Empowerment Squared Volunteer Recruitment, Engagement and Retention

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Executive Summary

Empowerment Squared's programming for newcomer youth and their families is reliant on volunteer support. Empowerment Squared aims to recruit more consistent, long-term volunteers to maintain continuity of their programs and build capacity by examining their current volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention practices. Empowerment Squared's volunteer base is currently made up of largely undergraduate students, who tend to be unable to volunteer over the summer months and during their exam periods, causing a gap in available volunteers to support the programs. By better understanding what attracts volunteers to their programs and what factors engage and retain them, Empowerment Squared will be able to modify their practices in attempt to double their current volunteer base (including graduate students and non-students in the Hamilton area, who are available year-round), and better engage and retain their current volunteers. The research team conducted a review of the literature on volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention, focus groups with Empowerment Squared staff, an online survey of volunteers, and volunteer interviews. Limitations of the study include a small sample size, the possibility of recruitment bias, and an unequal representation ratio of present to past volunteers.

Most survey and interview participants reported a positive experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared. Commonly described factors that increased engagement and motivated volunteers to stay with the program included building relationships with students, staff and other mentors, the positive feelings they experienced as a result of helping with the programs, seeing the direct impact of their work and 'paying it forward'. The majority of volunteers expressed feeling supported in their role and appreciated by the staff, students, or other volunteers. The most common reasons participants left the program were due to a change in their schedule, finding full-time employment, the time commitment being too much, moving out of the area, or experiencing a personal life stressor. Common suggestions to improve the program included having more volunteers to support the programs, having a social for the volunteers and students to get to know each other and making the Homework Circle sessions shorter. Our results indicate that volunteers are motivated to sign up to volunteer and continued to volunteer with Empowerment Squared for a variety of altruistic, social and material reasons and stop volunteering with the program due to situational factors (e.g., scheduling, time and/or location). Recommendations for Empowerment Squared include altering their word of mouth and club and group-based recruitment strategies, recruiting program alumni, providing specialized training to volunteers, considering volunteering motivation in their engagement strategies, and formalizing the volunteer feedback process.

Introduction

Empowerment Squared provides educational, recreational, and information literacy services to newcomer youth and their families. Their programs are currently managed by eight core staff members, but rely heavily on volunteers, most of which are undergraduate students from McMaster University. Empowerment Squared has been successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Empowerment Squared would like to increase its capacity, however, by doubling its volunteer base.

A problem with Empowerment Squared's volunteer base is that the majority of volunteers are university undergraduate students who tend to move away in April for the summer break, as well as after completion of their undergraduate degree. This creates a sharp decline in available volunteers from May through to September. Elementary school, however, runs until June. With volunteers leaving early in the students' school year, there are less volunteers to assist in running the programs for the rest of the grade school semester, as well as during the final exam period. Additionally, there are less volunteers available to support summer programming.

Empowerment Squared would like to increase the number of volunteers involved with their programs, especially graduate students (who attend school during the summer months) and non-students located in the Hamilton area, who can support programming in the summer months. Empowerment Squared has enlisted the help of a group of research volunteers with the McMaster Research Shop to investigate what factors motivate individuals to volunteer with their programs and what retains them. They hope to use this information to better understand how they can recruit more individuals to volunteer for their programs on a long-term basis.

Methodology and Limitations

Methodology

Literature Review

The team began with a review of the available literature on volunteer recruitment, engagement, and retention in order to seek out strategies and best practises that have been studied to date. A secondary aim of the literature review was to inform our focus group, interview and survey questions in terms of identifying important questions to ask participants. Although this search began with a search of scholarly sources only, it was broadened to include grey literature, organizational reports, and other non-peer reviewed sources. The research team used the following search terms within Google Scholar, Google, ProQuest, and the McMaster Library Database: "volunteer engagement", "volunteer recruitment", "volunteer management", "volunteer engagement strategies", "volunteer recruitment strategies", "volunteer retention strategies", and "volunteer recruitment for non-profit organizations". Thirteen articles and reports were found to be relevant to the study based on their application

to volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention and were therefore included in our results.

Staff Focus Groups

Recruitment

Staff members were either invited to participate in the focus group by email or through a direct in-person invitation by the Director of Operations and Administration at Empowerment Squared.

Data Collection

The focus groups took place at the Empowerment Squared office during a monthly staff meeting. Six out of the organization's eight staff members participated in the focus groups. The six staff members were separated into two groups, each containing three participants. In each group, members of the research team asked staff about their duties at Empowerment Squared, volunteer recruitment, the sign up and training process, the available supports for volunteers, communication, volunteer feedback, volunteer engagement, volunteer retention and suggestions to improve the program (*see Appendix A for a copy of the focus group guide*). The research team audio-recorded the focus groups for transcription and also took notes of the discussion.

Analysis

The research team coded the focus group transcripts for themes. To increase the accuracy of the results, the team collaboratively created a coding framework, which acts as a reference for multiple analysts to be consistent in their interpretation of statements made in the transcripts. The research team presented the results in themes using quotes from the transcripts to help ground their findings in participant accounts.

Volunteer Online Survey

Recruitment

The research team sent an online survey via email to both past and current volunteers through Empowerment Squared's volunteer management software.

Data Collection

Volunteers who were interested in participating in the survey were directed to a Google Forms page containing the survey. The survey asked participants demographic questions, how they were recruited to volunteer, their length of time volunteering with Empowerment Squared, their volunteer experience, whether they would recommend the program to others, and

suggestions to improve the program (*see Appendix B for a copy of the survey*). The initial e-blast indicated that the survey would be open for one week. However, the survey was left open for an additional week to obtain a higher number of responses. A total of 38 volunteers completed the survey. Participants were entered into a draw for a chance to win a $25 Tim Horton's gift card as a token of appreciation for taking the time to complete the survey.

Analysis

The survey data was downloaded from Google Forms into an Excel spreadsheet. The research team calculated descriptive statistics and created charts and graphs to synthesize the data.

Volunteer Interviews

Recruitment

The research team recruited volunteers through the survey (described above). In the survey, participants were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, and if they responded yes, they were asked to provide their phone number and/or email to contact them. Of the 38 participants who completed the survey, nearly half (47%) indicated that they were interested in completing an interview. In total, the research team recruited 15 volunteers through the survey. In addition to recruiting through the survey, the research team also reached out to Senior Mentors in the Homework Circle program and other volunteers that had been volunteering for over a year to request an interview. A total of 21 volunteers were interviewed.

Data Collection

The research team conducted all interviews in-person in a private room at the McMaster library or using online video conferencing software. In the interviews, the research team asked participants about their background, about their role (or former role) with Empowerment Squared, their recruitment experience, the sign up and training process, the supports they received during their volunteer term, organizational communication, feedback from staff, how engaged they were in their role, and suggestions to improve the program (*see Appendix C for a copy of the interview guide*). The interviews were audio recorded for transcription. Participants were entered into a draw for a chance to win one of three $25 Tim Horton's gift cards as a token of appreciation for them taking the time to complete the survey.

Analysis

The research team coded the interview transcripts for themes. To increase the accuracy of the results, the team collaboratively created a coding framework, which acts as a reference for multiple analysts to be consistent in their interpretation of statements made in the transcripts. The research team presented the results in themes using quotes from the transcripts to help ground their findings in participant accounts.

Limitations

The sample size of the survey is small (N=38). As such, we cannot claim that the survey results are entirely representative of Empowerment Squared's volunteer base.

Due to our recruitment methods, there is a possibility for self-selection bias, in that volunteers who had a positive experience with Empowerment Squared were more likely to participate in the survey and/or interview. If a volunteer had quit or had a poor experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared, they may be less likely to view their email messages and/or be less willing to take part in a survey sent out by the organization.

Although we made attempts to gather information that was representative of all volunteer groups, more current volunteers chose to complete the survey and engage in interviews than past volunteers. Additionally, not all of the volunteers had volunteered for the same amount of time (ranging from two weeks to two years). It is also noted that newer volunteers may have had a better recollection of their recruitment, sign up and training, as opposed to volunteers who had been with the program for a longer time due to these events occurring more recently.

Findings

Literature Review

A literature review was first conducted to gain insight into factors that motivate individuals to volunteer, recruitment methods, and volunteer engagement and retention strategies. The research team used this data to inform their data collection instruments (i.e., survey questions, interview guide, focus group guide). A search of the literature was conducted yielding 13 peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed articles and reports relevant to our research question. Due to the emphasis on training and duties as a critical component of volunteer recruitment and engagement, it was added as a section to our results. We present our results below by theme: (1) volunteer recruitment; (2) volunteer training and duties; and (3) volunteer engagement and retention.

Volunteer Recruitment

According to Volunteer Canada (2016), developing clear position descriptions can help with volunteer recruitment. This informs potential volunteers about the role and skill requirements of the position to help them decide if they are a good fit and if they would require extensive training. Providing volunteers with clear position descriptions reduces role uncertainty, which has been associated with poor volunteer task performance, low work engagement, and high burnout (Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017). Volunteer roles can be clarified through organizational handbooks that clearly communicate volunteer tasks and expectations, as well as effective orientations and trainings (Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017). Providing volunteers with these

materials ensures that new volunteers are equipped with the necessary resources to effectively perform the tasks assigned to them.

Volunteer Canada (2016) suggests organizations should create a recruitment strategy to ensure the skills, competencies, and interests of recruits are matched with volunteer requirements. Onboarding activities must be specific and clearly outline the commitment level and intended impacts of volunteer activities (Guidelines and Principles for NonProfit Excellence, 2019). Research has shown that recruitment problems are decreased in organizations that invest in training for staff members who work closely with volunteers so that the cultural environment of the organization is more supportive of new volunteers (Hager & Brudney, 2011). Research results also recommend that organizations provide their volunteers with recruitment resources so they can recruit other individuals (Hager & Brudney, 2011), as word of mouth tends to be an effective way to recruit more volunteers.

Volunteer Training and Duties

A volunteer training program is essential for non-profit organizations to help volunteers develop the skills required for their position (Volunteer Hub, 2019b). During the first volunteer training session, the expectations, guidelines, and procedures of the volunteer's role should be established clearly, to allow for mutual understanding between the organization and the volunteer recruits (Volunteer Hub, 2019b). Volunteers should be offered opportunities for growth and learning, allowing them to enhance their skills and grow as an individual while helping the organization (Volunteer Hub, 2019b).

