

Building and Sustaining Volunteer Engagement at the Writers' Exchange

By

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to examine different volunteer engagement and retention strategies with the aim of helping the Writers' Exchange continue to build and sustain its literacy mentor program. The organization also sought to focus its efforts on fostering increased diversity amongst its volunteers in the expansion of its literacy mentor program.

Non-profit organizations are an essential facet of civil society, working to address gaps unfilled by the public and private sectors. Many organizations rely on volunteers to support various aspects of their work, from programming to service delivery to fundraising. Engagement and retention are critical areas of focus for organizations that depend on volunteers.

Established in 2011, the Writers' Exchange is a small non-profit organization that operates in-school, after school, and summertime literacy programs for school-aged inner-city kids in East and South Vancouver, British Columbia. The service delivery model of the organization is dependent on volunteers, whose role as literacy mentors is to provide personalized attention and support to the kids participating in their programs. As the Writers' Exchange has continued to grow, the primary barrier preventing the expansion of programs and services was ensuring sufficient levels of volunteer engagement and retention.

The primary research question for this project is:

1. How can the Writers' Exchange work to support their volunteers in order to sustain their engagement and build relationships with new volunteers?

Secondary research questions included:

2. What factors motivate individuals to become literacy mentors and how can their experiences bolster the volunteer program at the Writers' Exchange?
3. How can the Writers' Exchange engage with prospective volunteers and build relationships that promote diversity and support inclusion in its literacy mentor program?

Methodology and Methods

This research project employs a case study methodology, a qualitative research approach that seeks to investigate multiple sources of data to inform a highly contextual understanding of a particular phenomenon. Grounded in a feminist research praxis, this research orientation acknowledges the researcher's own positionality and reflexivity and how it mediates the research itself.

Utilizing a multiple method design, both primary and secondary research techniques were employed in this case study of the literacy mentor program. Methods and tasks involved: a review of the literature pertaining to volunteer engagement, retention, and diversity; four key informant interviews with five Writers' Exchange staff members; one focus group with nine contemporary literacy mentors; and a document review of all organizational materials pertaining to volunteering with the organization.

Overview of Findings

- **Literature Review:** While the literature demonstrated many reasons motivate volunteerism and the desire to continue volunteering long term, the most significant discovery during this research process was that the motivation to volunteer, and continue volunteering, is mediated by individual (dispositional) and organizational factors (Penner, 2002)The research thus generated a conceptual framework drawing intersectional factors, which account for the role of broader social systems, institutions, and relations of power also interact with dispositional and organizational influences to mediate volunteering.
- **Document review:** The purpose of the document review was to examine the function of organizational materials within a broader volunteer engagement strategy. Documents reviewed reflected the organization's efforts to formalize the literacy mentor role with supporting texts that were informative, practical, engaging and clear. The document review affirmed findings uncovered in the key informant interviews and focus group that emphasized the importance of role clarity, facilitated positive relationships between literacy mentors, staff, and kids, and encouraged an open and inclusive environment for everyone.
- **Key informant interviews:** Interviews demonstrated that employees believed literacy mentors played foundational roles in Writers' Exchange programming and prioritized building strong connections between mentors, staff, kids, and community partners. The interviews highlighted that an essential aspect of literacy mentors' success was in building a strong sense of role clarity through effective volunteer orientation and training. The significance of flexibility in the literacy mentor role was also emphasized. Interviews revealed that the Writers' Exchange devotes significant time and resources towards supporting their volunteers through organizational tools such as debriefing sessions and personalized feedback. While the organization is successful in engaging prospective literacy mentors through the recruitment of students via post-secondary institutions and programs, only about one-third of volunteers remain with the organization for one year or more. By comparison, longer term volunteers tend to be older working professionals, signalling the gap between engagement strategies and patterns of retention.
- **Focus Group:** Key findings from the focus group reflected an emphasis on role clarity and role flexibility in facilitating positive volunteer engagement. The significance of relationship building with other mentors, kids, and staff was also acknowledged as supporting volunteer engagement and retention. Findings demonstrated a strong correlation between role clarity and role satisfaction, mitigated by the understanding that flexibility was crucial for ongoing volunteer engagement. The focus group highlighted that longer-term volunteers shared many salient qualities that yielded insights on volunteer engagement and retention but produced limited analysis concerning the research question regarding diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the research objective of continuing to build and sustain the literacy mentor program at the Writers' Exchange through volunteer engagement and retention practices, with a secondary focus on how to support greater diversity within the program. Recommendations are grouped into two categories: those aimed to bolster engagement and retention, and those that support greater diversity and inclusion within the literacy mentor program. Recommendations are structured by ease of implementation, beginning with those that are more straightforward or constitute one-time changes, progressing to more complex, ongoing measures that may involve more time and organizational resources.

Recommendations to Bolster Volunteer Engagement and Retention

- 1.** Increase place-based recruitment activities by putting up volunteer recruitment notices in nearby neighbourhoods and community hubs to solicit local volunteers.
- 2.** Center the importance of literacy mentors on the Writers' Exchange website by featuring information about literacy mentorship in the "About" section alongside the organization's mission and objectives.
- 3.** Increase incentives that may promote and reward longer term commitment to volunteering.
- 4.** Partner with youth-driven community organizations and schools to encourage stronger youth involvement in the literacy mentor program.
- 5.** Host a focus group annually with literacy mentors, with an emphasis on longer term mentors so the organization can attune itself to the specific needs and challenges of long-term volunteers.
- 6.** Track volunteer demographics and statistics quantitatively to analyze data for patterns of engagement and retention.
- 7.** Create a formal structure for soliciting feedback from mentors on an ongoing basis through the creation of a volunteer portal on the Writers' Exchange website.
- 8.** Strategize how to incorporate episodic volunteering at the Writers' Exchange in order to leverage increased corporate and community participation.

Recommendations for supporting Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering

- 1.** Centre the importance of diversity and inclusion in the Writers' Exchange website and communications by publicizing its Diversity and Inclusion policy in the "About" and "Volunteer" sections.
- 2.** Partner with organizations that support new residents and immigrants to Canada in order to bolster connections with agencies with diverse memberships.
- 3.** Continue to strategize ways to improve accessibility for marginalized groups through a variety of measures such as the provision of bus tickets for non-student volunteers, access to training and workshops, provision of meals, and others.
- 4.** Continue to strategize ways to leverage individual and organizational privilege within the Writers' Exchange, focusing on board members and donors by establishing a scholarship program for underrepresented groups.
- 5.** Create a diversity officer/ambassador position and allocate organizational resources to diversity and inclusion practices specifically.

