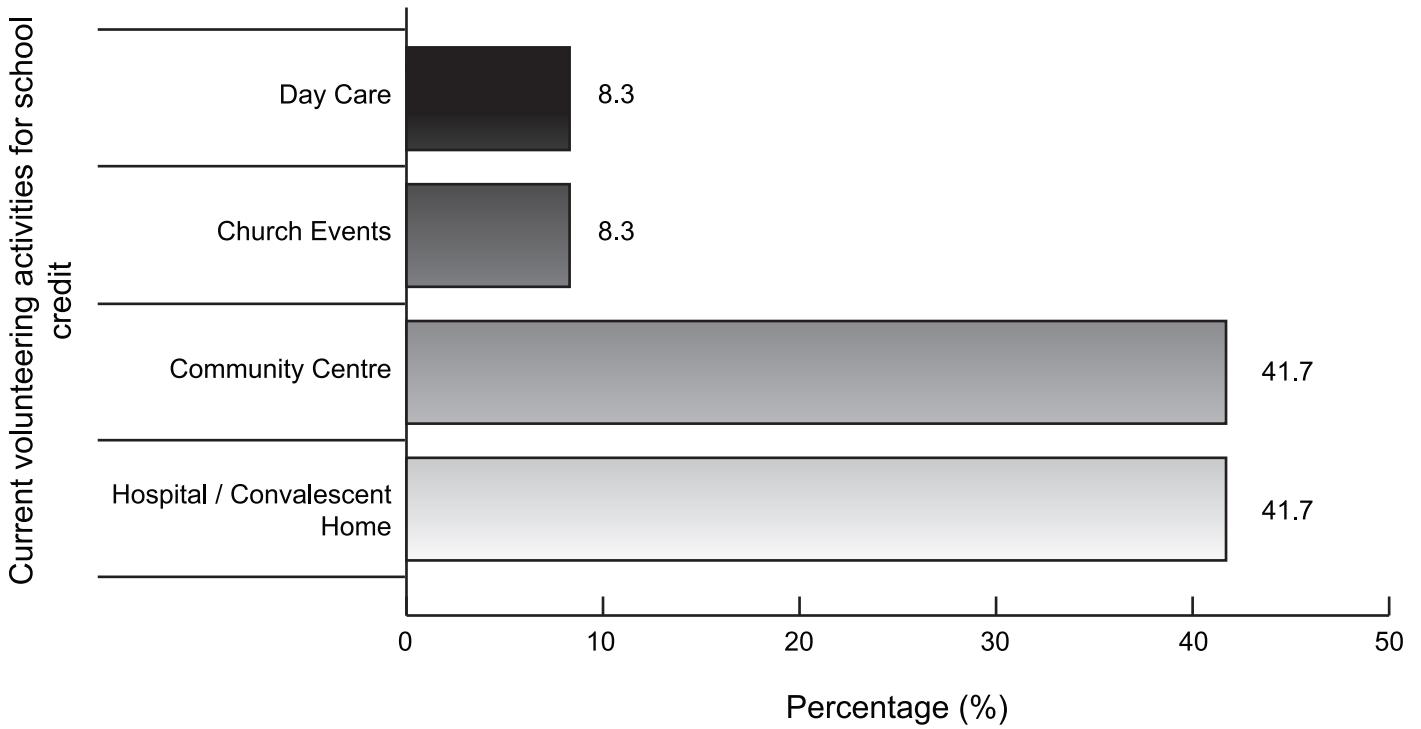
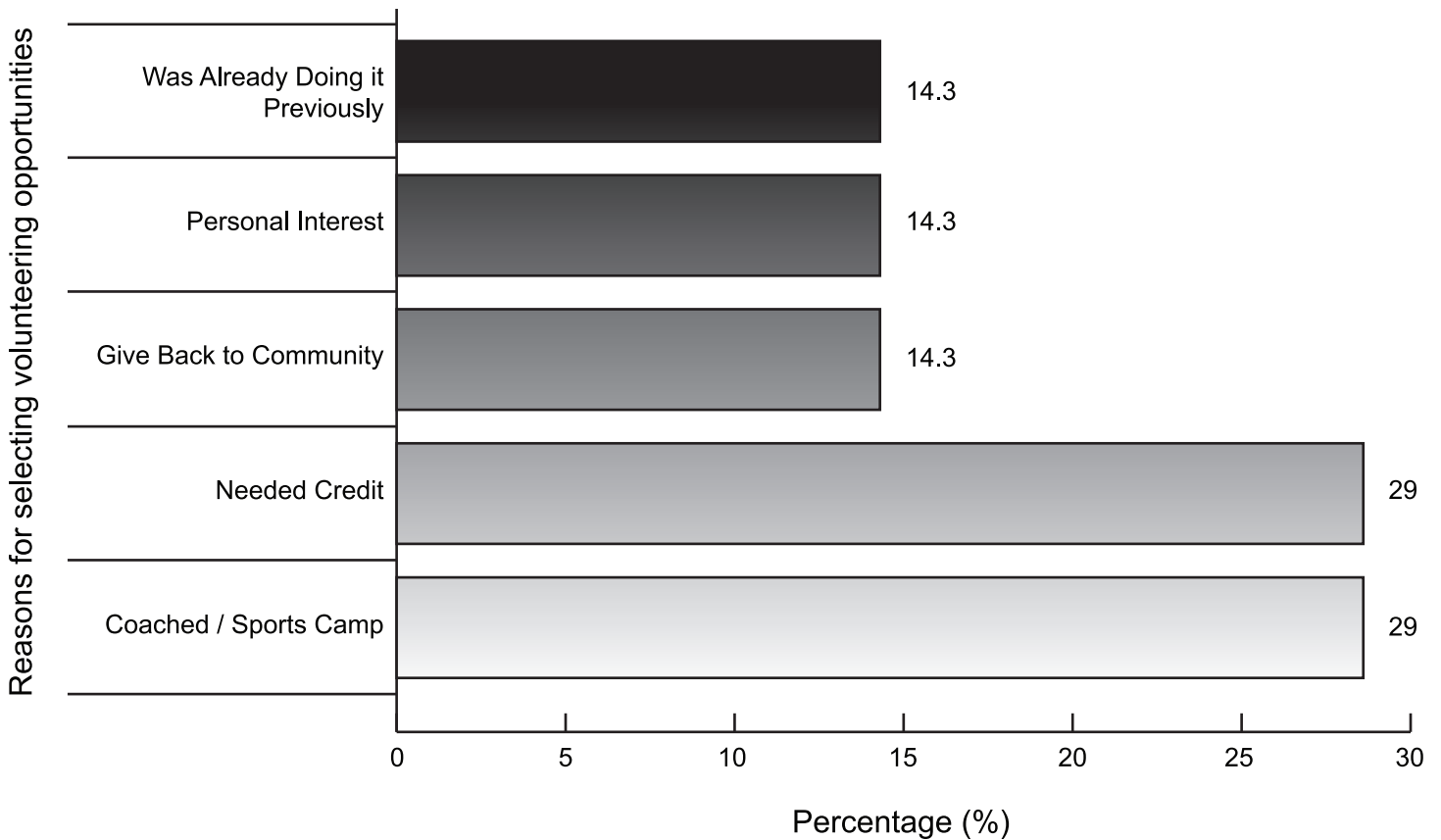