Involving experienced volunteers in training programs benefits both the organization and the volunteer trainees (Community ToolBox, 2019). This strategy allows experienced volunteers to refresh their skills and feel more connected to the organization (Community ToolBox, 2019). In addition, experienced volunteers can offer trainees a first-hand perspective of their role by talking about their experience (Community ToolBox, 2019). Continued opportunities for training and learning, whether through annual retreats, conferences, or additional classes should be part of the training process, as it serves to enhance volunteers' knowledge and experience (Community ToolBox, 2019).

Volunteer Engagement and Retention

Research shows that supporting volunteers in both emotional and task-related challenges leads to lower rates of volunteer turnover (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). Conducting regular, anonymous volunteer surveys, having a process for providing anonymous feedback (e.g., a feedback box), and/or conducting regular check-ins or focus groups with volunteers can help organizations monitor and address challenges in volunteer roles. Assisting volunteers in managing task-related challenges may involve clarifying and managing role expectations, providing more training, and providing any tools or equipment needed to accomplish their duties (Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017). Emotionally supporting volunteers can be accomplished through providing volunteers networking opportunities, feedback and appreciation, access to a

mentor, awards and recognition (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). Additionally, managers can empower volunteers to fulfil their duties by providing ongoing communication, evaluating volunteers' performance, and offering regular reinforcement so that volunteers can grow professionally through their service (SAMHSA, 2005).

Research also indicates that volunteers' motivations for volunteering play a key role in volunteer retention. Volunteer motivations can be divided into three main categories: social, material, and altruistic. Social motivation comes from a desire to connect with friends or peers, while material motivation comes from a desire for personal gain (i.e. respect from others, resume building, etc.). Altruistic motivation comes from a place of wanting to help others (Ward, 2017). Supporting volunteers in these areas makes them feel that their time and efforts are valued by the organization. Supporting volunteers' social motivations includes providing volunteers with the space and time to socialize with each other through regular social events. Supporting volunteers' material motivations involves skills-based volunteering approaches where volunteers are matched to roles and assignments best fitting their needs in terms of the skills they would like to develop or roles they want to gain experience in (Maranta & Sladowski, 2012). Supporting altruistic motivation may include reinforcing the importance of a volunteer's work and recognizing their achievements through gifts or awards (Unkefer, 2017). By focusing on what motivates their volunteers, organizations create sustained value for volunteers, increasing the likelihood they will stay long-term (Unkefer, 2017).

Staff Focus Groups

Six core staff members (N=6) took part in the focus groups. All of the staff had some degree of contact with volunteers in their roles. The staff who completed the focus groups were the Director of Operations and Administration, the Manager of Educational Programming, the Manager of Strategic Initiatives, the Education Law Program Coordinator, the Program Assistant and the Digital Content/Social Media Coordinator. The staff members' duties included volunteer training (n=3), development of curriculum (n=2), student registration, administrative tasks, communication with families, budget management, set up and take down during the program sessions, supporting management, social media content creation, overseeing efficiency of the organization, piloting new programming, and organizing and helping out with community events.

Volunteer Recruitment

When asked about the organization's ability to recruit volunteers, two staff members indicated that it was fairly easy to recruit new volunteers to the programs due to the organization finding new recruitment strategies, such as connecting with campus clubs and groups, who would advocate on behalf of Empowerment Squared to their members, and targeting volunteer fairs (where attendees are actively seeking a volunteer placement). One staff member stated: "We realized when we went to specific events that were designated for volunteer recruitment, that

helped a lot more because people had their minds set on volunteering when they would go to these places."

However, other staff members noted several recruitment challenges due to the large number of volunteers needed to sustain the programs and difficulty getting the volunteers to come downtown to the organization's office after the initial sign up. Staff members also pointed out that it may be easy to recruit volunteers, but finding consistent volunteers, with the qualities necessary to be successful in the placement, was difficult. One staff member stated "I think some of the difficulty is finding the right person…. you've got to make sure that the individuals that work with us have the skills or at least have the desire to learn, and the patience to work with youth." The staff indicated that volunteers were recruited through a variety of sources, such as schools (e.g., McMaster University, Mohawk College, Redeemer University; n=2), volunteer fairs (n=2), media sources (including newspapers and social media; n=2), interaction with the Empowerment Squared website, through their booths at community events, involvement with a club or group, and word of mouth.

The staff members stated that the qualities important for volunteers to have in this position were adaptability (n=2), patience, empathy, a desire to learn, and strong communication skills. To match volunteers to programs, staff often have one-on-one conversations about the organization and programs and then try to link volunteers' skills and interests to a program being offered, as evident by one statement: "I think somehow relating it back to the individual themselves… I found when I was at McMaster trying to recruit, relating to a desire to work with students, or young people, or children helped."

In terms of motivations for volunteering, the staff members thought volunteers were most likely to sign up due to the experience aligning with their interests or career goals (n=2), to add to their resume or fulfill their need for volunteer hours, to help marginalized communities, to pursue hands-on work, to build self-worth, and to connect and interact with others. Homework Circle was said to be the most popular program for volunteers to sign up for (n=5). The staff indicated they tend to recommend this program the most to volunteers because it is the largest program and therefore, requires the most volunteers to run (n=5).

Training and Duties

The staff described the volunteer training as beginning with an information session with the Director of Operations and Administration, where the volunteers get a general overview of all of the programs (including scheduling and time commitment; approximately 45 minutes), and then get to decide which program they would like to go on to. From there, the volunteer would receive specific training based on their program selection (ranging from one to two hours in length). The trainings also have an experiential learning component where the volunteer gets to experience how the program operates by actually watching how the program is run with the current volunteers. For example, in the Homework Circle training, the volunteers are first provided with administrative information and information about their duties and expectations.

Then they are taken into the sessions to observe the other volunteers interacting with the students and learn the structure of the program.

Although Empowerment Squared has not formally assessed their training program, two of the staff members indicated that they had received informal feedback from volunteers who stated they had found the training useful (n=2). The staff also noted that the training program is dependent on experiential learning that occurs when the volunteers are immersed in the program sessions (n=3), as well as continuous learning (n=2). Continued learning occurs as they encounter new situations and experiences in the program, learning to use the available supports to help navigate challenges and eventually learning to manage situations independently.

The staff reported that communication about roles, tasks, and expectations occurs at several points of the volunteering process. For instance, in the volunteer information session (n=2), after the information session when volunteers are given a handbook outlining their roles and responsibilities (n=1), and there is ongoing dialogue about roles and expectations during the debrief sessions[1] in Homework Circle (n=2). It was acknowledged that the roles, tasks, and expectations in the Homework Circle program tend to be more consistent than the other programs (n=2), as highlighted by one staff member: "Homework Circle is a little more consistent. So, let's say, after each session the program leader will take maybe 15-20 minutes and as a group, each session will debrief.... But the curriculum, or the agenda, is not changing as much as the pilot programs. So, it's a little easier I think to do consistent training…" Due to the pilot programs being less established, it can be difficult allotting time to discuss roles and expectations during the sessions. This is also true of the sports programs where the majority of the session is spent playing sports (n=2). Staff indicated that communication about roles, tasks, and expectations typically occurs verbally, face-to-face (n=2), through email, and/or through phone calls or texts (when a more immediate response is needed).

When asked which tasks volunteers most enjoyed, staff members believed the most enjoyable tasks to be working with the students (n=2), giving out snacks (n=2), socializing with the staff and other volunteers, and having the opportunity to do something they are passionate about (e.g., sports, creative activities, etc.). Staff suggested that volunteers disliked any tasks other than working directly with the kids, "They love working with the kids. So if the kids are absent then... if we try to fill their time with something else, they're not as happy. Not even kids, but they like working with people." Other duties the staff members indicated that they thought the task volunteers did not enjoy were disciplining students and reporting on the students' misbehaviours to their parents (i.e., authoritative relationship; n=5). They also noted that

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1 Debrief sessions are conducted at the end of each Homework Circle session with the Manager of Educational Programming and the volunteers. In these sessions volunteers are asked if they would like to share any challenging or positive situations that happened in the session that day. The volunteers are then given feedback from the group and engage in an open discussion. This creates an opportunity for the Manager of Educational programming to clarify volunteer roles, tasks and expectations and address any volunteer uncertainty regarding how they are expected to handle situations.

volunteers disliked engaging in situations that were new to them (n=2), data entry, or facilitating the mindfulness component of the sessions.

The staff members described a variety of supports in place to assist volunteers in their roles and duties. For instance, the staff indicated that they make it clear to volunteers that they are not expected to know all of the answers or material (n=2) and use the volunteers' skills to help determine their task assignment. One staff member described letting the volunteers know that any mistakes that they make can be corrected. They noted that the volunteers are never alone with the students, staff are always available to help them, and the staff will seek out answers for any questions that they do not know the answer to. The staff described mentorship opportunities within the programs (i.e., Senior and Junior Mentors; n=2) and the ability to make accessibility accommodations when volunteers are in need of them.

In terms of providing the volunteers with feedback on their performance, staff described providing positive reinforcement verbally in the sessions (e.g., noticing when the volunteers were doing well and commenting on it in the moment; n=2). They also indicated that they might give feedback after the sessions were complete, either in the debrief or through email.

Engagement and Retention

When asked about what factors they felt helped to engage volunteers, the staff described the welcoming and inclusive culture of the organization (n=3), opportunities for scholarships and letters of reference (n=2), showing their gratitude for the volunteers (by thanking them at the end of the sessions), their open-door policy (i.e., the ability for volunteers to drop in at Empowerment Squared and talk to staff whenever they need to), the ability to socialize with others in the programs, and small appreciation gifts they share with the volunteers such as tickets to sporting events, USBs, etc. (n=2). They also thought that their support for the volunteers' external activities (e.g., helping them plan their club event, helping them fill in OSAP forms, etc.), and sharing job opportunities and connecting volunteers to potential employers were important engagement factors. One staff member also mentioned that they hold an annual volunteer social to engage the volunteers.