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1.0 Introduction

Non-profit organizations have become staples of civil society, working to address the multiple gaps that exist between the private and public sectors. Due to factors that include limited funding and income generating opportunities, full portfolios for paid staff and otherwise strained organizational resources, many non-profit organizations rely on volunteers to support various aspects of the work they perform (Garner and Garner, 2010, p. 184; Reed and Selbee, 2000, p. 571; Vecina, Chacon, Marzana and Marta, 2012, p. 292). As such, it is evident that for non-profit and civil society organizations to be successful and sustainable in fulfilling their missions, many must devote organizational resources towards fostering volunteer engagement.

1.1 Defining the Problem

The Writers' Exchange is an organization whose volunteer program is fundamental for successful service delivery. The W/E operates after-school, in-school and summertime literacy programs for inner-city children and youth in Vancouver's Eastside and South Vancouver neighbourhoods. The majority of volunteers at the Writers' Exchange serve as literacy mentors with the organization. Literacy mentors work directly with kids in a two-to-one ratio of kids to mentors, and help them with reading, writing, homework, and other activities that support literacy and education. These programs comprise the primary and majority of programming the W/E offers. The organization also produces professionally designed, illustrated chapbooks based on participants' own writings, available both online and for sale/by donation in hard copy. Each kid receives their own free copy of the chapbook to take home, and the organization regularly hosts book launches with families, mentors, and community partners (Writers' Exchange, n.d.)

The volunteer program at the Writers' Exchange has been operating since the organization first started. Referred to as the literacy mentorship program, it has involved hundreds of volunteers since the organization began in 2011. While the Writers' Exchange has continued to grow as an organization, the capacity to develop and maintain its literacy mentor program has proven challenging; sustained volunteer engagement has been highlighted as the primary barrier to program expansion within the organization (S. Hamilton, personal communication, November 22, 2018). Because the vast majority of volunteers work directly with children in a 2:1 ratio, volunteer capacity has a direct impact on programming, and children's learning and engagement. As a result, the W/E is seeking meaningful ways to increase interest in its literacy mentorship program, continue to maintain and support the volunteers currently involved with the organization, and engage a broader demographic of volunteers in order to expand the work they do. This research project seeks to address issues surrounding volunteer engagement, specifically in seeking out practices for sustaining engagement, as well as retaining and expanding the literacy mentorship program at the Writers' Exchange in order to continue the development of literacy programming for kids in East Vancouver. Additionally, the organization is seeking strategies to appeal more broadly to diverse groups in soliciting new literacy mentors.

1.2 Project Client

The Writers' Exchange is a non-profit organization whose mission is to get inner-city kids excited about reading, writing, and their own potential (Writers' Exchange, n.d.). Formally established in 2011, the W/E was co-founded by program directors Sarah Maitland and Jennifer MacLeod as a community response to the need for free, fun, accessible literacy programming in Vancouver's Eastside (Writers' Exchange Annual Report, 2014, p. 3). Designed to serve youth between the ages of six and eighteen, the

W/E opened its doors on East Hastings street and Campbell avenue in September 2013, working with nearly 400 kids during its first year of operation. The organization continues to grow each year, now working with approximately 700 kids, 250 literacy mentors, seven full and part-time staff, various contractors, and comprises an annual operating budget of \$456,118 (The Writers' Exchange Annual Report, 2018, p. 3). All participants are children who have been referred to the organization by program partners, which are primarily school teachers and educators, and referrals have continued to grow each year the W/E has been in operation (S. Hamilton, personal communication, November 22, 2018). The Writers' Exchange programs are creative, collaborative, and community-based, and vary each school semester. As their programming has expanded, so has the need for reliable volunteers who can commit to being literacy mentors for a minimum of one school semester, or three to four months.

The primary client contact for this project is Sarah-Jane Hamilton, the manager of volunteer engagement and development at the Writers' Exchange, who is responsible for overseeing the literacy mentor program, including communications, administration, and grant-writing. The relevance of this research project for the Writers' Exchange is in its contribution towards a better understanding of what engages and motivates W/E volunteers, and more broadly, to better understand how an organization can grow and develop its volunteer program in a sustainable manner that benefits all stakeholders (Tengblad and Oudhuis, 2019, p.9). This report will be used within the agency to inform the Writers' Exchange staff and board of the strengths of their literacy mentorship program and provide insight into how to make it more robust, sustainable, and diverse as the organization continues to grow.

1.3 Project Objectives and Research Question

The purpose of this project is to gain insight into the literacy mentor program at the Writers' Exchange, with the goal of helping to maintain and expand on the programming currently offered. Specifically, this project seeks to:

- Bolster the volunteer engagement strategy of the Writers' Exchange through an analysis of related literature and practices, an organizational document review, and through primary research conducted with both volunteers and staff at the Writers' Exchange;
- Make practical, tangible, actionable recommendations on how to build, sustain, and support volunteerism at the Writers' Exchange

The primary research question of this project is:

How can the Writers' Exchange work to support their volunteers in order to sustain their engagement and build relationships with new volunteers?

Secondary research questions include:

- What factors motivate individuals to become literacy mentors and how can their experiences bolster the volunteer program at the Writers' Exchange?
- How can the Writers' Exchange engage and build relationships that promote diversity and support inclusion in its literacy mentor program?

1.4 Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this project, primary research topics and commonly used terms are defined to ensure clarity in this report. Associated terminology of the core themes surrounding volunteer engagement, satisfaction, and diversity will be discussed throughout this research project, as some terms overlap or are used interchangeably. While informal volunteering amongst Canadians is demonstrably higher than organizational volunteering (Vezina and Crompton, 2012, p. 37), volunteering in an organizational capacity is the focus of this project. Weaving together works of many noted authors studying volunteerism (MacNeela, 2008; Penner, 2002; Vezina & Crompton, 2012), **volunteering** can be defined as a sustained prosocial interaction that is undertaken in an organizational context and performed without financial compensation or monetary benefit. This definition remains broad in terms of scope because volunteering can take many forms in terms of tasks, duties and responsibilities, among other factors.

The concept of engagement is somewhat imprecise because it often includes both the recruitment phase as well as the initial acts of volunteering. **Engagement** in this project can be defined as the harnessing of volunteers to their roles, resulting in a positive, fulfilling relationship to one's work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Harp et al., 2017; Huynh et al., 2012). **Retention** can be characterized as the individual commitment to remain with an organization for an extended period of time, as well as an organizational climate that promotes the intention to remain (Cnaan and Cascio, 1999; Penner, 2002; Vecina, Chacon, Marzana and Marta, 2012). In the particular context of the Writers' Exchange, they strive to retain literacy mentor volunteers for the duration of a school year or more. For the purposes of this report, sustained retention will be considered as volunteering with the W/E for one year or more.