Figure 8: Reasons for volunteering in the current year



Social and Personal Responsibility (SPR)

The questionnaires were analyzed for differences between individuals who were currently volunteering and those who were not volunteering; the impact of having parents who volunteered on students' SPR; for those who were currently volunteering, differences were examined between those who were volunteering for school credit and those who were not; and finally, differences were examined between the two sexes.

Questionnaires were analyzed for gender differences, for differences between those who were currently volunteering and those who were not, for differences between those who were volunteering for school credit and those who were not, and, finally, for the influence of parental involvement.

Statistically significant differences⁵ in the individuals who were currently volunteering were found in the Social Welfare and Duty elements of the questionnaire (Table 1, p.13). Those individuals currently volunteering had greater commitment to social welfare and a greater sense of duty to the community. The mean scores for the remaining three categories of the questionnaire did not differ significantly.

For current volunteers statistically significant differences were found in the Social Welfare and Duty components of the questionnaire, i.e., they had greater commitment to social welfare and a greater sense of duty to the community (Table 1, p.13).

The mean scores for students who were volunteering but not for school credit were greater in 4 of the 5 components of SPR (*Competency* was the only component where students who were volunteering for school credit had higher scores) however these differences were not significant (Table 2, p.13).

Whether or not students volunteered for credit had no significant influence on SPR scores.

Significant differences in social welfare awareness, sense of duty to the community and perceived ability to perform volunteer activities were found between respondents whose parents volunteered and those whose parents did not volunteer (Table 3: Social Welfare significant at the 2% level; Duty had significance of less than 1% and Performance significance at the 3% level, p.14). Students whose parents volunteered scored higher in all three of the above mentioned subscales.