The staff most commonly described the ability of volunteers to see the direct impact of their service on the students' lives as the reason they stay with the programs (n=3), as highlighted by one staff member who stated "I think especially with the mentors in Homework Circle, you almost see the direct impact, ...Whereas other things… You have to wait much longer to see the difference that is being made. So, it's the amount of impact they're seeing, I believe is making them come back". They also thought that volunteers may continue volunteering with the programs due to having fun in the program (n=2), with one staff member saying "you see people smiling, you hear jokes, you hear their stories that they're sharing with each other, the mentees with the mentors." Other factors for why people continue to volunteer include building relationships with the students, staff, and other mentors and recognizing the students' motivation to learn.

In cases of volunteer underperformance or poor attendance, staff indicated that they typically would let the volunteer know that it is okay for them to stop volunteering (n=3). One staff member explained that they do not fire volunteers, but rather allow the volunteer to decide whether or not they would like to quit by giving them permission to do so. They described the common reasons volunteers stop volunteering with the program as being unable to manage the time commitment (n=3), having a change in schedule (n=2), the students being too high energy for them (n=2), or the program not being what they expected or not a good fit for them (n=3). Other reasons they thought volunteers stopped volunteering were due to some of the programs lacking a consistent schedule, moving away after finishing their degree, or not feeling useful. However, it was noted most volunteers who no longer volunteer still remain connected to the organization through making donations (monetary or in-kind), attending their events, referring others to the program, being community advocates, and returning to volunteer at a later time.

Additional Considerations for the Programs

In terms of additional considerations for the programs, the staff indicated they are working on creating an exit assessment to better understand the experiences of volunteers in their programs (n=3). One staff member indicated that "I think [an exit survey is] important. We pride ourselves on quality programming in everything we do. We like to learn and improve, and so I think that is one piece that is missing." Some staff members thought hiring a volunteer coordinator to oversee the volunteering process and manage volunteer experiences may be beneficial to the programs (n=3). One staff member thought that having the volunteers do some of the training may be helpful, to allow the new volunteers to hear about the volunteers' first-hand experience in the programs.

Volunteer Online Survey

Demographics

The majority of participants indicated they were current volunteers (84.2%). The majority of participants (60.5%) were McMaster undergraduate students, followed by those who were not students (28.9%). Other participants included graduate students at a university/college other than McMaster (5.3%), an undergraduate student at a university/college other than McMaster, and a McMaster graduate student *(Figure 1)*. The majority of participants (60.5%) were not currently employed. Of those who were employed (39.5%), about half were employed part-time (53.3%), 40% were employed full-time and one participant had casual employment. Most participants (36.8%) planned to stay in the Hamilton area for two to five years, 21.1% of participants planned to stay in the area more than five years, another 21.1% planned to stay in the area for one to two years, and 2.6% of participants planned to stay in the area less than a year. Some participants (18.4%) were unsure about how long they planned to stay in the area *(Figure 2)*.

Figure 1. Participant school status.

Please select the option that best describes you. I am currently:
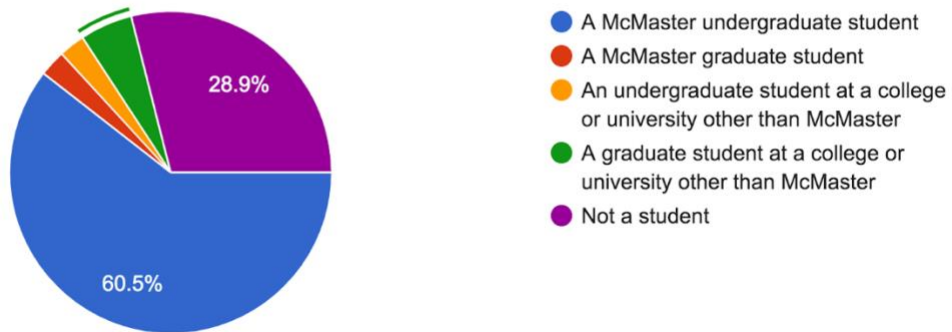38 responses

- A McMaster undergraduate student
- A McMaster graduate student
- An undergraduate student at a college or university other than McMaster
- A graduate student at a college or university other than McMaster
- Not a student

28.9%

60.5%

Figure 2. Plans to stay/move away from the location of the organization.

How long do you plan to stay in the Hamilton area?
38 responses

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 2-5 years
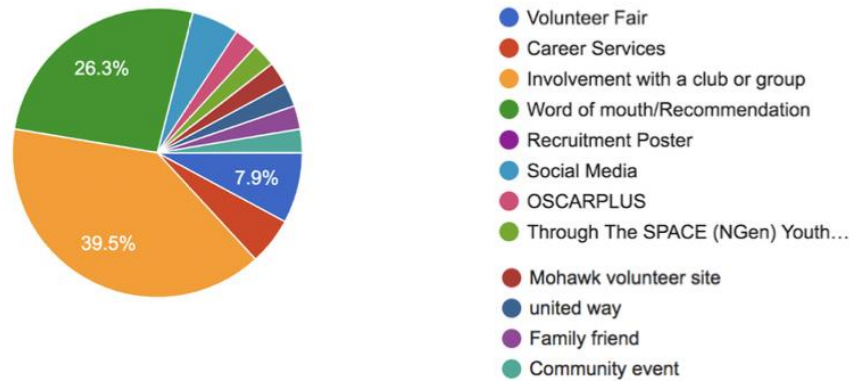- More than 5 years
- Unsure

21.1%

18.4%

36.8%

21.1%
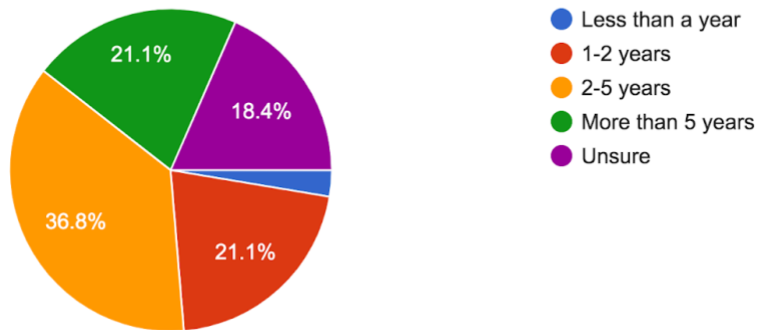
Recruitment Sources

Most past/current Empowerment Squared volunteers were recruited through their involvement with a club or group (39.5%) or word of mouth (26.3%; *Figure 3*). Other volunteers were recruited through a volunteer fair (7.9%), social media (5.3%), career services (5.3%), OSCARPLUS, The Space (NGen) Youth Centre, the Mohawk College volunteer site, United Way, or through a community event.

Figure 3. Main sources of volunteer recruitment.

How did you find out about Empowerment Squared?
38 responses

- Volunteer Fair
- Career Services
- Involvement with a club or group
- Word of mouth/Recommendation
- Recruitment Poster
- Social Media
- OSCARPLUS
- Through The SPACE (NGen) Youth…
- Mohawk volunteer site
- united way
- Family friend
- Community event

Current Volunteers

The majority of current volunteers (71.9%) had been volunteering with Empowerment Squared for less than six months, 15.6% had been volunteering for one to two years, and 12.5% had been volunteering between six months to a year.

Most of the current volunteers (84.3%) stated that they were satisfied with their experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared, 12.5% felt unsure or neutral, and one participant (3.1%) felt somewhat satisfied with their volunteering experience *(Figure 4)*. When volunteers were asked to describe why they gave the provided rating of their experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared, many expressed the staff as being caring and supportive, making them feel appreciated, and being passionate about what they do (n=11); enjoying working with the students (n=6); seeing the direct impact of their work (n=4); feeling welcome in the program (by the staff, students, and other volunteers; n=4); learning from the staff and students (n=3); and the program being well-organized (n=3). The others felt that they were doing work that was needed, supported the mission of the organization, or felt that there was a lack of structure within the Homework Circle program that created a chaotic environment for the students.

Figure 4. Current volunteers' ratings of their volunteer experience.

How would you rate your experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared?
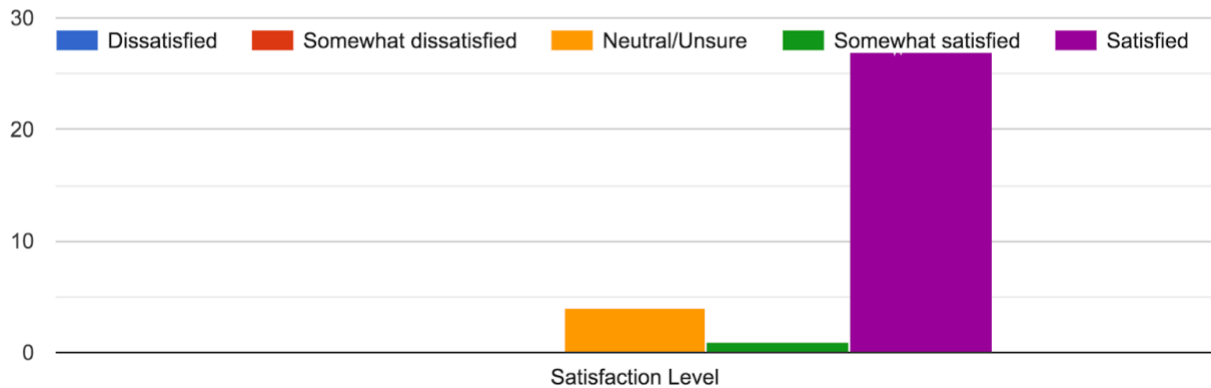
When asked if their role or specific tasks within Empowerment Squared's programs made them feel useful or that they were making a difference, approximately half of current volunteers (53.1%) stated that they strongly agreed, 31.2% stated that they agreed, and 15.6% felt neutral or unsure. However, 40.6% agreed they felt that they could do more to help and 15.6% strongly agreed. 43.8% felt unsure or neutral about whether they felt they could do more to help. 100% of the current volunteers stated they would recommend a friend to volunteer with Empowerment Squared. The reasons why they would recommend volunteering with the organization to a friend are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons current volunteers would give their friend to volunteer with Empowerment Squared.