Diversity gained popular usage as a term in the 1990s, and can be broadly understood as the variety of ways in which people differ. While a number of models exist that conceptualize diversity, a common tool that has been used to understand its nuances and complexities is Gardenswartz and Rowe's "Four layers of diversity" (2003). The model, pictured below, includes personality, internal dimensions, external dimensions, and organizational dimensions as distinct components of diversity that exist within the individual.

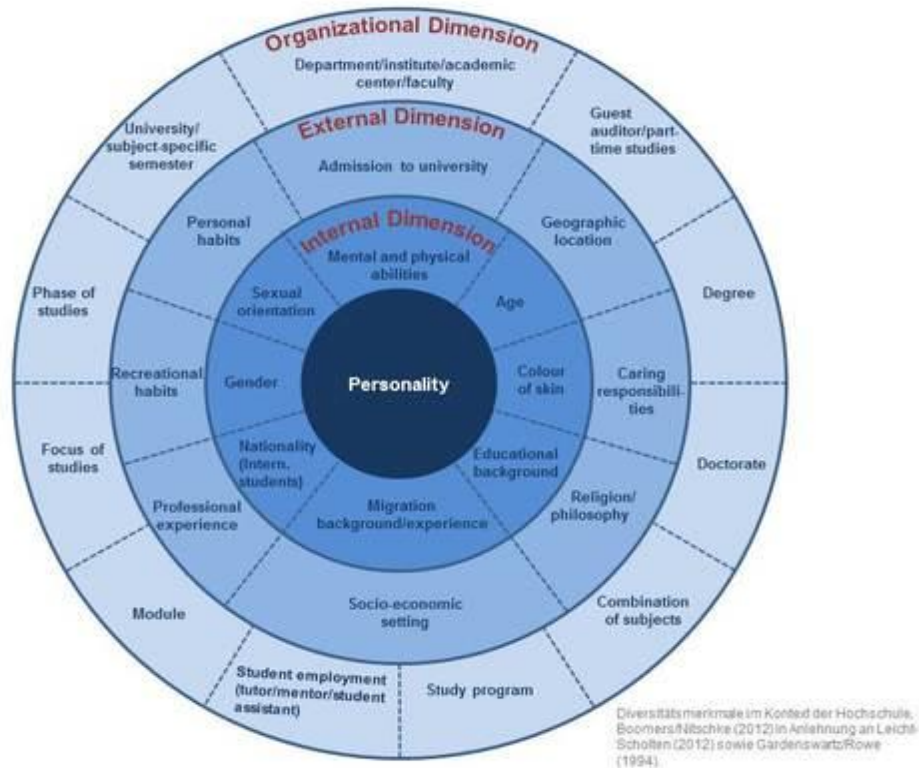


Fig. 1 Gardenzwartz & Rowe's Four Layers of Diversity

In the context of this report, the organizational objective of increasing diversity within the literacy mentor program refers more explicitly to increasing the participation of currently underrepresented groups such as people of colour, Indigenous people, high school-aged youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2SIA people. This project employs the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion's definition of terms. **Diversity** is defined as the unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics individuals possess (CCDI, 2019). **Inclusion**, a related term, is defined as the creation of a culture that strives for equity and embraces, values, and respects difference (CCDI, 2019). In recent years, the concept of "diversity and inclusion" has gained traction in contemporary literature and has become the term used most widely in organizational contexts, as it refers to both the individual and collective conceptions of diversity. **Diversity and inclusion** as a cogent concept is defined as "capturing the uniqueness of the individual; creating an environment that values and respects individuals for their talents, skills and abilities to the benefit of the collective" (CCDI, 2019). Diversity, inclusion, and diversity and inclusion are related concepts that will be employed consistently throughout this project and will be discussed further as an important theme within the literature.

Diversity and inclusion within an intersectional framework prompts the consideration of how individual differences are shaped and informed by power relations, as "there is much theoretical and empirical support for the notion that paying attention to differences in power and status is critical for understanding diversity in organizations" (Ely and Thomas, 2001, p. 231). **Intersectionality** can be defined as the ways power relations contribute to and shape individual volunteers based on their distinct identities as understood through characteristics such as race, class, socioeconomic status, gender, and other factors (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). The implications of considering diversity and inclusion within an intersectional framework for the W/E's literacy mentorship program pertains to how to facilitate the increased participation of people with marginalized identities to volunteer with the organization by removing barriers.

1.5 Background

Responding to gaps in the public education system, the Writers' Exchange was founded not only to help inner-city children with their reading and writing, but to serve as a community hub where kids could feel safe, supported, and have access to healthy food and snacks. Generating a revenue of \$466,190 in 2017, less than 10% of the Writers' Exchange revenues came directly from government funding, while 42% came from individual donors and 49% from foundations and corporations (Writers' Exchange Annual Report, 2017-2018, p. 2). The Writers' Exchange tracks its in-kind donations and recorded over 6,570 volunteer hours in the 2017-2018 school year, a testament to the crucial role volunteers play in the organization. The Writers' Exchange recognizes the important role played by their volunteer literacy mentors in ensuring programs are run successfully and strives to demonstrate appreciation for their volunteers through mentorship, training, and other opportunities, demonstrating how value can be expressed through non-monetary benefits (S. Hamilton, personal communication, November 22, 2018; Volunteer Canada, 2018, p. 8).

While there is a limited number of organizations that offer literacy programming for kids in the Lower Mainland, they operate in different regions and schools, whereas the Writers' Exchange is focused almost exclusively in East Vancouver. In tandem with the goal of increasing literacy, the organization focuses on the mentorship aspect of their programs to foster positive adult role models for kids (S. Hamilton, personal communication, April 9, 2019).

The Writers' Exchange is located in the Strathcona/Downtown Eastside community, an area that is accessible to the demographic it serves. Its location helps to foster connections with the other community organizations it partners with, such as RayCam Community Centre, KidSafe, and eight participating public elementary and high schools, including XP'EY, an Indigenous-focused elementary school. However, the capacity to remain in its location has proven challenging due to the increase in development and gentrification of the area, and the Lower Mainland in general (Chiang, 2017). Community hubs such as the Writers' Exchange are place-based, and gentrification has impacted the ability of many local non-profits to operate in brick-and-mortar locations, as leases and rents increase and privately-owned businesses move in (Burnett, 2014, p. 157).