Parental involvement showed a positive influence on three components of the scale: Social Welfare, Duty and Performance (Table 3, p.14). Students whose parents volunteered had greater social awareness, a stronger sense of duty to the community, and a greater perceived ability to perform volunteer duties than students whose parents did not volunteer.

⁵ Please note that data presented in Tables 1 to 9 were statistically analyzed using t-test to see if there was significant difference between means presented in those tables. The actual t-values are not presented but simply the level of significance where differences are more than one would be expected from sampling error and normal variation in the responses of the students. For example, if a table has a significance value of 5% for the difference between mean SPR scores, then the differences in means are real and hold true for 95% of the respondents. If the significance level is 1%, the difference between means holds true for 99% of the respondents.

Table 1: Differences in mean SPR scores between those students who are currently volunteering and those who are not.

Components of SPR	Mean Social and Personal Responsibility Scores		Significance Level
	Currently Volunteering (From 31 responses)	Not Currently Volunteering (From 40 responses)	
<i>Social Welfare</i>	12.8	11.3	1%
<i>Duty</i>	4.3	13.4	5%
<i>Competency</i>	9.6	9.3	NS
<i>Efficacy</i>	11.1	10.5	NS
<i>Performance</i>	12.7	12.5	NS

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Table 2: Differences in mean SPR scores between those who are volunteering for a school credit and those who are not.

Components of SPR	Mean Social and Personal Responsibility Scores		Significance Level
	Volunteering for School Credit (from 13 responses)	Volunteering but Not for School Credit (from 16 responses)	
<i>Social Welfare</i>	12.8	13.0	NS
<i>Duty</i>	14.3	14.4	NS
<i>Competency</i>	9.8	9.7	NS
<i>Efficacy</i>	11.2	11.3	NS
<i>Performance</i>	12.4	13.3	NS

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Table 3: Differences in mean SPR scores between those students whose parents volunteer and those students whose parents do not.

Components of SPR	Mean Social and Personal Responsibility Scores		Significance Level
	Have Parents who Volunteer (From 31 responses)	Have Parents who Do Not Volunteer (From 20 responses)	
<i>Social Welfare</i>	12.5	11.0	2%
<i>Duty</i>	14.6	12.7	1%
<i>Competency</i>	9.5	9.2	NS
<i>Efficacy</i>	10.7	10.8	NS
<i>Performance</i>	13.1	11.7	3%

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Table 4: Mean difference in SPR scores between female and male students who volunteer.

Components of SPR	Males (From 29 Responses)	Females (From 44 Responses)	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	11.3	12.5	5%
<i>Duty</i>	12.9	14.3	3%
<i>Competency</i>	8.9	9.7	NS
<i>Efficacy</i>	10.5	11.0	NS
<i>Performance</i>	11.5	13.1	1%

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Significant differences between mean scores were identified between sexes. Females had significantly greater mean scores in the Social Welfare, Duty and Performance categories (Social Welfare significant at the 5% level; Duty significant at the 3% level and Performance significant at the 1% level). In each case females had greater mean scores than males. In addition, the females had greater mean scores in the other two categories however these scores were not significantly different than the males (Table 4, p.14).

Significant gender differences were found with three components of SPR: Social Welfare, Duty and Performance. Females had more social awareness, a stronger sense of duty to the community, and greater perceived ability to perform volunteer duties than their male counterparts (Table 4, p.14).

A further analysis was conducted in order to understand the differences in SPR that may be occurring between the sexes. Males and females were analyzed separately for individuals who were currently volunteering but not receiving an academic credit for their volunteer activity and individuals who were currently volunteering in schools and receiving an academic credit. The results for these comparisons can be found in Tables 5 and 6 (p.16). However it must be noted that in some parts of this analysis some samples were less than the required minimum of 10, particularly in the male respondents. Therefore, some of these comparisons were not conducted or require further investigation with a larger sample to obtain reliable results.

Males, who were currently volunteering for a credit, had significantly greater mean scores in the Social Welfare and Duty categories of SPR. However, it must be noted that the number of males currently

volunteering for credit was quite low and may affect the validity of the statistical analysis. There were no significant differences in mean scores between females who currently are volunteering for credit and females who are not.

Among females, no significant differences were found in SPR scores on any of the variables: whether or not they were current volunteers, whether or not they were volunteering for credit, or whether or not their parents volunteered.

