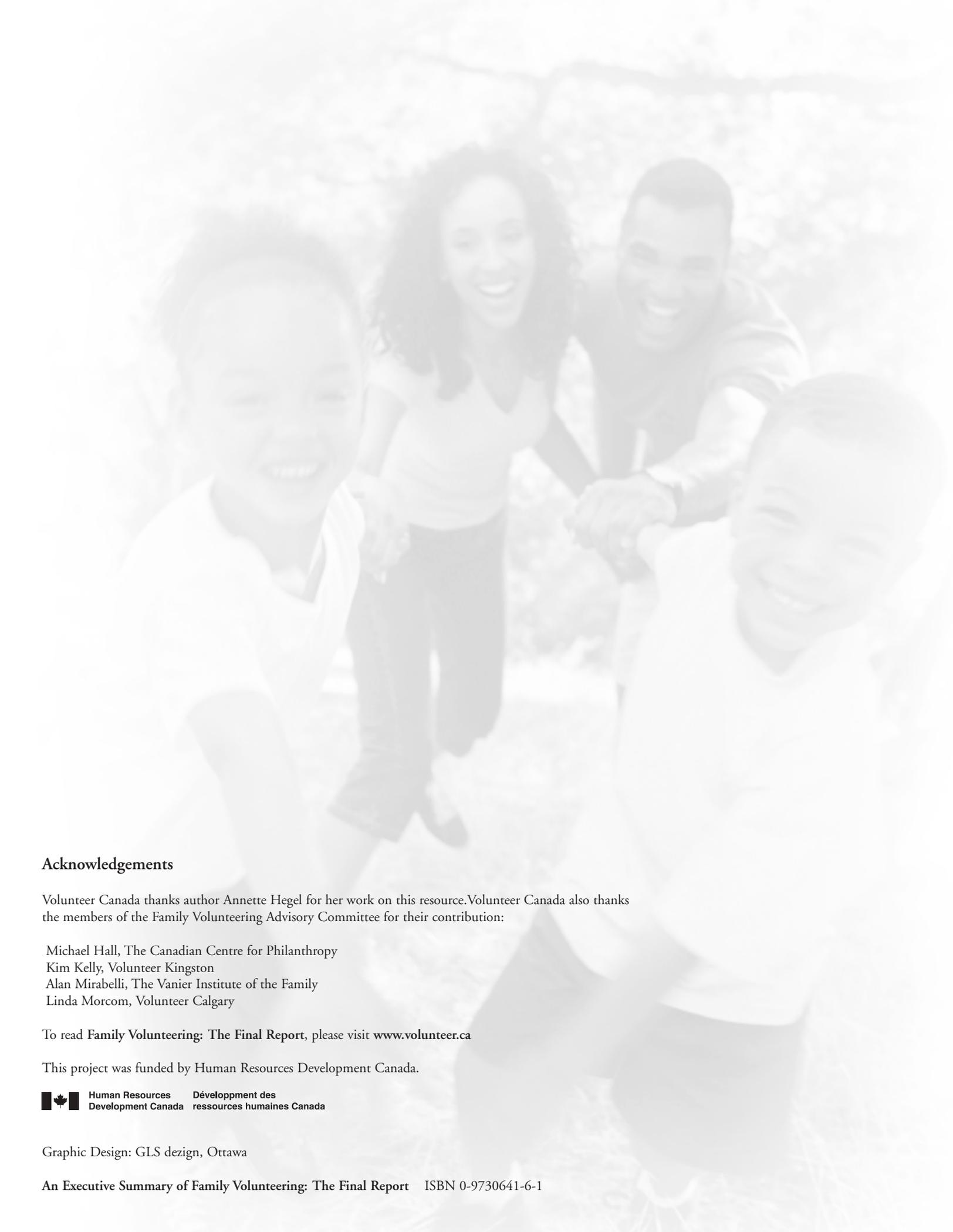




An Executive Summary
of Family Volunteering:
The Final Report



VOLUNTEER
BÉNÉVOLES
CANADA



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To read **Family Volunteering: The Final Report**, please visit www.volunteer.ca

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Introduction

Family volunteering is an established, albeit informal principle that has thus far scarcely been utilized by the voluntary sector in the targeted recruitment of volunteers for their organizations.

With the recent decline in actual numbers of one million volunteers in Canada (NSGVP 2000) it is evident that the voluntary sector needs to do more than merely react to this circumstance, but must develop proactive strategies to increase the participation of Canadian citizens in voluntary action. Family volunteering addresses the short-term predicament by increasing the volunteer pool exponentially, as well as securing volunteerism in the future: individuals who experienced volunteering as part of their upbringing are more likely to continue volunteering as adults (NSGVP 2000).

Additionally, family volunteering offers new volunteer opportunities to groups of people who may not otherwise be able to incorporate volunteering into their lives. This ability to participate allows families to spend meaningful time with each other and with their community without diminishing other aspects of family life, but instead enriching their collective experiences. The time has come for this exciting new trend to become a recognized volunteer management practice.

The family volunteering project is an initiative of Volunteer Canada that represents the organization's longstanding interest in the potential of families as catalysts for community change and of volunteering as a shared, transformative experience. This exploratory work on family volunteering in Canada offers insight into how groups of people who may not otherwise be able to incorporate volunteering into their lives can now get involved.

One component of Volunteer Canada's Family Volunteering Initiative was to conduct the National Survey on Family Volunteering. The survey was designed to identify current practices in family volunteering, assess the readiness of the voluntary sector in Canada to approach and accommodate families as volunteers, and to lead to the development of tools for the implementation of family volunteering as a formalized volunteer opportunity.