The Writers' Exchange narrowly avoided eviction when the building they are situated in was purchased by a wealthy business and real estate developer in 2013. The precarity of small non-profit organizations in Vancouver, even those deemed successful, is extremely visible in the ongoing real estate squeeze and associated challenges of finding affordable rent (Central City Foundation, 2013, p. 3). Under the auspices of terms such as "reinvigoration," "development," and "gentrification," the Downtown Eastside has been a hotbed of activity and dissent over how to responsibly plan for growth within a community with many low-income residents, in a city that is increasingly tight on space (Dobson, 2004, pg. 29; Megaphone Magazine, 2012). Through a public campaign and strategic advocacy efforts, the Writers' Exchange was spared from eviction and was ultimately the only tenant able to remain under the building's new ownership. This win was largely related to their success as an organization in garnering strong community support, and leveraging advocacy efforts from a volunteer with significant experience and strategic partnerships in the real estate business (S. Hamilton, personal communication, November 22, 2018).

Another issue vital to the context of the Writers' Exchange was the Supreme Court of Canada's 2015 decision to reinstate bargaining rights for the BC Teachers' Federation regarding classroom size and composition (British Columbia Teacher's Federation, n.d.). Although this decision did not impact the programming offered by the Writers' Exchange directly, it did have a ripple effect on volunteer capacity. After the initial court decision, some literacy mentors left the organization because they were able to

secure paid teaching positions, which resulted in a temporary shortage of volunteers. Fortunately, the reduced number of literacy mentors was only for a brief period of time, and the court decision likely contributed to the expansion of volunteering within the organization overall, as education-related jobs increased in British Columbia, making those positions more tenable for university-educated individuals seeking volunteer and work experience (S. Hamilton, personal communication, March 11, 2019).

1.6 Organization of Report

This report will be organized into seven chapters as follows: the first chapter introduces the project client, identifies the research problem, provides context for the research question and explains the project objectives. The second chapter is a literature review of the associated research on related topics, highlighting the main themes of the report provides a conceptual framework for considering the specific research questions of this report. The third chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology and methods used to conduct the research. The fourth chapter of the report provides an exhibition of research findings from primary research conducted in key informant interview, a focus group and a document review. The fifth chapter elaborates on research findings, including a discussion and analysis of volunteer engagement, retention, and diversity. The sixth chapter of the report provides recommendations for the Writers' Exchange and its literacy mentorship program, and the final chapter provides a brief summary and conclusion of this research project.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

To support the Writers' Exchange in its goals to bolster its volunteer literacy mentorship program, a literature review was conducted of research related to volunteer engagement and retention, with specific attention paid to the sub-theme of developing greater diversity in volunteering. With the aims of supporting the Writers' Exchange to maintain and expand their volunteer program, understanding what motivates volunteers' initial and sustained involvement is crucial to the project's research questions. This literature review contributes to a better understanding of volunteer engagement strategies, and can inform how to support a more diverse and inclusive volunteer engagement strategy.

The literature review for this project is based primarily on peer-reviewed academic articles, found in online journals accessed through the University of Victoria's online library, Summon, as well as through publicly accessible search engines such as GoogleScholar and SAGE Publishing. The majority of the sources reviewed are contemporary, although some research, ideas and conceptual models can be linked to earlier studies of volunteerism and organizational management in the 1980s and 1990s.

The literature review demonstrated that many of the concepts and topics regarding volunteer engagement and retention are interrelated, which will be discussed in further detail in this chapter. Journals of primary relevance included *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, the *Journal of Community Psychology*, and *The International Third Sector Research* database. Additional supporting sources were found in journals of social issues, social psychology, community psychology, nonprofit and voluntary sector studies, volunteer management studies, social policy and administration, behavioural psychology, organizational behaviour, and human resource management.

The human resources-focused *International Journal of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* provided key resources for the secondary research question. Government publications and resources were used to

assess volunteer statistics and demographic data from Statistics Canada, as well as the Government of Canada's Voluntary Sector Initiative website and resource list. Many publicly available sources and non-profit organizations relied on data presented in the Government of Canada's Report on Giving, which was published in 2015 using 2013 census data.

An examination of grey literature was also conducted to elaborate and support academic sources. Grey literature in the context of this report refers to non-profit management websites such as Volunteer Now, Volunteer Canada, Volunteer Weekly, and Nonprofit Quarterly, as well as various community organization websites. While there is a multitude of resources about volunteer engagement, and a significant array of literature on the broad topic of diversity and inclusion, there is little research on diversity and inclusion in the context of volunteering specifically. The importance of a cross-disciplinary literature review that included grey literature was crucial for identifying and filling this gap in the academic literature. Volunteering was examined in relation to other types of "helping" work, and disciplines such as nursing, public health, and social work were explored with the aim of compiling useful analyses to support diversity in volunteering contexts. This aspect of the literature review was undertaken with a focus on substantive strategies for the engagement and recruitment of diverse and underrepresented groups.

Terms and keywords that were used to search for literature included: volunteer engagement, volunteer retention, volunteer sustainability, volunteer recruitment, diversity in/and volunteering, diversity and inclusion in volunteering, increasing diversity in volunteering, targeted recruitment, targeted volunteer engagement, volunteering and organizational constraints, volunteer motivation, volunteer satisfaction, volunteer burnout. Some of the search terms emerged from the literature as interrelated concepts that fell within the general scope of the research topics; for example, what is referred to as retention in this research project is referred to as: length of service (Penner and Finkelstein, 1998), intention to continue (Huynh, Metzger and Winefield, 2012), organizational commitment (Grube and Piliavin, 2000) and sustained volunteerism (Nencini, Romaioli and Meneghini, 2015). In areas where the literature yielded fewer results, such as diversity and inclusion in volunteering, the search field was widened to include diversity and inclusion in organizations, human resource management, and the workplace.

2.2 Volunteer Engagement and Retention

Although the Writers' Exchange does have some sporadic and episodic volunteers, the organization is primarily focused on developing and maintaining relationships with volunteers who are involved with their literacy mentorship program. From a practical perspective, volunteer recruitment can be a time-consuming and costly enterprise, therefore retaining volunteers is a pragmatic and efficient use of organizational resources (Garner and Garner, 2011, p. 813; Hager and Brudney, 2004, p. 9).