For males, there were insufficient numbers of respondents in some categories to yield valid results.

School Performance

Students who received grades of C or below had significantly greater awareness of social welfare and duty to the community (Table 7, p.17).

Home Environment

There were no significant differences found in demographic variables pertaining to language spoken at home and ESL. However, it should be noted that the sample size for some of the variables was less than the required 10 and therefore these results may be skewed.

There were insufficient sample sizes to test for differences in mean SPR scores regarding language spoken at home, and whether or not English was a second language.

Table 5: Comparison of mean SPR scores between males volunteering for credit and those volunteering but not receiving an academic credit.

Males				
Components of SPR	Volunteering for a Credit	Number	Mean	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	Yes	4	13.2	5%
	No	18	10.8	
<i>Duty</i>	Yes	4	15.0	2%
	No	19	12.5	
<i>Competency</i>	Yes	4	8.5	NS
	No	17	9.0	
<i>Efficacy</i>	Yes	4	10.2	NS
	No	18	10.6	
<i>Performance</i>	Yes	4	11.5	NS
	No	15	11.5	

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores between those receiving credit and those who do not.

Table 6: Comparison of mean SPR scores between females volunteering for credit and those volunteering but not receiving an academic credit.

Females				
Components of SPR	Volunteering for a Credit	Number	Mean	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	Yes	25	12.8	NS
	No	15	12.0	
<i>Duty</i>	Yes	24	14.2	NS
	No	15	14.5	
<i>Competency</i>	Yes	25	9.8	NS
	No	15	9.5	
<i>Efficacy</i>	Yes	24	11.3	NS
	No	15	10.5	
<i>Performance</i>	Yes	25	12.9	NS
	No	13	13.5	

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores between those receiving credit and those who do not.

Table 7: Differences in mean SPR scores among school performance levels.

Components of SPR	School Performance	Sample Number	Mean	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	A-B	27	11.3	3%
	C or below	33	12.6	
<i>Duty</i>	A-B	28	13.2	1%
	C or below	32	14.4	
<i>Competency</i>	A-B	26	9.0	NS
	C or below	33	9.7	
<i>Efficacy</i>	A-B	27	10.4	NS
	C or below	32	11.2	
<i>Performance</i>	A-B	25	12.2	NS
	C or below	30	13.0	

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire

The cumulative Rosenberg scores were calculated for each respondent and then mean scores for different categories of respondents (these categories were based on sex, whether parent’s volunteer, volunteering for school credit etc.) When statistically analysed, there were no significant differences between means for any of the comparative populations.

No significant differences were found between mean scores for any of the comparative populations (based on gender, parental involvement, volunteering for school credit etc.).

Summary of Open-end Questions Related to Volunteering

There were eight open-ended questions related to past and current volunteer experiences, and those for school credit. The most common volunteer activities were those related to sport and activities at the local community centre or church. Many of the reasons

students provided for volunteering, such as ‘give back to the community’ and ‘help people’, reflected a strong sense of social responsibility. Both students who were volunteering for credit and those who were not gave the same responses. Students were also motivated to volunteer for reasons of personal development. All students who answered the open-ended questions on motivation cited work experience and career development as important reasons for volunteering.

In addition to the types of volunteering experiences and the reasons for volunteering another observation that can be drawn from this data set is that not as many students volunteered in the current year. Fifty-seven individuals (57) identified as having volunteered in the previous year, yet only 40 were volunteering in the current year. This is also the same for volunteering for school credit. Twenty-one individuals identified as having volunteered for school credit last year and twelve were volunteering for school credit this year.

Table 8: Differences in mean SPR scores for language spoken in the home..

Components of SPR	Language Spoken in Home	Number	Mean	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	English Only	6	11.3	NS
	Additional Language	51	12.2	
<i>Duty</i>	English Only	6	12.8	NS
	Additional Language	50	14.0	
<i>Competency</i>	English Only	6	9.2	NS
	Additional Language	50	9.4	
<i>Efficacy</i>	English Only	6	11.3	NS
	Additional Language	50	10.7	
<i>Performance</i>	English Only	6	10.7*	NS
	Additional Language	46	12.9*	

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

Table 9: Differences in mean SPR scores between those for whom English is a second language (ESL) and those for whom it is not.