What reasons would you give your friend to volunteer with Empowerment Squared? (Select all that apply)	% of Volunteers
It helps you feel like you are making a difference.	93.5%
It helps you to gain skills.	83.9%
The atmosphere is welcoming.	77.4%
The staff are friendly and helpful.	77.4%
It helps you to build experience for your resume.	74.2%

| It helps you to socialize and/or make friends.	71%
Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school.	67.7%
There are scholarships and awards available to volunteers.	32.3%
It helps you to build leadership skills.	3.2%
It is rewarding.	3.2%

Past Volunteers

Previous volunteers made up a minority of participants (15.8%). Most of the past volunteers that responded to the survey (83.3%) had volunteered with the program for less than six months. 16.7% had volunteered for one to two years.

Most of the past volunteers (83.3%) stated that they were satisfied with their experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared and only one past volunteer stated that they felt neutral or were unsure (*Figure 5*). When volunteers were asked to describe why they gave their rating of their experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared as such, past volunteers expressed their enjoyment in working with and coaching the students (n=2), that they liked the staff (n=2) and that they enjoyed working with diverse individuals.

Figure 5. Past volunteers' ratings of their volunteer experience.
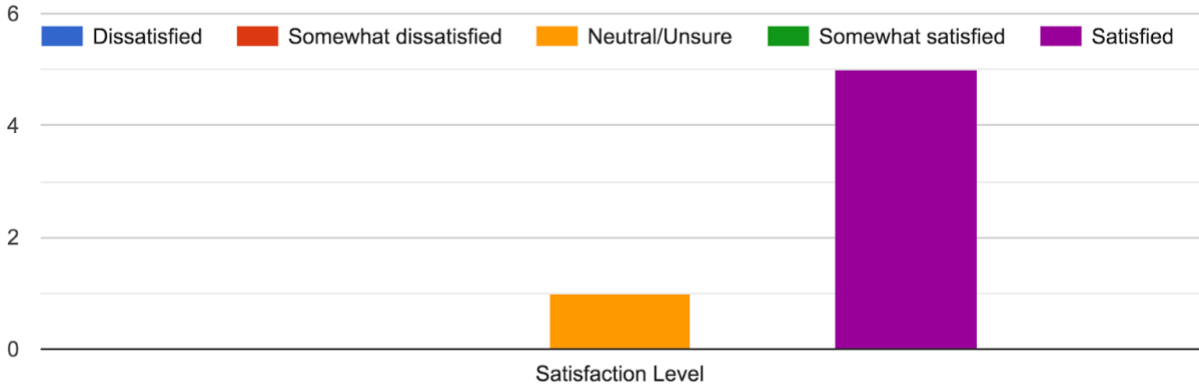
Of the past volunteers, 40% stated that they strongly agreed that their role or specific tasks within Empowerment Squared's programs made them feel useful or that they were making a

difference, 40% stated that they agreed, and 20% felt neutral or unsure. However, 50% agreed that they felt that they could do more to help and 50% felt unsure or neutral about whether they felt they could do more to help. The previous volunteers' reasons for volunteering with the program are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons previous volunteers volunteered with Empowerment Squared's programs.

Why did you volunteer with Empowerment Squared? (Select all that apply)	% of Volunteers
It helps you feel like you are making a difference.	100%
It helps you to socialize and/or make friends.	66.7%
The atmosphere is welcoming.	50%
It helps you to build experience for your resume.	50%
It helps you to gain skills.	50%
The staff are friendly and helpful.	33.3%
Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school.	33.3%
To help with the workload.	16.7%

Due to the small sample of past volunteers, no common themes were identified in the reasons volunteers stopped volunteering. Each volunteer had a unique reason, such as the event they volunteered for occurring only once throughout the year, the hours not fitting with their full-time job, being too busy with schoolwork, wanting to try a new volunteer experience, and/or a loved one passing away.

Suggestions to Improve Programming

Five past and present volunteer respondents provided suggestions to improve the volunteering experience within Empowerment Squared *(see Table 3)*.

Table 3. Volunteers' suggestions to improve the program.

Suggestion to Improve the Program	% of Volunteers
Having more staff support.	40%
Organize a volunteer social where volunteers can interact and learn more about each other.	20%
Providing more training to help the volunteers positively/effectively discipline the students.	20%
Increase the program efficiency.	20%

Volunteer Interviews

Twenty-one volunteers completed interviews. Of these participants, 16 were current volunteers and five were past volunteers. The majority of volunteers were students (undergraduate students, n=9; graduate students, n=3; and a college student). Many volunteer participants were retired or not currently employed (n=9). Six volunteers were employed full-time and four volunteers were employed part-time. Most participants were Junior Mentors in the Homework Circle Program (n=12). Other participants volunteered as Senior Mentors in the Homework Circle Program (n=3), Office/Administrative volunteers (n=4), Summer Literacy Program volunteers (n=3), Soccer Program volunteers (n=3), a Digital Literacy Program volunteer, and a Sponsorship volunteer. Those who had indicated switching programs, did so because the program they were volunteering with had finished (n=3), they had a timing conflict with a specific program, their volunteer goals were not being met, or they did not want to volunteer with children anymore. Most volunteers described the primary duties of their position as helping students with their homework (n=6), facilitating lessons (n=4), assisting with program set up (n=3), ensuring the classes run smoothly (n=2), playing sports with youth (n=2), and greeting guests and helping them with registration at events (n=2). Other duties described include selling donation cards, reaching out to sponsors, building rapport with students, teaching adults to use computers, helping to build lesson plans, data entry, and providing indirect support for the programming (such as purchasing snacks and books).

Recruitment

Most volunteers indicated that they were recruited to the programs through word of mouth (n=7), their involvement with a club, group, or sorority/fraternity (n=6), or their previous connection to a staff or board member of Empowerment Squared's team (n=5). Other volunteers were recruited through other organizations that they were volunteering with (n=2), social media, a volunteer fair, or a booth at a community event.

The volunteers expressed a broad range of reasons as to why they were motivated to sign up to volunteer with Empowerment Squared. Many volunteers stated that they wanted to help children and/or marginalized communities (n=9), enjoyed working with youth (n=7), supported the mission of the organization (n=6), wanted to give back to the community (n=6), found that the programs were well-aligned with their interests or career goals (n=6), or were interested in connecting and interacting with others. One participant stated, "I feel a sense of responsibility to give back and I really feel that me giving back helps to create balance in the community... I just had this sense in my heart, that when I get in the position to give back, I definitely know that I want to, and I feel like it's part of my responsibility to do so." Other reasons volunteers cited as motivating them to start volunteering included team building (n=2), their friends volunteering with the program (n=2), to add to their resume (n=2), wanting to develop themselves (n=2), the welcoming environment provided by the staff (n=2), and/or wanting to be a role model for female students.

Most volunteers indicated that signing up to volunteer with Empowerment Squared was an easy process to complete (n=17). However, two volunteers did not engage in a formal sign up procedure, due to it not being in place at the time that they became involved with the organization. One volunteer stated that the sign up process was difficult due to the program that they had intended to sign up for being unavailable/not accepting volunteers at the time.

When volunteers were asked whether or not they had recommended volunteering with Empowerment Squared to a friend, the majority indicated that they had (n=16). Of those who had, seven endorsed that the person they had recommended had signed up to volunteer and seven endorsed that they did not. Four participants stated that they had not recommended the program to anyone because they needed to try it out for themselves first (n=3) or did not know anyone that they thought would be interested in volunteering.

Training and Duties

Thirteen volunteers indicated that they found the training to be useful. Three participants had not completed a formal training process due to the program being quite new when they began volunteering. Volunteers described the training as in-depth (n=2) and stated that the training helped them to learn about new concepts important to the role (n=2). Two participants indicated that it is difficult to prepare for a position like this because there is a lot of reliance on intuition and problem-solving skills that the volunteer must possess in order to be successful in the position. The volunteers noted that experiential and continuous learning are required in the programs (n=4). Suggestions to improve the training included adjusting the length of the training (although there were mixed opinions on an appropriate training length; n=2), having the training at an earlier time (i.e., the current training runs too late), further emphasizing the need for volunteers to have patience within the training, and providing more specific training on how to work with children and youth, diverse communities, English as a second language (ESL) and special needs children. For example, one participant said, "The training was good, and it did prepare you for the role. However, there's some things that I had to learn while volunteering like for instance, working with certain kids. There's a child there who has some disabilities. Some are ESL. So those weren't really taught in training."

Most volunteers expressed that their roles, tasks, and expectations, in their respective positions, were communicated to them effectively (n=16). Two volunteers indicated that at first, they were unsure of their role and expectations, but they became clearer over time. The volunteers stated that this information was communicated to them verbally (n=9), through phone calls/texts (n=5), in a guidebook (n=5), through email (n=4), and in a PowerPoint during the volunteer information session. Volunteers also indicated that regular communication around these items occurred in the Homework Circle debrief sessions each week (n=6). Additionally, it was noted that although the volunteer expectations may be clearly communicated, there could be more instruction on how to handle specific situations that they may encounter in their role (n=2).

The task that volunteers most commonly indicated that they enjoyed was working directly with the students (n=9). However, some stated that they enjoyed working with the same students to build relationships with them and watch them progress (n=4) and one volunteer stated that they enjoyed working with different students each week (due to their uniqueness). Other tasks or aspects of the program that the volunteers enjoyed included facilitating lessons (n=3), being able to use their existing skill-set to help the students (n=3), the ability to tailor their instruction to meet the unique learning needs of the students (n=3), socializing with others and completing the Happiness Journal with the students. One volunteer said, "I like that we're kind of, instead of just saying 'Okay, you have to do your work,'we're saying 'Okay, what can we do to make you feel like you can do your work?' So, we're kind of going step-by-step according to the individual." Many volunteers indicated that there were no parts of the program that they disliked (n=10). However, some felt uncomfortable being placed in situations where they felt they were inexperienced (n=2). Some volunteers stated that they did not enjoy having to discipline and have an authoritative relationship with the students (n=3), the chaotic environment of the program (n=2), doing mindfulness with the students (n=2), sending students home because they do not have homework, and/or the new student reward points system (due to volunteers' unfamiliarity with how it works).