Much of the literature on engagement and retention focuses on both the interaction between the individual and organizational aspects of volunteering (Grube and Piliavin, 2000; Moreno-Jimenez and Hidalgo, 2010; Nencini et al., 2016; Penner, 2002). The literature demonstrates a variety of ways that scholars have come to consider volunteer engagement in non-profit contexts, both in terms of individual volunteer behaviour and traits, as well as the organizational factors that shape the volunteer experience, evaluated in both qualitative and quantitative studies. To illustrate these concepts, some of the theoretical frameworks and models used to measure volunteer engagement and retention relevant to this research project will be discussed.

The Jobs Demands-Resources Model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) measures engagement in terms of the demands placed on volunteers versus the resources gained from volunteering. Demands can be defined as barriers to the work, such as skillsets not fitting the role or tasks being asked of volunteers, interpersonal conflict, or pressure to volunteer more than a person is able to. Conversely, resources are described as aspects of the work that facilitate positive outcomes such as having good working relationships with staff or clients, feeling well-suited to the tasks being asked of volunteers, or gaining additional skills and knowledge through volunteering (Harp et al., 2017, p. 444). Deci and Ryan's (2000, p. 68) Self-Determination Theory suggests that many individuals have a natural tendency to strive towards personal positive growth, and are self-motivated to meet this psychological need through personality integration and prosocial behaviour, such as volunteering. This phenomenon has been assessed in volunteer contexts via the Community Self-Service Efficacy scale, which suggests people gain satisfaction through service activities that benefit their communities (Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon & Yoder, 1998). Huynh, Metzger and Winefield's (2012) Four-Dimensional Connectedness Scale (4DCS) outlines a four-factor structure that influences volunteers' work engagement, assessing individuals' organizational connectedness based on: other workers, recipients, tasks, and values.

Examining the motivations that incite people to initially volunteer with an organization and then continue volunteering is an area of interest for this research because it is linked explicitly to volunteer engagement and retention. There is an abundance of literature regarding this topic, and an assortment of findings based on the differing research methodologies and demographics involved (MacNeela, 2008; Nencini, Romaioli and Meneghini, 2016; Penner, 2002; Vecina, Chacon, Marzana and Marta, 2013). A particularly useful way of considering volunteer motivation is in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic value. Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations for volunteering are highlighted as impacting engagement and retention differently. Intrinsic, or autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000, pp. 70-71) is defined as incitement to volunteer based on personal values aligning with an organization – essentially, that volunteering is satisfying in and of itself. Extrinsic, or controlled motivation can be characterized as volunteering motivated by a perceived benefit or tangible reward. Although engagement and retention are often discussed in tandem, the study of volunteer motivation demonstrates the importance of considering these concepts as distinct from one another, as individual motivation to volunteer can change over the course of volunteering with an organization. While intrinsic or extrinsic values might motivate initial engagement, organizational factors such as relationships built with staff and other volunteers, or the satisfaction gained from working with clients can motivate continued volunteering. Penner's (2002, p. 64) study of volunteer motivation highlights the initial recruitment stage as being critical for sustained engagement, suggesting that a variety of conceptions of volunteer motivation, engagement, and retention are apparent in the literature, highlighting the need for further investigation to address the specific aims of this research project.

The literature on engagement and retention also highlights how specific qualities of an organization can shed light onto understanding the volunteer experience. Organizational barriers (Penner, 2002), organizational climate (Nencini et al., 2016), organizational connectedness (Huynh et al., 2012), and organizational constraints (Harp, Scherer and Allen, 2017) are related concepts that highlight the importance of considering an organization both in terms of its structure and systems as well as its human resource capacities. With respect to volunteer roles within an organization, Nencini et al. (2015, p. 629) found that volunteer tasks did not necessarily have a significant impact on sustained participation and overall volunteer satisfaction, while Huynh et al.'s (2012, p. 1058) 4DCS model would suggest tasks are one of multiple factors that influence engagement. The simultaneous existence of positive and negative sentiments that volunteers may hold about their role has also been studied, such as feeling emotional exhaustion alongside personal accomplishment (Moreno-Jimenez & Hidalgo, 2010, p. 1811), complicating the notion of a binary conception of volunteer engagement and satisfaction. These complexities highlight the relevance of Penner's interactionist model (2002) by demonstrating that engagement is more nuanced than simply engaging in volunteer activities because it is enjoyable, and

ceasing to volunteer if it becomes challenging. Huynh et al. (2012) cite organizational connectedness as a primary reason fueling volunteers' intention to stay with an organization, while Reeb et al. (1998) found that volunteers' individual beliefs about their capacity to make a difference in their communities is a significant factor for retention. Numerous motivations for volunteer engagement and retention are identified in the literature, and they are not static, linear, or uniformly understood.

Management practices emerged as a critical sub-theme of volunteer engagement and retention, cited by many authors as a specific aspect of the organizational environment that can impact sustained volunteerism, even when leaders/managers do not have direct contact with volunteers (Cnaan and Casio, 1999; Moreno-Jimenez and Hidalgo, 2010; Nencini et al., 2015). The significance of open and adaptive management practices is highlighted as playing a crucial role in volunteer engagement and sustainability (MacNeela, 2008, p. 134; Moreno-Jimenez and Hidalgo, 2010, p. 1800). Managers who are aware of relationship dynamics between volunteers, paid staff, and participants, and who seek to mitigate challenges, and actively improve and support positive interactions can better ensure volunteers are more engaged, committed, and willing to stay with an organization despite otherwise positive experiences (Cnaan & Casio, 1999, pp. 9-10; Nencini et al., 2015, p. 633). By the same token, volunteer mismanagement has been directly correlated with volunteers' discontinuation to work with an organization (Hager & Brudney, 2004, p. 2; Moreno-Jimenez & Hidalgo, 2010, p. 1813).

On a broader scale, a growing body of literature highlighted organizational constraints as impacting volunteer engagement and retention. Organizational constraints can be understood as components of a work (or volunteer) environment that interfere with individuals' ability and motivation to perform the tasks at hand (Harp et al., 2017, p.454). This is an important area of focus because it demonstrates that aside from the individual characteristics of volunteers, or what may motivate their participation, there are behaviours and factors within organizations themselves that impact sustained participation. Some examples of organizational constraints concern a lack of clarity or definition of volunteer roles, a lack of training for specific tasks or duties, insufficient staff or managerial support for volunteers, a failure to match volunteer skillsets to appropriate duties, or failure to mitigate interpersonal conflicts. Examining what organizational constraints exist, if any, at the Writers' Exchange will likely have a bearing on its literacy mentor program and provides crucial context for addressing how to improve it.