Components of SPR	ESL	Number	Mean	Significance Level
<i>Social Welfare</i>	Yes	4	12.5	NS
	No	58	12.0	
<i>Duty</i>	Yes	4	14.0	NS
	No	58	13.8	
<i>Competency</i>	Yes	4	9.5	NS
	No	57	9.4	
<i>Efficacy</i>	Yes	4	10.7	NS
	No	57	10.8	
<i>Performance</i>	Yes	4	11.5	NS
	No	53		

Note: NS means no significant difference in SPR scores.

5. Discussion

Social Responsibility

In this study current volunteers were more socially aware and had a greater sense of duty to the community than students not currently volunteering. These findings are similar to other investigations of the impact of volunteering on social welfare (McLellan & Youniss, 2001; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier, 2000). However, volunteers who are volunteering for school credit did not differ significantly from those volunteering for other reasons. This also supports McLellan & Youniss (2001) in their argument that it does not matter whether the volunteering experience was mandatory (as in the case of completing a volunteer experience for school credit) or not mandatory. However, this result needs to be explored further because the non-significant finding may be a result of a mixed sample of volunteers and non-volunteers. For example, one question that arises from this finding is *“Is there a difference between individuals who volunteer for school credit who would not have volunteered otherwise and those individuals who would have volunteered regardless of the school credit?”* The answer to this question would be quite useful for those educators designing school-based service learning programs because it would indicate whether the service learning programs were having an impact on a group of students who previously would not have been interested in volunteering. In addition, this question would assist divisional policy makers in decisions associated with the implementation of mandatory community service as a graduate requirement. This would be an avenue for further investigation.

In this study, current volunteers were more socially aware and had a greater sense of duty to the community than students who were not currently volunteering. These findings are similar to other investigations of the impact of volunteering on social welfare (McLellan & Youniss, 2001; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier, 2000).

Another similar finding to those of McLellan & Youniss (2001) is the lack of significant difference in mean SPR scores between those who volunteered for school credit and those who did not. However, it is possible that this non-significant finding is a result of a mixed sample of volunteers and non-volunteers. There may be a difference between those who volunteer for school credit but would not otherwise volunteer and those who would volunteer regardless of school credit. This would be an avenue for further investigation.

Another factor that affects the outcome of the comparison between students who volunteer outside of school and those who volunteer for school credit is the issue of choice. In Manitoba, the courses that include volunteering for credit are optional courses and therefore the student has a choice about whether or not to take the course. This differs from other provinces where students are required to complete 40 hours of service to obtain a high school diploma. However, the level of choice may be significant enough for these school-based volunteer opportunities to be perceived as non-mandatory and therefore the level of impact does not differ. A further investigation comparing students who volunteer for school credit in an optional course with those who are required to volunteer would be an avenue for further investigation.

A further test of the effects of whether or not the volunteering is mandatory might be to compare students who volunteer for school credit in an optional course with those who are required to volunteer to obtain a high school diploma. Both situations provide credit for volunteering, but the level of choice is different.

The volunteering experience did not seem to impact the efficacy or competence components of the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale. This seems to support the findings of the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale where there were no significant differences on any of the measures. Previous research that examined attitudes towards volunteerism using the SPRS scale looked at total scores rather than scores on individual subscales so a comparison is not possible.

Most research on student volunteerism has focused on attitudes towards volunteering with little consideration for the external factors that may influence those attitudes. One of the external factors we examined in this study was parental involvement. The findings indicated that parental participation in volunteering had a positive effect on respondents' awareness of social welfare issues and their sense of commitment to the community. To determine whether this effect would hold true for students who volunteer for school credit, future investigations could compare those who would volunteer regardless of school credit and those who volunteer only for the school credit.

Gender

More females responded to the questionnaire than males. In general, research in this area of gender differences suggests that females are more likely to volunteer. Females who are volunteers are more aware of social welfare issues and have a greater sense of community compared to males, however no gender differences were found between those volunteering and those not volunteering for school credit. The findings in this study are similar to Hamilton and Finzel (1988) who found that the total SRPS scores for females improved more than males while participating in a service-learning program. However, in the current study the female volunteers scored higher in the social welfare and duty. The results in the sample of the male respondents cannot be commented upon because the sample size was too small.

School Performance

The findings associated with school performance are quite interesting. Students who identified as having C or below averages were more aware of social welfare issues and felt a greater sense of duty to the community. Previous studies associated with school performance investigated the impact of service learning programs on school attendance and grade point averages (Shumer 1994). Shumer found that participation in a service learning program had a positive influence on attendance and GPA. In the current study further investigation would be required to examine whether the students with lower GPA's and greater social responsibility awareness had lower grades when not participating in volunteer opportunities.