Developed with the assistance of the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, The Vanier Institute of the Family and a volunteer advisory committee, the survey was conducted in three separate parts: a nationwide, mail-in questionnaire, focus groups held in five locations across the country and telephone interviews with key informants in Quebec.

The report describes methodology and results, and also delivers an analysis of the insights gained and recommendations generated to guide the next steps of the Family Volunteering Initiative.

In determining the locations, the selection criteria applied to regional representation, ethnic diversity, as well as communities of varying sizes.

Purpose of Survey

The purpose of the survey was to gain an understanding of the voluntary sector's current organizational practices as they apply to family volunteering from the perspective of managers of volunteer resources and from individual volunteers. In addition, the research was to identify the challenges and opportunities related to family volunteering that may exist in the sector.

Survey Components

The survey consisted of three components: a mail-in questionnaire, focus groups and telephone interviews with key informants.

Questionnaire

The 28-point, self-administered questionnaire was available in French and English and organized into three sections that addressed the structure of the organization, existing volunteer opportunities and family volunteering.

It was distributed by mail to 1,500 agencies, specifically directed to the organization's manager of volunteer resources (or those responsible for managing the volunteer program). Recipients of the questionnaire represented a random selection of small, medium and large community-based organizations across the country, including communities in the North. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter outlining the project and defining "family" for the purpose of the survey.

Questionnaires were completed and returned in a two-week period with a respectable response rate of 49%.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held between January 15 and February 1, 2002, in five cities across Canada. In determining the locations, the selection criteria applied to regional representation, ethnic diversity, as well as communities of varying sizes.

Two focus groups were held in each location: one agency focus group with 10 to 12 managers of volunteer resources and one volunteer focus group with eight to 10 participants who were currently volunteering or had been engaged in volunteer activity.

The objectives of the focus groups were:

- ▶ to ascertain what organizations understand family volunteering to be;
- ▶ to learn more about the capacity of agencies to respond to the increasing demand of family groups wishing to volunteer;
- ▶ to determine barriers to family volunteering and how to overcome them in order to implement or enhance family volunteering.

Telephone Interviews

Eight individual telephone interviews were conducted in Quebec applying a somewhat abridged version of the format and questions from the focus groups. The individuals were chosen by the Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec, according to the same criteria as the focus groups. The interviews were held to capture the experience and views unique to Quebec on the topic of family volunteering.





Survey Responses

A total of 740 questionnaires were returned, with the majority completed by those directly responsible for volunteer management in their organization. Eighty-four managers of volunteer resources as well as volunteers participated in the focus groups and telephone interviews. Overall, there was a satisfactory representation of organizations according to size, field and location.

Family Volunteering: The Final Report breaks the findings into two chapters: those of the questionnaire, and those of the focus groups and telephone interviews. The questionnaire results paint a very clear picture of the current state of family volunteering as addressed by organizational structures, whereas the focus groups reflect the individual experience of managers and volunteers from within that organizational structure.

The results confirmed three general assumptions:

- (1) family volunteers do exist and operate in almost all organizations;
- (2) efforts made to formally incorporate family volunteers as a group are at this point, uncommon;
- (3) judging from the strong positive reaction within the voluntary sector to the survey, there is a tremendous interest in family volunteering as a viable opportunity for the sector's future operations.

Principal Findings

The understanding of family volunteering varies greatly, nonetheless there is general consensus that the provided definition is a practical one. While 60% of organizations state that they have family volunteers, only 15% have programs actually designed for that group. However, 55% indicated that the possibility of incorporating a family volunteering program was likely in the next two years.

Benefits of Family Volunteering

There is general agreement that family volunteering benefits both organizations and volunteers greatly. Organizations see that they can increase the diversity and size of their volunteer pool, increase their impact in the community, expand their range of services, and increase their profile in the community. Family volunteering is viewed overall as providing an important opportunity to develop values for future generations by instilling good social conscience. It is also seen as contributing to healthy family connections by offering venues that give family members a common interest.

Barriers to Family Volunteering

Perceived barriers were numerous, though mostly of a logistical nature. The major issues brought up by the respondents were as follows:

- ▶ staffing and funding issues were identified as the greatest challenges to overcome in order to successfully implement family volunteering programs;
- ▶ there is a lack of best practices with which to address family volunteering;

Participants in the research demonstrated a great interest in being able to meet and discuss new and innovative ideas...

- ▶ constraints on the amount of time that is available to family members to actually volunteer as a unit;
- ▶ including children raised questions regarding supervision, liability and confidentiality.

Requirements for Implementation of Family Volunteering Programs

In order to implement family volunteering programs, organizations felt that they needed to create interesting and socially relevant programs that were appropriate for all age groups. The tasks must be fun and the schedules, flexible.

In addition to creating interesting programming for a diverse volunteer base, agencies felt they needed to evaluate the level and type of demand, assess internal organizational capacity (staffing, staff support, structure and resources), invest time in careful planning (volunteer recruitment, training etc.), and create flexible volunteer program schedules. Recognition specific to family volunteering was also seen as very important.

Participants in the research demonstrated a great interest in being able to meet and discuss new and innovative ideas and sought the support of Volunteer Canada to provide guidance and consistency in implementing a family volunteering program.

Recommendations

To properly ready the voluntary sector and successfully implement family volunteering programs, organizations require the following tools:

- ▶ a manual on the benefits and challenges of family volunteering;
- ▶ training materials on how to implement a family volunteering program;
- ▶ awareness building with national organizations to encourage them to promote family volunteering to their provincial and local branches;
- ▶ a public awareness campaign to encourage families to volunteer.