The significance of the organizational climate, which can include tasks performed, support from staff, and smart management practices reinforce the value of employing a case study methodology for this project. A case study orientation will necessitate the collection of primary data of volunteers, staff, and management to garner a clearer picture of the volunteer experience from all perspectives within the Writers' Exchange.

2.3 Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering

The Writers' Exchange identified that expanding their literacy mentor program to be more inclusive of a diversity of volunteers was a priority, and was thus a critical issue to explore as a secondary research question. Specifically, a review of the literature on this topic sought both analytical and prescriptive information about how to promote engagement of individuals with diverse backgrounds and identities who are not represented within the literacy mentor program currently. In the Writers' Exchange setting, this refers to prospective volunteers of diverse racial, ethnic and gender identities, as well as people from diverse economic backgrounds and people with disabilities. The Writers' Exchange has made it an ongoing organizational priority to remove all barriers for participation for current and prospective mentors (H. Wells, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

A review of the literature regarding diversity in volunteer programs produced fewer results as compared to the topics of volunteer engagement and retention, although the literature about diversity and inclusion practices in (paid) employment contexts yielded some research that could be applied to volunteering. It must be acknowledged that diversity and inclusion has different implications for paid versus unpaid work contexts, which will be explored further in the discussion and analysis section of this report. Diversity and inclusion in organizations yielded limited findings regarding volunteer programs specifically, but many of the principles of diversity and inclusion in the workplace can be adapted and integrated into volunteer contexts.

The vast majority of the literature posits that a diverse team of volunteers will enhance and improve volunteer programs and service provision across non-profit organizations, especially as the social fabric of a community, city, or country becomes more diverse (Kreitz, 2007, p. 6; The Community Toolbox, 2019; The Denver Foundation, n.d.). While greater diversity and inclusion in all areas of organizations is broadly encouraged, there is somewhat limited academic research regarding *how* organizations can build diverse volunteer programs. Aside from offering a broad range of activities in order to attract a wider range of prospective volunteers, targeted recruitment is the primary substantive strategy proposed to increase diversity in volunteer programs (Adams and Stange, 2016, p. 1; The Denver Foundation, n.d.; Volunteer Now, 2018, p. 2). Targeted recruitment involves directing organizational outreach toward building relationships directly with members of underrepresented groups to facilitate recruitment opportunities for volunteering (The Denver Foundation, n.d.) The research sub-theme of targeted recruitment is most commonly practiced in the fields of ethnography and community-based health research (Adams & Stange, 2016; Chadiha, Washington, Lichtenberg, Green, Daniels and Jackson, 2011). The recruitment strategies of community organizations that serve members of underrepresented groups were also explored, although many suggestions were context-specific to the organization, mission, geographic location, and population it serves.

Numerous authors emphasize the importance of training staff in cultural competency and cross-cultural collaboration in order to foster an inclusive agency environment (Adams & Stange, 2016; Chrobot-Mason & Abramovich, 2013; The Community Toolbox, 2019). However, there is also literature that suggests formalized diversity and inclusion training have limited effectiveness in organizational settings, contesting the notion that prescribed training is an effective way to foster inclusivity (Chavez and Weisinger, 2008, p. 331). Ultimately, much of the literature highlights that creating the capacity for a “culture of diversity” stemming from within an organization is vital in encouraging diversity within its programs and practices (Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion, 2013; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Kartolo and Kwantes, 2019). In the absence of organizational diversity and inclusion, regardless of how explicitly it is stated, the literature demonstrated that it is important for marginalized groups to feel welcome and comfortable in new organizational settings, as perceived social discrimination is often an antecedent to perceived discrimination within organizational cultures (Kartolo and Kwantes, 2018, p. 602).

Further emphasizing the role of formalized supports for diversity in organizational settings and volunteer programs, the significance of establishing and reiterating diversity and inclusion policies is highlighted in the literature (Bernstein, Crary and Bilimoria, 2015; Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion, 2013; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013, p. 786; Smith, 2005, p. 475; VolunteerNow, 2018). Developing organizational objectives around diversity and inclusion in a strategic planning process is one way of encouraging these policies (Friday and Friday, 2003). The importance of developing explicit diversity and inclusion policies in addition to ensuring that these policies are given adequate platforms are both important in building a diverse, inclusive organization. In the case of volunteer-driven programs and activities, volunteers should be made aware of these policies through organizational training materials, organization websites, and information should be relayed by program staff in person. Ultimately, research has demonstrated that when organizations prioritize diversity and inclusion in their strategic planning,

hiring, and recruitment practices, this sets the tone for an organization to appear welcoming to various individuals (Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion, 2013; Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019).

Additional strategies found to bolster organizational diversity in volunteering include: leveraging web-based technologies as a maneuver to yield a more heterogeneous sampling of prospective volunteers, such as Facebook ads (Williams & Frederick, 2015, p. 387; VolunteerNow, 2018); respondent-driven sampling, similar to snowball sampling, as an extension of targeted recruitment that involves using pre-existing participants (or volunteers) to contact their networks (Williams and Frederick, 2015, p. 387). While demographic information such as age, marital/family status, economic status, educational status, and religious affiliations are regularly measured and cited in qualitative and quantitative data of volunteer studies, other ethnographic data that demarcates differences amongst people is not typically collected or discussed. As the research concerning diversity and inclusion continues to grow, collecting a wider array of demographic data will be useful in helping researchers and organizations determine what (and who) is present, absent, and needed in their volunteer programs.

An exploration of substantive strategies to increase diversity within volunteer programs is an area of study that requires further research, with special attention paid to how different groups may volunteer in different contexts. As an example, an intersectional and ethnographic analysis of formal and informal volunteering may yield compelling insights about the volunteer landscape (Sundeen, Garcia and Raskoff, 2009, p. 946; Vezina and Crompton, 2012, p. 51). Another consideration for the pursuit of research of diversity and inclusion in volunteerism is that as demographics shift within Canadian society, the volunteer landscape is prone to change as well, becoming more diverse than previous generations (Martel, 2015, p. 5; Volunteer Canada, n.d). The relationship between an increasingly diverse population in Canada and the emerging patterns and types of volunteering that exist could yield some interesting insights for the future of volunteering.