Home Environment

In addition to parental involvement in volunteering, there were three other factors related to home environment examined in this research. They were: Family Structure, Language Spoken in the Home and ESL. There were no significant differences between individuals from two-parent families compared to those from single-parent families or guardians. Respondents in this study were linguistically diverse, and most of the respondents spoke more than one language at home. In fact there were so few respondents who spoke only English in the home that we could not make valid comparisons. The same is true for respondents who identified as ESL; there were too few respondents to make an accurate comparison between ESL and non-ESL respondents. So we would need to have much larger sample sizes to be able to see if being an ESL student has any impact on SPR scores.

This study attempted to address the gap in exploration of external factors that may influence the impact of volunteering. Regarding English as a second language (ESL) and English as the only language spoken in the home, there were insufficient sample sizes to make valid comparisons. Although English was spoken in the home, few respondents spoke only English. And while several languages were spoken in the home, few spoke English as a second language.

There were sufficient numbers to assess the impact of family structure on volunteering. However, there were no significant differences between two-parent families and either single-parent families or guardian families.

Self esteem

There were no differences in self-esteem between the sexes, those currently volunteering and not volunteering, and volunteers for school credit and volunteers for other purposes. These findings correlate well with the subscales in the social and personal responsibility scale where no differences were found on any of the subscales that related to personal responsibility. So for students, volunteering appears to have no impact on personal responsibility and associated self esteem. However, to verify this result, a larger sample of students would be needed.

Reasons for Volunteering

Brock (2001) describes the two most common reasons for instituting voluntary experiences (in the Manitoba context this would be volunteering in order to obtain school credit). One is humanitarian and is based on the argument that institution of mandatory volunteering enhances social responsibility. The other reason is utilitarian and is based on the argument that instituted volunteering enhances job skills. In the 2000 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) the most often cited reasons for volunteering were utilitarian. In the current study 25% of respondents who volunteered prior to 2005 identified with a more humanitarian reason for volunteering, that is to “help people”. Fifteen per cent (15%) gave a utilitarian reason. In the current year, about 30% identified humanitarian reasons for volunteering compared to 15% giving a utilitarian reason. Thus in this study, humanitarian reasons predominate in both the past and current groups of volunteers. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents citing humanitarian reasons increased over the past year.

Even though the overall group of respondents cited humanitarian reasons most often, the subgroup of students volunteering for credit cited utilitarian reasons most often. Either the respondents needed the credit or they were seeking experience. Thus, there is some indication that the motivation for volunteering is different for those specifically volunteering for school credit. However, the difference in motivation does not seem to impact ideas associated with social responsibility or self-esteem, as these measures did not differ between the two groups.

Methodological Challenges and Recommendations

The greatest difficulty in obtaining a large sample of respondents from high school youth is the requirement of parental consent as outlined in the Tri-council Agreement on Research Conducted on Humans. Once we did get consent, our research team tried three distribution methods. The first method was to visit the classrooms or attend an assembly of the high school students and inform them of the research being conducted. Then the questionnaires with consent forms were attached to the questionnaire and the completed questionnaires with parental consent forms signed were turned into the homeroom teacher. This distribution method was the least successful of all the methods attempted. Less than 5% of the returned questionnaires were from using this method. The second distribution method was to distribute the consent forms to the high school students through their homeroom teachers and then use class time to complete the questionnaires. This was by far the most successful means of obtaining a larger sample of respondents of students from a school. Approximately 70% of the returned questionnaires were from using this method

of distribution. Finally, the third method was to distribute the questionnaires to various organizations that hire youth as volunteers and provide pre-posted envelopes for the return of the questionnaires. This method was somewhat successful and provided approximately 25% of the returned questionnaires. Thus, it is from the experience of this research that we recommend using the second method in further investigations into volunteerism in high school aged volunteers.

In addition, the methods used to distribute the questionnaires was not successful in recruiting *at-risk* students, volunteers or otherwise, to complete the questionnaire. No respondents fit the criteria we used to identify at student who is academically *at-risk* (more than two risk factors that have been identified in the literature). One possible approach to obtaining information from students who may be considered to be academically at-risk would be to talk to individual teachers and then conduct interviews with the students individually or in groups. This may help volunteer administrators gain useful information on how to encourage and better serve this population of possible volunteers.

Our methods failed to recruit *at-risk* students, volunteer or otherwise. Perhaps speaking with teachers to identify students, then obtaining information through interviews might improve our access to this group.

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Notes

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