The program staff were the most frequently endorsed support for the volunteers (n=14), followed by the Junior Mentors (n=6), and Senior Mentors (n=3). Volunteers felt that they were supported in a variety of ways. They indicated that the staff were always available to help (n=6), they were never alone with the students (as there were always other mentors around; n=2), and lesson materials were always made available to them (n=2). One volunteer indicated that, "Your first line of help is the Senior Mentors to help with the situation. After that you could go to one of the Program Coordinators that are also walking around during session. So, there is lots of help and lots of people willing to help as well." One volunteer mentioned that the staff also provided assistance for volunteers in filling out the police check forms and reimbursing the cost of the vulnerable sector check. Additionally, it was noted that in the Homework Circle program, any issues that may have occurred in the session are discussed in the debrief by the mentors and staff (n=4). Five volunteers endorsed using the available supports frequently, whereas three participants indicated that they never or rarely use the provided supports.

When asked about whether they had received feedback on their performance, some volunteers said that they often received positive feedback verbally in the sessions (n=10) or during the debrief (n=3). Five volunteers indicated that they had not yet received any feedback on their performance. Only two participants had received constructive feedback and two participants indicated that they were provided feedback only after asking for it. One volunteer noted, "I think they focus a lot on praising or positive feedback. However, I don't get a lot of critique. And I know there are definitely areas where I can improve. So, to hear more at the end of the day of what we can do better, what can we focus on more, would be very helpful."

Engagement and Retention

Volunteers indicated that receiving a volunteering certificate, a job reference, a letter of reference for school, feelings of empowerment and the welcoming culture of the program were key engagement factors for volunteering in the programs.

The volunteers commonly endorsed feeling appreciated by the staff (especially the Manager of Educational Programming; n=6). The ways in which they described staff making them feel appreciated were by thanking them (n=6), gifting them donated items or providing an honorarium (n=6), complimenting them (n=4), providing food and snacks (n=3), and remembering their names and interests. The volunteers also described feeling appreciated by the students (n=4) by the students thanking them (n=3), writing notes of appreciation (n=2), listening to them and respecting them, and giving hugs at the end of sessions.

Most volunteers indicated that they chose to continue volunteering with the programs due to building relationships with the students, staff, and/or other mentors (n=7); the positive feelings they experience as a result of helping out (n=6); seeing the direct impact of their work (n=4); or 'paying it forward' because someone had helped them when they needed the support (n=4). For example, one participant said, "One of the volunteers in the program said once you start volunteering you feel like you don't want to leave because you've built this connection with the kids, the other mentors and the staff, and it really is true. I wasn't sure if I was going to volunteer because of my course load, but I made it work because I felt like I was making a difference. It kind of gives you another purpose, other than doing school." Other reasons for continuing to volunteer included the experience gained in working with diverse populations (n=3), skill-building (n=3), having fun in the program (n=2), learning about one's self, and understanding the students' need for consistency.

When asked how long they planned to continue volunteering for, some volunteers indicated that they would continue to volunteer until they were finished their degree (n=5), some indicated that they did not plan to stop volunteering at this time (n=4), and some indicated that the length of their volunteering was dependent on their work/school schedule (n=6) and/or how long they stay in the area (n=4).

Those who had quit volunteering or were planning to quit volunteering indicated that their reason for quitting was a change in their schedule (n=3), they had obtained full-time employment, the time commitment became too much for them, they had moved away after finishing school, they experienced a personal stressor, or they were going on a student exchange. Those who had already stopped volunteering stated that they would like to return to volunteer at some point (n=5), depending on where they are living and their schedule opening up. Those who no longer volunteered with the programs said that they maintained involvement with Empowerment Squared by staying connected to the staff (n=3), making donations (n=2), and attending their events (n=2).

Additional Considerations for the Programs

Most volunteers stated that they were encouraged to share their suggestions on how to improve the program (n=11), several participants stated that they were not asked to share their suggestions but felt as if there is an open culture to do so (n=4), and one participant felt as though you may have to volunteer for a certain period of time before providing suggestions. Many volunteers indicated that they felt comfortable enough that if they did have suggestions and feedback to improve the program, they would openly share it with the staff (n=12).

Some volunteers shared their suggestions for the organization/programs with the interviewers. Common themes included having more volunteers to support the programs (n=3), having a social for the volunteers and students to get to know each other (n=3), and making the Homework Circle sessions shorter (especially for the younger volunteers; n=3). Other suggestions included sending out the PowerPoint outlining the volunteer positions at the time of sign up for volunteers to review, implementing an anonymous feedback process, having the administrative volunteers work together (rather than alone), finding a larger space to hold sessions, working to spread the word about the program, providing manuals on how to work with ESL and special needs children, recruiting younger volunteers and non-student volunteers, and leveraging the connections to past volunteers and their networks. It was also noted that for individuals with full-time '9 to 5' working hours it may be difficult to participate in the programs due to the early start time (n=2). It was suggested that Empowerment Squared find other ways for these individuals to volunteer their time to the programs and utilize their skills (n=2).

> "Everyone is on the same page. Their focus is so obviously about helping people and the kids. They are really good at recruiting. The people that end up coming to volunteer are just amazing." -Volunteer

Discussion

Areas of Strength

Empowerment Squared has successfully adjusted their recruitment practices to recruit higher numbers of volunteers more efficiently. In the focus groups, the Empowerment Squared staff (n=2) stated that they found new recruitment strategies that helped to bring in more volunteers: (1) connecting to clubs and groups; and (2) attending volunteer fairs. Consistent with this statement, 39.5% of survey participants indicated that they were recruited through their involvement with a club or group and 7.9% indicated that they were recruited through a volunteer fair. Similarly, six interview participants stated that they were recruited through their involvement with a club, group, or sorority/fraternity. These findings indicate that connecting to community clubs and groups is a strong recruitment strategy for Empowerment Squared to make use of.

The staff and volunteers interviewed provided many reasons as to why one might initially sign up to volunteer with Empowerment Squared and why one might continue to volunteer that align with the motivational categories described in our literature review (*Table 4*). Additionally,

the reasons surveyed volunteers provided for why they volunteered or why they would recommend a friend to volunteer corresponded to these categories as well. This demonstrates that there are many reasons why volunteers choose to volunteer and to continue volunteering with Empowerment Squared, therefore the programs are relevant to a broad population of individuals who have differing interests motivating their involvement, emphasizing the broad applicability of the programs.

Table 4. Participants' motivations for signing up and continuing to volunteer by motivation category.

Motivation Category (Ward, 2017)	Definition	Surveyed Volunteers' Reasons for Volunteering/Reasons they Would Give a Friend to Volunteer	Staff Perceptions of Volunteers' Motivations to Sign Up/Continue Volunteering	Interviewed Volunteers' Motivations to Sign Up/Continue Volunteering
Altruistic Motivation	**-Comes from a place of wanting to help others**	*Current Volunteers:* -It helps you feel like you are making a difference (93.5%) *Past Volunteers:* -It helps you feel like you are making a difference (100%) - "To help with the workload'' (16.7%)	*Perceived motivation to volunteer:* -Wanting to help marginalized communities (n=1)	*Motivation to volunteer:* -Wanted to help children/marginalized communities (n=9) -Supported the mission of the organization (n=6) -Wanted to give back to the community (n=6)
			Perceived motivation to continue volunteering: -Volunteers seeing the direct impact of their work (n=3) -Volunteers recognizing the students' motivation to learn (n=1)	*Motivation to continue volunteering:* -Seeing the direct impact of their work (n=4) -'Paying it forward' (n=4) -Understanding the students' need for consistency (n=1)
Social Motivation	**-A desire to connect with friends or peers**	*Current Volunteers:* -The atmosphere is welcoming (77.4%) -The staff are friendly and helpful (77.4%)	*Perceived motivation to volunteer:* -Interesting in connecting and interacting with others (n=1)	*Motivation to volunteer:* -Enjoyed working with the students (n=7) -Were interested in connecting and interacting with others (n=1)

		-It helps you to socialize and/or make friends (71%)	*Perceived motivation to continue volunteering:*	*Motivation to continue volunteering:*
		Past Volunteers:	-Building relationships with the students, staff, and other mentors (n=1)	-Building relationships with the students, staff, and/or other mentors (n=7)
		-It helps you to socialize and/or make friends (66.7%)		
		-The atmosphere is welcoming (50%)		
		-The staff are friendly and helpful (33.3%)		
Material Motivation	**-A desire for personal gain (i.e., respect from others, resume building, etc.)**	*Current Volunteers:* -It helps you to gain skills (83.9%) -It helps you to build experience for your resume (74.2%) -Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school (67.7%) -There are scholarships and awards available to volunteers (32.3%) *Past Volunteers:* -It helps you to build experience for your resume (50%) -It helps you to gain skills (50%)	*Perceived motivation to volunteer:* -Programs well-aligned with the volunteer's interests/career goals (n=2) -To help build the volunteer's resume (n=1) -To fulfill the volunteer's required volunteer hours (n=1) -To pursue hands on work (that is different from their daily duties; i.e., for a change; n=1) -To build self-worth (n=1)	*Motivation to volunteer:* -Programs were well-aligned with their interests/career goals (n=6)
		-Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school (33.3%)	*Perceived motivation to continue volunteering:* -Volunteers having fun in the programs (n=2)	*Motivation to continue volunteering:* -Experiencing positive feelings as a result of helping out (n=6)

				-Gaining experience in working with diverse populations (n=3) -Skill building (n=3) -Having fun in the program (n=2) -Learning about one's self (n=1)

According to the literature, creating an organizational culture where staff members who work with volunteers are highly supportive of new volunteers aids in recruitment efforts (Hager & Brudney, 2011). Providing volunteers with emotional and task-related support is important to engage and retain volunteers (Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017; Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). Empowerment Squared is successful in helping their volunteers feel appreciated and supported. When volunteers were asked to describe why they gave their rating of their experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared, many expressed the staff as being caring and supportive and making them feel appreciated (i.e., emotional support; n=11). Similarly, in terms of emotional support, the interviewed volunteers endorsed feeling appreciated by the staff through staff members thanking them (n=6), gifting them donated items or providing an honorarium (n=6), complimenting them (n=4), providing food and snacks (n=3), and remembering their names and interests. Additionally, there is evidence that the staff provide task-related support as the program staff were the most frequently endorsed support for the volunteers in completing their duties (n=14).