The Writers' Exchange identified that volunteering, in some ways, can be viewed as a privileged activity insofar as it demands the time and capacity to "work for free" (S. Hamilton, personal communication, November 22, 2018). While demographic data may demonstrate that it is often white, middle or upper-class women who participate in many formal volunteer activities, the framing of volunteering as a privileged act is not a concept discussed explicitly within the literature. The comparatively minimal literature regarding diversifying volunteer programs compels this project to consider whether or not, and in what ways, volunteering may be considered a privileged practice in and of itself. Implications for this topic will be elaborated later on in this report, in the findings, analysis and future research sections.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Vital to studies of volunteerism and cited in many journal articles was Penner's interactionist theory of volunteer engagement, which will serve as a guiding conceptual framework for this project. Penner (2002, p. 450) asserts that neither dispositional nor organizational variables alone can provide a full explanation as to why individuals choose to initially volunteer or continue to volunteer for an extended period of time; instead, these variables interact. The strength of Penner's perspective is in the recognition that dispositional and organizational factors influence volunteer engagement in different ways, and to varying degrees, demonstrating the context-specific nature of volunteer engagement. To further develop this concept in response to the research questions, a focus on the intersection of identities of individual volunteers also warrants consideration within the scope of the interactionist model. Integrating an intersectional analysis of volunteer engagement expands Penner's model by highlighting how the characteristics of individual volunteers relate to a broader, systemic understanding of power and privilege that can impact individual volunteer capacities and motivations. This research project proposes

that Penner’s model of interactionism be adapted to include a conceptualization that extends beyond dispositional and organizational factors to encompass intersectional, societal and systemically-driven factors.

In the context of this research project, volunteer engagement and retention is mediated by interacting variables that include dispositional, organizational, and intersectional factors. By exploring and exposing how relations of power intersect to impact volunteers on individual and demographic levels, a better understanding of how to remove barriers for specific groups and increase diversity within volunteer programs may become more visible. The recognition that adopting an intersectional lens can bolster more inclusive participation can offer insights into increasing diversity within the literacy mentor program at the Writers’ Exchange specifically, and prospectively in non-profit volunteer sector more broadly as well (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013, p. 785).

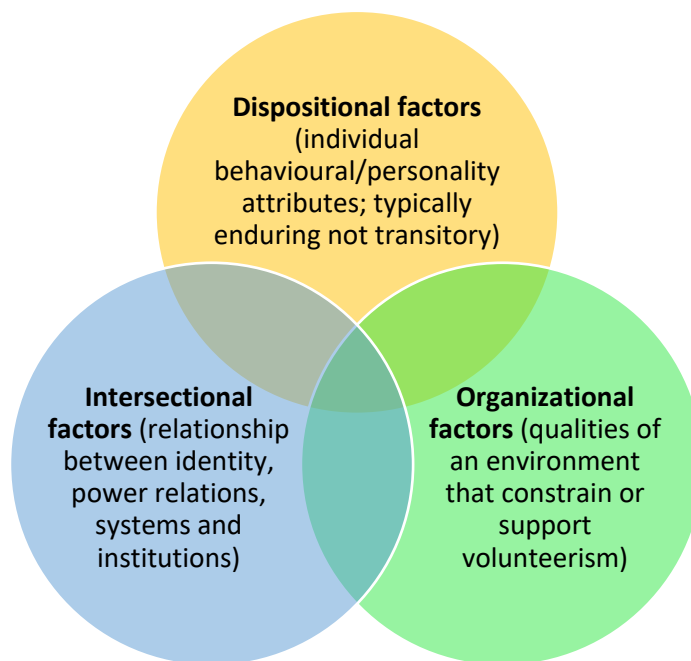


Fig. 2. Adapted Model of Penner’s Interactionist Perspective of Volunteering

3.0 Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This project employs a case study methodology, a qualitative research approach that aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Writers’ Exchange literacy mentorship program through a detailed investigation involving multiple methods. The case study methodology enables researchers to examine a “contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis” (Zainal, 2007, p. 2) by analyzing multiple sources of evidence. In this case study, the Writers’ Exchange has been successful in engaging and retaining volunteers, seeking additional strategies to continue the expansion of its literacy mentorship program. Utilizing both primary and secondary research, guided by the conceptual framework, an adapted version of Penner’s interactionist perspective (2002), this research orientation seeks to provide an in-depth, contextual analysis of the W/E’s literacy mentor program by examining the volunteer experience from multiple perspectives.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology of this project is a case study of the Writers' Exchange literacy mentorship program, comprising a multiple method design involving both primary and secondary research. The employment and analysis of multiple sources of data is a key characteristic of the case study (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1989), enabling a comprehensive picture of the case in an attempt to answer the research question(s). In this case study, the evidence compiled for analysis included key informant interviews, a focus group, a document analysis of Writers' Exchange training materials and a review of the literature of related topics.

Primary research for this project included key informant interviews of staff at the Writers' Exchange and a focus group of current literacy mentors. Secondary research included a comprehensive literature review of volunteer engagement, retention and diversity, rooted in the project's research questions. A document review of the W/E's educational and training materials for volunteers was conducted as a means of identifying prospective strengths and gaps within the literacy mentorship program.

A feminist research orientation underpins this project's methodology, taking into consideration the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher and how that mediates the research itself (England, 1994, p. 244). The researcher positions herself as a post-secondary educated white woman who works for a local non-profit organization in Vancouver. A feminist research praxis centers intersectionality as vital to understanding how power and privilege shape the volunteer landscape, emboldened by the case study methodology and conceptual framework, seeking to shed light on the particular context, processes and dynamics that inform the literacy mentorship program and the organizational efforts to bolster it (Reinharz, 1992, p. 167).

3.3 Methods and Tasks

The primary research component of this project involved semi-structured key informant interviews of Writers' Exchange staff and a focus group of volunteer literacy mentors. In-person, semi-structured interviews provide a rich source of data for case study methodologies (Gillham, 2000, p. 65). Key informant interviews are in-depth interviews with specific individuals and are useful because they harness the knowledge and expertise of these individuals to provide insight and context about their organization (Lavrakas, P.J., 2008).

Key informant interviews were conducted with the manager of volunteer engagement and the literacy mentor and development coordinator, the program director, and two program managers, who plan and lead literacy programs and regularly work alongside literacy mentors. Key informant interview questions can be found in Appendix 9.2, on page 41 of this report. The aim of the key informant interviews was to illuminate how volunteer engagement is understood, how it functions currently within the organization, and how it may expand to accommodate future organizational and programming needs. Each interview was digitally recorded and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed using talk-to-text technology, which were reviewed and verified by the researcher.

