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Long-term Outcomes of a Volunteer Advocacy Training: Correlates of Sustained Volunteering

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Background

Volunteer Advocacy Project:

- 36-hour special education advocacy training
- One of multiple models that has emerged to meet the need for special education advocates
- Focuses on special education law and non-adversarial advocacy
- Effective in increasing participants' special education law knowledge and comfort with non-adversarial advocacy (Burke, Goldman, Hart, & Hodapp, in press)
- Each graduate agreed to volunteer as an advocate for four families

Volunteering Literature:

- Six personal and social *motivations* served by volunteering (Clary & Snyder, 1999)
- Satisfaction* and alignment with *motivation* correlate with long-term volunteering (Clary & Snyder, 1999)
- With ongoing volunteering, development of strong *role identity* (Grube & Piliavin, 2000)

Research Questions

1. What do sustained volunteer advocacy activities look like over time?
2. Do existing measures of volunteering apply to volunteer advocates?
3. Are greater amounts of advocacy correlated with *role identity*, *motivation*, and *satisfaction*?
4. After completing the training, are there differences between program graduates who volunteer as advocates compared to those who do not volunteer?

Methods

Participants

- 83 program graduates from 2009-2012: Primarily female, White, college educated, family members
- 52.5% response rate (83/158 graduates)

Measure: online survey

- Demographics
- Advocacy frequency
 - 8 advocacy activity types
 - Frequency in last six months and since graduation
- Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI; Clary et al., 1998)
 - 30 items from *not at all* (1) to *very* (7)
- Role Identity Scale (Callero, 1985)
 - 5 items from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, 1-5
- Participant identity
 - Involvement in four advocacy-related activities from 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*extremely involved*)
 - Future involvement in advocacy
 - Changes to involvement in disability field (1-5)
- Satisfaction with advocacy and training

Analyses: Calculated 6-month average advocacy rate

Results

Research Question 1: Sustained Advocacy Activities

- 63.9% ($n = 53$) advocated for at least one family since completing the training
- Median 6-month average advocacy rate = 0.50 families, range from 0-200
- For post-graduation volunteer advocates, number of families helped since completing training, in last 6-months, and 6-month average advocacy rate all highly correlated
 - r_s from .82 to .95, all p 's < .001

Advocacy Activities Correlations and Principal Components Analysis (N=53)

Advocacy Activity	% completed activity since training	Average 6-month rate median	Last 6-month frequency median	Spearman's rho	Factor analysis loadings	
					Family-focused	School-focused
Referred a family	86.0%	1.00	2.00	.996**	.983	.132
Coordinated a forum/support group	40.0%	0.00	0.00	.794**	.964	.167
Coordinated or spoke at a training	52.2%	0.18	0.00	.672**	.961	.186
Talked with a family over the phone	100%	1.67	3.00	.982**	.959	.249
Met with a family in person	96.2%	1.00	2.00	.976**	.810	.552
Completed a record review	88.0%	0.75	1.00	.974**	.493	.723
Wrote a letter to the school	73.1%	0.50	0.00	.646**	.351	.895
Communicated directly with school	69.2%	0.43	0.00	.981**	< .10	.917

- First factor, named *family-focused*, explained 72% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 5.77
- Second factor, *school-focused*, explained an additional 20% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.61
 - Together, 2 factors accounted for 92% of variance

Research Question 3: Correlates of Advocacy

- 6-month average advocacy rate not correlated with *role identity*, *VFI*, or *satisfaction*
- 6-month average advocacy rate positively correlated with:
 - Degree of involvement in other disability organizations, $r_s = .44$, $p = .001$
 - Degree of contact with other program graduates, $r_s = .32$, $p = .02$
 - Likelihood of advocating through another organization, $r_s = .49$, $p < .001$
 - Informally working with families of individuals with disabilities in a year, $r_s = .36$, $p = .01$
 - Degree of involvement in the disability field, $r_s = .32$, $p = .026$

Research Question 2: Volunteering Measures

Volunteer Scale Descriptives and Cronbach's Alphas for Volunteer Advocates

	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	SD	% rated important (>4)	Rank of importance	Clary & Snyder (1999) rank
Volunteer Function Inventory						
Values	.88	6.35	0.70	100%	1	1
Understanding	.88	5.52	1.17	88.7%	2	2
Social	.79	4.50	1.39	66.7%	3	5
Enhancement	.86	3.76	1.45	40.4%	4	3
Career	.90	3.38	1.73	35.8%	5	4
Protective	.83	2.85	1.44	17.3%	6	6
Role Identity Scale	.62	4.25	0.66			

Research Question 4: Advocates and Non-Advocates

Results of t-tests Comparing Role of Advocates and Non-advocates

Variable	M (SD)		t	p	d
	Advocates	Non-Advocates			
Volunteer Role Identity	4.25 (0.66)	3.71 (0.71)	-3.44	.001*	.79
I really don't have any clear feelings about volunteering as an advocate (R)	4.48 (0.87)	3.93 (0.78)	-2.83	.006*	.67
For me, being an advocate means more than just advocating for individuals with disabilities.	4.47 (0.89)	3.70 (1.24)	-3.01	.004*	.71
Volunteering as an advocate is an important part of who I am	4.12 (1.02)	3.55 (1.06)	-2.35	.021*	.55
Advocacy is something I rarely think about (R)	4.75 (0.76)	4.30 (1.06)	-2.08	.043	.49
I would feel at a loss if I had to give up advocacy	3.44 (1.51)	3.03 (1.09)	-1.40	.165	.31
Extent to which involved in:					
Disability advocacy social media group	2.53 (1.31)	1.73 (0.91)	-3.25	.002*	.71
Disability advocacy network	2.13 (1.33)	1.60 (0.97)	-2.09	.04	.46
Other disability organization	2.77 (1.19)	2.53 (1.31)	-0.85	.40	.19
In touch with other graduates	2.42 (1.12)	2.03 (0.89)	-1.61	.11	.39
Likelihood of doing the following in one year:					
Advocating through the VAP	3.29 (1.27)	2.59 (1.12)	-2.50	.015*	.58
Advocating through another organization	3.86 (1.15)	2.86 (1.33)	-3.54	.001*	.80
Informally working with families of individuals with disabilities	4.39 (0.98)	4.14 (1.19)	-1.03	.31	.23
Degree of change in involvement in the disability field as a result of training	4.24 (0.91)	3.66 (0.90)	-2.76	.007*	.64

*=significant after BH Correction at $p < .05$. (R)= reverse coded. d = Cohen's d effect size.

Discussion

- Almost 2/3 of program graduates volunteered as advocates and continue advocating over time, engaging in two types of advocacy activities: *family-focused* and *school-focused*
- Similar to other volunteers in major constructs (VFI, role identity)
- Higher rates of advocacy correlated with participant identity
- Advocates (vs. non-advocates) reported significantly greater role identities
- Future research is needed to understand role identity and the outcomes of advocacy

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