Areas in Need of Improvement

Although many volunteers who participated in the interviews found the training useful (n=13), there were some areas where volunteers stated more training would have been useful to assist them in completing their duties and better understanding what was expected of them. The literature on volunteer engagement and retention demonstrates that alleviating and assisting volunteers with task-related challenges helps to reduce turnover (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). For instance, in the survey when volunteers were asked to provide suggestions to improve programming, it was suggested that volunteers receive more training to help the volunteers positively and effectively discipline the students. Both staff (n=5) and volunteers (n=3) expressed that disciplining the students was a task that the volunteers disliked. In the interviews, when asked about the training, volunteers suggested that providing more specific training on how to work with children and youth, diverse communities, ESL and special needs children. Likewise, one volunteer suggested that Empowerment Squared could provide manuals on how to work with ESL and special needs children.

The literature on volunteer engagement poses that staff providing ongoing communication, performance evaluations, and reinforcement both assists volunteers in completing their duties and growing within their role (SAMHSA, 2005). In the focus groups, the staff described providing positive reinforcement in the sessions and after the sessions (e.g., in the debrief or through email). However, the staff did not mention providing any constructive feedback to the volunteers. Similarly, most volunteers said that they often received only positive feedback (n=13) and only two volunteers had received any form of constructive feedback. Five volunteers indicated that they had not yet received any feedback on their performance and two volunteers indicated that they had asked staff for feedback. Although it can be difficult to provide individuals who are offering unpaid support for programming with critique, constructive criticism where needed, is necessary in order for volunteers to master the skills needed in their position. As one interview participant noted, it is imperative for the operations of the organization, for volunteers to understand which areas they can improve on and where to focus their efforts.

Recommendations

Volunteer Recruitment

1. *Further develop their word of mouth recruitment strategy.*
Empowerment Squared should develop and strengthen their word of mouth recruitment strategy. Word of mouth recruitment impacts an organization's attractiveness and image and has a positive effect on application decisions (VanHoye, 2014). Word of mouth recruitment can also be applied at all levels of the organization, making it a scalable recruitment method for staff, experienced volunteers, and new volunteers to participate in. According to the online survey, only about a quarter of volunteers were recruited through word of mouth (26.3%), suggesting that word of mouth recruitment is an untapped resource. Promisingly, 100% of volunteers who were surveyed indicated that they would recommend Empowerment Squared to someone else. The majority of interviewed volunteers (n=16) indicated that they had recommended the program to a friend and almost half (n=7) stated that the person they recommended had actually signed up, further highlighting the potential of this form of recruitment.

Empowerment Squared is currently using this strategy to a smaller degree. During the staff focus groups, one staff member indicated that at the end of each term she asks volunteers to think about whether or not they will be coming back and to think about who they could recommend to volunteer with the program. This allows participants to reflect on their experience, and gets volunteers thinking about who they would recommend Empowerment Squared to. Further steps would be to provide volunteers with recruitment resources to help recruit other volunteers (Hager & Brudney, 2011), such as a brochure, brief informational video, or website. Moreover, although "word of mouth" is thought to be a face to face communication, using web-based word of mouth-style techniques is another option that could be used by Empowerment Squared. This provides potential volunteer recruits and other

community members with information through various communication channels such as telephone, internet, electronic bulletin boards, and social networking sites (VanHoye, 2014). It is recommended that Empowerment Squared grants volunteers the opportunity to submit a testimonial to post on Empowerment Squared's website and social media accounts, showcasing their experiences and insight into the program as a volunteer.

2. Partner with clubs and groups that include professionals and other non-students to aid recruitment of consistent volunteers.

As stated in the above section, Empowerment Squared's strategy of partnering with clubs and groups to efficiently recruit a higher volume of volunteers has been effective (39.5% of survey participants were recruited through a club or group and six interview participants were recruited through their involvement with a club, group, or sorority/fraternity). However, most of the volunteers recruited via these channels are undergraduate students due to the majority of the clubs and groups targeted being associated with the McMaster Students Union. Due to the need to recruit more professional, graduate level and non-student volunteers to maintain continuity of programming throughout the school year and summer months, Empowerment Squared should make use of this strategy, that has proven to be effective, by partnering with groups and associations open to non-students, and those geared toward professionals. Both staff (n=2) and volunteers (n=6) endorsed volunteer motivations to sign up and volunteer with the programs due to the material motivation of the programs being well-aligned with the volunteers' interests and career goals. Additionally, the majority of survey participants indicated that they volunteered with the programs (or would recommend others to volunteer with the programs) because it helps you to gain skills, build experience for your resume, and can be used as a reference for jobs/school (i.e., material motivation). In the focus groups, staff indicated that the Homework Circle program was most in need of volunteers because of the high number of students it serves (n=5).

Empowerment Squared should target groups of individuals that are interested in: (1) working with children and youth; (2) working with diverse populations and/or newcomers; and (3) are interested in teaching or education-related domains. Connecting with local clubs and groups in the area, who have demonstrated interest in working in an educational setting with students, should help to grow the volunteer base (such as connecting to the Retired Women Teachers of Ontario Hamilton Wentworth and the Educational Workers' Alliance of Ontario).

3. Create a mentee to mentor volunteer recruitment model.

Many volunteers stated that they were motivated to sign up and engaged in volunteering because they wanted to 'pay it forward' (as someone else had done for them when they were a newcomer youth or a youth in need of a positive adult role model) and/or give back to their community (n=10). The literature indicates that opportunities for growth and learning within the context of the organization are key in successful volunteering programs (Volunteer Hub, 2019b). Therefore, the same types of opportunities for growth and skill development should be offered to the mentees to promote youth empowerment. In our informal consultation with staff, we learned that many youth who are no longer involved in the programs (because their

grades have significantly improved or they have aged out of the programs) come back to hang out at the organization's headquarters and connect with the staff.

Former mentees are well-positioned to volunteer in the programs as they have had a first-hand account of the experience, know the structure of the programs, and understand the role and duties of the mentors. Additionally, based on our consultations with staff and through our data collection, it appears that former volunteers are likely to experience altruistic motivation such as wanting to pay it forward and social motivation such as wanting to remain connected with the staff (Ward, 2017) to volunteer. Empowerment Squared should leverage their connections to alumni of the programs and older youth mentees by providing a bridge training program where the youth receive a "mentee to mentor" style training in which the youth learn leadership and mentorship skills to assist them in building their skills to mentoring the younger student. One example of this type of model was described in our consultation with the staff, where a high school student who is mentee in the Homework Circle program during the school year volunteered with the various programs throughout the summer and found it to be a rewarding experience (Empowerment Squared, 2019; *see* [*https://empowermentsquared.org/my-summer-with-empowerment-squared/*](https://empowermentsquared.org/my-summer-with-empowerment-squared/)).

Volunteer Engagement and Retention

1. ***Provide specialized training and resources to volunteers in managing situations that are new to them and in meeting the needs of diverse individuals.***
    a. ***Have experienced volunteers facilitate part of the training.***

Our literature review identified the volunteer training program as an essential tool in preparing volunteers for their role and duties (Volunteer Hub, 2019b). Empowerment Squared provides an in-depth training, composed of an administrative session and experiential learning through observing the program directly. However, our findings indicate that there are areas where some volunteers may be in need of additional training to be successful in their role. Some of the staff (n=2) and interviewed volunteers (n=2) stated that they felt uncomfortable being placed in situations that were new to them or where they felt they were inexperienced. Participants also stated that although expectations may be clearly communicated, there could be more instruction on how to handle specific situations that they may encounter in their role (n=2). Volunteer unenjoyment and uncertainty in disciplining students and interacting with students in an authoritative manner emerged as a common theme in our findings. Additionally, the need for training and/or resources on working with children and youth (for those who had not previously done so), working with diverse communities, ESL and special needs children, as well as disciplining students, was endorsed by volunteers in the interviews. Empowerment Squared should provide training and resources for volunteers in these areas to increase volunteer comfort in working with these individuals and managing situations that are new to them. It is acknowledged that special circumstances and scenarios may not come up in the experiential component of the training. Therefore, Empowerment Squared should provide simple and clear expectations around managing situations and scenarios that are new to the volunteers and engage in participatory learning activities. For example, in a group format two

participants could role play what disciplining a student might look like and have the group and staff provide feedback. Empowerment Squared could also show videos of different scenarios and have the group respond as to how they would handle the situation. Manuals overviewing best practices in working with culturally diverse, ESL, and special needs students should be available to the volunteers, should they need additional support.

In our review of the literature, having experienced volunteers assist in the training of new recruits was identified as a means of engagement for long-term volunteers who are able to provide their personal insight and perspective on the role and duties based on their experience as a volunteer in the program (Community ToolBox, 2019). One staff member indicated that they would like to see the volunteers do some of the training. Empowerment Squared should have Senior Mentors conduct part of the training session. This type of peer mentorship provides emotional support to the new recruit from someone who has been through the training process and understands the challenges of the position, thereby reducing volunteer turnover (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). In our observation of the programs, Senior Mentors were highly involved in overseeing the operations of the classroom and identifying areas in which the volunteers may be in need of support. Due to this experience and their first-hand perspective of volunteering with the program, Senior Mentors have unique insight into the skills that need to be emphasized in the training and areas where volunteers are in need of the most support.

2. Target volunteers' specific motivations for volunteering in engagement efforts.
According to the literature on volunteer engagement and retention, volunteers' motivations for volunteering help to determine if they will continue volunteering in a program or stop volunteering, based on whether or not their volunteering goals are being met (Ward, 2017). Our findings in terms of volunteers' ratings of their experiences volunteering with the program, motivations for volunteering, and motivations for continuing to volunteer with the program directly correspond with the three motivational categories (i.e., altruistic motivation, social motivation, and material motivation; *see Table 4*). Empowerment Squared should use the volunteers' motivations for volunteering to determine how to best engage and retain them. There are specific engagement strategies tailored to each motivation. For example, a volunteer with an altruistic motive for volunteering would be best engaged by recognition of the impacts they are having on the students (i.e., the student passing a test). A volunteer with a material motivation for volunteering would be best engaged by Empowerment Squared providing them with a letter of recommendation or reference. A volunteer with a social motivation for volunteering would be best engaged by holding an annual volunteer social. Empowerment Squared should add an item to their sign up form asking the volunteer their motivation for volunteering with the program (similar to how we have done this in our online survey; *see Appendix B*). The volunteers' motivations for volunteering should be tracked in the volunteer management system (Keela) and Empowerment Squared should make efforts to develop engagement activities and opportunities that reflect the various motivations of the volunteers.

3. Create a formal volunteer feedback process.

Although many volunteers had indicated receiving positive feedback and praise from staff (n=13), not many volunteers had received constructive feedback (n=2) and some had not received no feedback at all during their time volunteering at Empowerment Squared. Several volunteers indicated that they had asked for feedback on their performance as they thought it would be helpful to be aware of any areas that they could improve on (n=2). Similarly, the program staff mostly endorsed providing positive praise to the volunteers (n=2). Our review of the literature found that ongoing performance evaluations assist volunteers in completing their duties (SAMHSA, 2005) and aid staff in providing regular emotional and task-related support to the volunteers (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2015). Empowerment Squared should implement a progress report system to help volunteers feel more confident in their abilities and reduce role uncertainty (which is associated with low task performance and poor engagement; Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017). The progress reports should be conducted each semester by staff members so that every volunteer has been provided feedback. There is opportunity for staff to involve the Senior Mentors in assisting with this process as part of their leadership role in the program. The feedback should include strengths, areas in need of improvement, and set tangible goals for the volunteer to work toward, contributing to their sense of mastery

Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate that volunteers are attracted to volunteer with Empowerment Squared for a variety of altruistic, social, and material reasons. The vast majority of individuals who have volunteered with Empowerment Squared have indicated that they have been satisfied with their experience and describe the experience as having some form of personal benefit to them. The results indicate that volunteers within Empowerment Squared's programs feel both supported and appreciated, not only by the staff, but by the students and other volunteers as well. In the present sample, the main reasons volunteers stop volunteering are due to external circumstances (such as scheduling conflicts, moving away, etc.) that are not preventable by the organization. Those who stop volunteering often still choose to remain involved with the organization in other ways, such as donating to the organization, advocating for the programs, recommending others to volunteer with them, attending their events, and remaining connected to the staff. In order to expand their volunteer base, it is recommended that Empowerment Squared further develop their word of mouth recruitment strategy, partner with clubs and groups that include professionals and other non-students and create a mentee to mentor recruitment model. In order to better engage and retain volunteers, it is recommended that Empowerment Squared provide specialized training and resources to volunteers in areas that are new to them, target volunteers' specific motivations for volunteering in engagement efforts and create a formal volunteer feedback process.

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Appendices

Appendix A

<u>Empowerment Squared Staff Interview Guide</u>

Introduction and Consent

Hello, my name is [your name]. We want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. We're working on a Research Shop project on behalf of Empowerment Squared. The purpose of this research is to explore what motivates volunteers to volunteer with Empowerment Squared and what factors motivate them to keep volunteering. This study involves: (1) focus groups with yourselves (Empowerment Squared staff); (2) a broad survey to past and current volunteers; and (3) interviews with volunteers. The information we gather today will be used as part of our final report to Empowerment Squared.

Does anyone have questions about the project?

This focus group will be approximately 45 minutes in length We want to spend a few moments go over some basic ground rules for our discussion today. Firstly, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will be asking. Everyone's views are welcomed. It is important that we have the opportunity to hear everyone's opinions about the questions we will discuss. All of your comments –both positive and negative— are important, so please speak up, even if you disagree with someone else; but also, be respectful of that person's opinion. We may step in to make sure everyone has a chance to speak, and we may intervene if we feel the conversation is straying off topic. The information we will collect today will be connected to you as a group. Any identifying information (names, places, etc.) will be removed during the transcription process. The data from the focus groups will be synthesized and the themes identified will be summarized in our final report. We strive to protect individual confidentiality. Keep in mind that we are often identifiable through the stories we tell when you are deciding what to share today. We ask that everything shared here by yourself and your colleagues not be spoken about outside of this focus group discussion in order to maintain each participant's confidentiality. Having said this, and having made these requests, we cannot guarantee that the request will be honoured by everyone in the room. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the focus group at any time and are not required to answer any questions that you cannot think of an answer to, or do not feel comfortable answering. If you would like to stop participating in the focus group, you are able to leave at any point or stay and stop answering the questions.

With your permission, this focus group will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what is said. All audio files and transcripts will be securely stored in a Google Drive folder that only the Research Team has access to. We will also be taking notes throughout the discussion, which are only viewed and

shared among the Research Team. Only the Research Team will have access to transcripts from this discussion. The tapes and transcripts will only be used for this project and will be destroyed once the report is complete.

We ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription. It is also helpful to have only one person speaking at a time. If at any point you feel tired or fatigued please let us know and we can take a short break.

Do you give your consent to participate in this focus group?

[Go around the circle and ensure everyone has verbally answered 'yes'.]

The questions in this focus group will cover five areas: 1) Introductory Information; 2) the Recruitment Process; 3) Training and Duties; 4) Engagement and Retention; and 5) Concluding Remarks.

Focus Group Questions	
Section	*Question*
1-Introductory Information	1.1 How long have you been working for Empowerment Squared?
	1.2 Can you explain your role within Empowerment Squared?
2-Recruitment Process	2.1 How easy or difficult do you do you think it is to recruit new volunteers for Empowerment Squared?
	2.2 What strategies do you or the organization currently use to recruit volunteers for Empowerment Squared?
	2.3 What do you believe attracts volunteers to Empowerment Squared?
	2.31 *Prompt: Do you think there are different factors that would motivate volunteers to volunteer for the different programs?*
	2.4 Do you find volunteers to be more drawn to particular programs?

3-Training and Duties	3.1 Have volunteers ever provided feedback about the sign up and training process? If so, what has been their main feedback?
	3.11 *Prompt: How do they find the sign up/training process in terms of length, scheduling, and ability to prepare them for their volunteer duties?*
	3.2 Do volunteers ever drop out of the program following training? If so, why?
	3.3 How are roles, tasks and expectations communicated to volunteers?
	3.31 *Prompt: Are volunteers ever given feedback?*
	3.4 Are there any duties that the volunteers seem to particularly enjoy? If so, what are they?
	3.5 Are there any duties that the volunteers tend to dislike, or do not particularly enjoy? If so, what are they?
	3.6 How does Empowerment Squared support volunteers in their position (e.g., mentorship, access to the program leaders, language accommodations, accessibility accommodations)?
	3.61 *Prompt: Is there currently a procedure in place for volunteers to report any difficulties they may be experiencing in volunteering with the program (e.g., accessibility, lack of transportation, etc.)?*
	3.7 Do you ever experience issues with volunteers missing sessions or underperforming their duties? Please elaborate.
	3.71 *Prompt: Are there policies in place for absenteeism or underperformance?*
4-Engagement and Retention	4.1 Empowerment Squared has a large volunteer base and many are returning volunteers. What do you believe motivates volunteers to stay with the program?

	4.2 Some volunteers only stay for a short term. What do you believe causes volunteers to only volunteer a short time with the program?
	4.3 Does Empowerment Squared do anything to improve the social experience for volunteers (e.g., volunteer socials, recognition events, etc.)? If so, what are they?
5-Concluding Remarks	5.1 Is there anything that you would like to see implemented in terms of the volunteering process?
	5.11 *Prompt: Do you have any ideas for how the volunteer program can be improved?*
	5.2 Are there any other comments about volunteers at Empowerment Squared you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this focus group. Your willingness to share your insights into these questions is greatly appreciated. This information will help us to better understand what attracts volunteers to volunteer their time to the programs at Empowerment Squared and what retains them. If you have any questions or comments regarding this research project, the nature of the questions being asked or ethics, please feel free to contact the team lead, Savanah, at smiths73@mcmaster.ca. Thank you again and have a great evening.

Appendix B

Empowerment Squared Volunteer Survey

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in our survey about volunteers' experiences with Empowerment Squared. Please carefully read over this document prior to completing the survey.

We are a group of volunteers from the McMaster University Research Shop. We're helping Empowerment Squared conduct research to learn more about its volunteer program. Your feedback will inform our final report to Empowerment Squared on recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers.

We have created a short survey (5-10 minutes) that we are hoping you will fill out. The survey asks some information about yourself and your experience volunteering at Empowerment Squared. The survey will ask you to provide your name and contact information, only if you are interested in participating in an interview with our team at a later date. This information will only be seen by the Research Team and will not be linked to your survey or shared with anyone outside of our Research Team. If you are not interested in participating in an interview, please do not provide this information.

Your responses will be completely confidential. All survey information is accessible only by the McMaster Research Shop volunteers. These surveys will be collected in a secure, Google Drive folder that only the Research Team is able to access. The feedback that you provide will not affect your ability to volunteer with Empowerment Squared. As a token of appreciation for your time and feedback, you will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a $25 Tim Hortons gift card. At the beginning of the survey you will be asked to provide an email for this draw.

Participating in this survey is completely voluntary. You have the option to skip any question that you are not comfortable answering, and you can stop filling out the survey at any time. If you have any concerns about the survey after completing it, please contact the team lead, Savanah, at smiths73@mcmaster.ca.

* Required

1. **Email address** *

   _____

2. **By consenting to participate in this survey, I understand that: (1) My participation in this survey is completely voluntary and that I am able to stop taking the survey at any time; (2) My individual responses to this survey will not be shared with anyone outside of the McMaster Research Shop; (3) I have the opportunity to ask any questions about my participation in the survey.** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes

   ◯ No   *Stop filling out this form.*

3. **Please select the option that best describes you. I am currently:**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ A McMaster undergraduate student

   ◯ A McMaster graduate student

   ◯ An undergraduate student at a college or university other than McMaster

   ◯ A graduate student at a college or university other than McMaster

   ◯ Not a student

4. **Are you currently employed?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes   *Skip to question 4.*

   ◯ No   *Skip to question 5.*

5. **What is your employment status?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Casual

   ◯ Part-time

   ◯ Full-time

6. **How long do you plan to stay in the Hamilton area?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Less than a year
   ◯ 1-2 years
   ◯ 2-5 years
   ◯ More than 5 years
   ◯ Unsure

7. **How did you find out about Empowerment Squared?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Volunteer Fair
   ◯ Career Services
   ◯ Involvement with a club or group
   ◯ Word of mouth/Recommendation
   ◯ Recruitment Poster
   ◯ Social Media
   ◯ OSCARPLUS
   ◯ Other: _____

8. **Are you currently volunteering with Empowerment Squared?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes   *Skip to question 8.*
   ◯ No   *Skip to question 15.*

Current Volunteers

9. **How long have you been volunteering with Empowerment Squared?**
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Less than 6 months
   ◯ 6 months-1 year
   ◯ 1-2 years
   ◯ 2-3 years
   ◯ 3-4 years
   ◯ 4-5 years
   ◯ 5+ years

10. **How would you rate your experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared?**
    Mark only one oval per row.

	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neutral/Unsure	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied
Satisfaction Level	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

11. **Please briefly describe why you gave the above rating.**

    _____

12. **Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: My role or specific tasks within Empowerment Squared's programs make me feel useful or that you I am making a difference.**
    Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Level of Agreement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

13. **Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: I feel that I could do more to help.**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Level of Agreement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

14. **Would you recommend volunteering with Empowerment Squared to a friend?**
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes   *Skip to question 14.*

◯ No   *Skip to question 23.*

Skip to question 23.

15. **What reasons would you give your friend to volunteer with Empowerment Squared? Please select all that apply.**
Check all that apply.

☐ It helps you to gain skills

☐ The atmosphere is welcoming

☐ The staff are friendly and helpful

☐ It helps you to build experience for your resume

☐ It makes you feel like you are making a difference

☐ It helps you to socialize/make friends

☐ There are scholarships and awards available for volunteers

☐ Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school

☐ Other:

Skip to question 23.

Past Volunteers

16. **How long did you volunteer with Empowerment Squared?**
Mark only one oval.

◯ Less than 6 months   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 6 months-1 year   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 1-2 years   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 2-3 years   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 3-4 years   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 4-5 years   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ 5+ years   *Skip to question 17.*

◯ I signed up to volunteer, but did not end up volunteering   *Skip to question 16.*

Skip to question 17.

17. **Why did you not end up volunteering?**
Mark only one oval.

◯ I was too busy with school/other commitments   *Skip to question 23.*

◯ The time commitment was too much for my schedule   *Skip to question 23.*

◯ The tasks/duties associated with the role were not of interest to me   *Skip to question 23.*

◯ I felt unprepared for the role   *Skip to question 23.*

◯ Other: *Skip to question 23.*

Skip to question 23.

18. **How would you rate your experience volunteering with Empowerment Squared?**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neutral/Unsure	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied
Satisfaction Level	○	○	○	○	○

19. **Please briefly describe why you gave the above rating.**

_____

20. **Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: My role or specific tasks within Empowerment Squared's programs made me feel useful or that I was making a difference.**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Level of Agreement	○	○	○	○	○

21. **Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: I feel that I could have been doing more to help.**
Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Level of Agreement	○	○	○	○	○

22. **Why did you volunteer with Empowerment Squared? Please select all that apply.**
Check all that apply.

☐ It helps you to gain skills

☐ The atmosphere is welcoming

☐ The staff are friendly and helpful

☐ It helps you to build experience for your resume

☐ It makes you feel like you are making a difference

☐ It helps you to socialize/make friends

☐ There are scholarships and awards available for volunteers

☐ Empowerment Squared can be used as a reference for jobs/school

☐ Other: _____

23. **Why did you stop volunteering with Empowerment Squared?**
Mark only one oval.

○ I moved further away

○ Scheduling (I was too busy, or the hours of the program did not work with my schedule)

○ I did not enjoy the program I was volunteering in

○ I did not have a positive experience with staff/program leaders

○ I did not have a positive experience with the program attendees

○ Lack of childcare

○ Difficulty traveling to the volunteering location

○ I did not receive enough training

○ I did not receive enough feedback from staff

○ I was satisfied with my experience, but decided I wanted to try something new

○ Other: _____

24. **Do you have any suggestions to improve the program/volunteer experience?**
Mark only one oval.

○ Yes

○ No   *Skip to question 25.*

25. **Please select all that apply. My suggestions to improve the program/volunteer experience are:**
Mark only one oval.

- ( ) To have more volunteer training
- ( ) To have regular check ins
- ( ) To have more volunteers
- ( ) To have more staff support
- ( ) Other: _____

26. **If you have any additional comments, please add them in the space below:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

27. **Would you be interested in participating in an interview about your experience with Empowerment Squared?**
Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No   *Skip to question 28.*

28. **Please provide your name and email/phone number below for the research team to contact you.**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

29. **Thank you for participating in this survey. The information you have provided will help Empowerment Squared improve their volunteer program. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the research team lead at the provided email address (smiths73@mcmaster.ca).**
Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Done   *Stop filling out this form.*

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Appendix C

Introduction and Consent

Hello, my name is [your name]. I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm working on a Research Shop project on behalf of Empowerment Squared. The purpose of this research is to explore what motivates volunteers to volunteer with Empowerment Squared and what factors motivate them to keep volunteering. This study involves: (1) focus groups with Empowerment Squared staff; (2) a broad survey to past and current volunteers; and (3) interviews with volunteers. The information we gather today will be used as part of our final report to Empowerment Squared.

Do you have questions about the project?

This interview will be approximately 45 minutes in length. I want to spend a few moments going over some information about our discussion today. Firstly, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will be asking. Your views and opinions are welcomed. All of your comments –both positive and negative—are important. The information we will collect today will be connected to you only as a volunteer of Empowerment Squared. Any identifying information (names, places, etc.) mentioned will be removed during the transcription process. The data from the interviews will be synthesized and the themes identified will be summarized in our final report. We strive to protect individual confidentiality. Keep in mind that we are often identifiable through the stories we tell when you are deciding what to share today. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time and are not required to answer any questions that you cannot think of an answer to, or do not feel comfortable answering. If you would like to stop participating in the focus group, please let me know.

With your permission, this interview will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what is said. All audio files and transcripts will be securely stored in a Google Drive folder that only the Research Team has access to. I will also be taking notes throughout the discussion, which are only viewed and shared among the Research Team. Only the Research Team will have access to transcripts from this discussion. The tapes and transcripts will only be used for this project and will be destroyed once the report is complete.

We ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription. If at any point you feel tired or fatigued please let us know and we can take a short break.

Do you give your consent to participate in this interview?

[Ensure the participant has verbally answered 'yes'.]

The questions in this interview will cover five areas: 1) Introductory Information; 2) the Recruitment Process; 3) Training and Duties; 4) Engagement and Retention; and 5) Concluding Remarks.

Interview Questions	
Section	*Question*
1-Introductory Information	1.1 Can you explain to me your volunteering role within Empowerment Squared (or former role)? For example, do you volunteer with Homework Circle, the Education Law Program, Sports and Recreation, etc.?
	1.11 *Prompt: What does/did your role entail?*
	1.2 Have/had you switched programs from the original program that you signed up to volunteer for? If yes, why?
	1.3 Are you currently a student? If so, are you an undergraduate or graduate student?
	1.4 Are you currently employed (full-time or part-time)?
2-Recruitment Process	2.1 How did you hear about Empowerment Squared?
	2.2 How easy or difficult did you find it to sign up to volunteer with Empowerment Squared?
	2.3 What about the program/organization motivated you to sign up to volunteer?
	2.3 Have you recommended anyone else to sign up to volunteer with Empowerment Squared? If so, who did you recommend and why did you recommend the program to them?
	2.31 *Prompt: [If yes] did they end up volunteering as well?*

3-Training and Duties	3.1 How did you find the training/orientation process?
	3.11 *Prompt: How did you find the sign up/training process in terms of length, scheduling, and ability to prepare you for your volunteer duties?*
	3.2 Are/were there any supports available to volunteers to help you complete your duties?
	3.21 *Prompt: What are/were they? Do/did you use these supports frequently?*
	3.3 Are/were there any duties that you particularly enjoy?
	3.4 Are/were there any duties that you dislike, or do not particularly enjoy?
	3.5 Do/did you feel that your roles, tasks and expectations are/were communicated effectively?
	3.51 *Prompt: [If so] How are/were they communicated?*
	3.52 *Prompt: [If not] How could they be better communicated?*
	3.6 Are/were you encouraged to share your suggestions on how to improve programming?
	3.61 *Prompt: Do/did you feel comfortable sharing your suggestions?*
	3.7 Are/were you ever given feedback on your performance?
4-Engagement and Retention	4.1 Do/did you feel appreciated for your work at Empowerment Squared (by staff, students in programs, other volunteers, etc.)? If so, in what way?
	4.11 *Prompt: Have you ever received recognition for your volunteer work (e.g., award, letter of reference, etc.)?*

	If they are currently volunteering…
	4.2 What factors have motivated you to stay with the program?
	4.21 *Prompt: Do you feel that this volunteer placement will assist with your career goals, cv, schooling, etc.?*
	4.3 How much longer do you think you'll continue to volunteer with Empowerment Squared, and why?
	If they are not currently volunteering…
	4.2 What caused you to stop volunteering with the program?
	4.3 Would you return to volunteer with Empowerment Squared? Why or why not?
	4.4 Are you currently connected to Empowerment Squared in any way (i.e., attending their events, in contact with staff, etc.)?
5-Concluding Remarks	5.1 Are there any changes you'd like to see in Empowerment Squared's volunteer program?
	5.2 Are there any other comments about volunteering at Empowerment Squared that you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your willingness to share your insights into these questions is greatly appreciated. This information will help us to better understand what attracts volunteers to volunteer their time to the programs at Empowerment Squared and what retains them. If you have any questions or comments regarding this research project, the nature of the questions being asked or ethics, please feel free to contact the team lead, Savanah, at smiths73@mcmaster.ca. Thank you again and have a great evening.