Following the key informant interviews, a focus group with literacy mentors was held. A focus group is an informal discussion amongst a group of selected individuals about a given subject (Wilkinson, 1999). Focus groups are an effective research tool for case studies because they are agile, allowing for data collection that reflects individual responses in addition to the insights derived from group discussions. Focus groups also offer the capacity for the researcher to compare and contrast differing

responses to a given question and can engender more equitable relations between researcher and research subjects (Barbour, 2007, p. 11; Liamputtong, 2015, p. 6). The focus group involved nine current and contemporary literacy mentors, two of whom were previous literacy mentors who planned to return to volunteering with the organization. Literacy mentors were initially invited by the manager of volunteer engagement and project client, Sarah-Jane Hamilton. It was mutually decided that this method of recruitment would solicit a larger pool of participants because volunteers had a pre-existing relationship with Sarah-Jane, who could establish stakeholder buy-in more easily and explain how participation would benefit the organization. The focus group session for this project lasted approximately one hour, with the recording transcribed with the same talk-to-text technology, which was reviewed and verified by the researcher. Focus group questions can be found in Appendix 9.3, on page 43 of this report.

3.4 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involved a series of steps. First, a literature review was undertaken to analyze, compare and contrast findings from the literature regarding volunteer engagement, retention and diversity. A document review of the educational and training documents the Writers' Exchange provides to its literacy mentors was also completed. A document review is a systematic analysis of organizational materials that pertain to a research topic, often combined with other research methods as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009, p. 27-28). Documents reviewed included: Writers' Exchange annual reports, a volunteer recruitment posting, the organization's diversity and inclusion policy, an example of a program manager's mentor engagement plan, and literacy mentor training materials, including its volunteer handbook, mock scenarios that literacy mentors may encounter on the job, and the literacy mentor position description and agreement. The list of documents reviewed is located in Appendix 9.4, on page 45 of this report. The purpose of this review was to compile all of the organizational materials relevant to literacy mentorship program to examine their function within a broader volunteer engagement strategy with special attention paid to gaps that may exist within these documents relevant the research questions.

Following the literature and document review, data collected from the interviews and focus group was analyzed via thematic content analysis. Understood as a foundational analytical tool, thematic content analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data (Anderson, 2007, p.1). In the context of this project, thematic content analysis was employed to organize recurring themes between focus group participants and key informants regarding volunteer engagement and retention at the Writers' Exchange. Although the interview and focus group transcripts were used to highlight emerging themes as they related to knowledge gained from the literature review, interpretation of the data is not a feature of thematic content analysis. Data interpretation will be undertaken in the discussion section of this project.

3.5 Project Limitations and Delimitations

Broadly speaking, a case study methodology limits the application of this project's findings to the organization studied, in recognition that the particular context of the Writers' Exchange has great bearing on one's understanding of it, and seeks out "specificity, exceptions, and completeness" in lieu of broadly applicable generalization (Reinharz, 1992, p. 174; Yin, 2009). It must also be acknowledged that the focus of this report is explicitly on volunteer (and not paid) work, which has practical and theoretical implications that pertain to this project's research objectives. Connected to this idea, another limitation of this project with respect to the secondary research question about diversity is that of privilege, and how considerations of individual and societally-attributed power and privilege can shape volunteer demographics, including the focus group in this case study. The nexus of privilege and volunteerism is an area of research that has not been explored deeply in the literature, and the focus group is not necessarily emblematic of the larger pool of literacy mentors who work with the Writers' Exchange. Further, this

report acknowledges that to understand W/E's literacy mentorship program more deeply, the consideration of both who does, and who does not, participate in their programming is important. While this research project aims to expose and highlight better practices for sustaining and expanding the volunteer program at the Writers' Exchange, it does not serve as a template for volunteer programs more generally, although it is possible that some of the insights and recommendations could be useful for other non-profit organizations.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings in this report are encompassed in three primary sets of data. The first data set describes findings from key informant interviews with Writers' Exchange staff, the second data set represents findings from a focus group of current and former literacy mentors, and the third data set comprises a document review of related W/E literacy mentor training materials. As indicated by the research project questions, participants were asked questions pertaining to volunteer engagement and retention, as well as general exploratory information about their roles with the Writers' Exchange. Questions pertaining to diversity and inclusion, both in an organizational context and more specifically within the literacy mentorship program were posed in key informant interviews and the focus group. A document review was then undertaken to examine organizational materials provided by the Writers' Exchange that related to the topics of engagement, retention, and diversity. These distinct sources of data are interrelated, with many common themes shared between them.

4.2 Key Informant Interview Findings

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five staff from the Writers' Exchange in November 2019. Individual interviews were conducted separately with two program managers and the programs director/co-founder of the Writers' Exchange. A joint interview was conducted with the manager of volunteer engagement and fund development, and the volunteer and development coordinator, who work closely together and whose responsibilities overlap. The length of time that the employees interviewed have worked with the organization ranged from one to eight years, with one employee (the co-founder) having worked with the Writers' Exchange since its inception. Two of the five staff interviewed had previously volunteered with the W/E as literacy mentors prior to working for the organization. All five of the staff interviewed are women, reflected by the overall organizational makeup, which includes a seven-person permanent staff whereby all employees are women (S. Hamilton, personal communication, February 18, 2020). The most prominent themes that emerged from the interviews were: the foundational role of literacy mentors in Writers' Exchange programming; the importance of cultivating relationships between staff, mentors, kids, and community partners; the significance of role clarity. Additional findings relating to patterns of engagement and retention and addressing diversity, inclusion and discrimination are also discussed.

4.2 a) The foundational role of literacy mentors

Over the course of four interviews with Writers' Exchange staff, all employees expressed that literacy mentors were essential to the organization, and that programs as they currently exist would not be possible without them; one program manager described mentors as "the key to success in our programs" (Employee 1, November 12, 2019). Literacy mentors are not a value-add for the organization; their role is built into the service model itself, which strives to provide personalized support by assigning two kids to

each mentor wherever possible in all its programs. Because literacy mentors are integral to their service model, the need for a streamlined, effective volunteer engagement and retention strategy is a constant consideration for the organization. As one employee stated, “mentors are the backbone [of the organization] and that could be a limiting factor as programs grow – if we can't find a reliable roster of people to call on” (Employee 5, November 18, 2019). Four of the staff interviewed emphasized that it was important to ensure that volunteers knew that they mattered to the organization. One employee stated:

We're constantly trying to figure out how individual (mentors) need our support. We do have a big plan as a whole, but if somebody needs a little something extra, a little something different, we try to make that happen in order to support them. (Employee 4, November 18, 2019).

All staff interviewed viewed supporting volunteers as a central objective directly related to achieving the organization’s mission. Three employees shared instances of how different mentors required differing types of support, which ranged from reference letters, scheduling accommodations, more focused attention, or other needs that enable staff to engage literacy mentors more meaningfully. These actions and supports are primarily undertaken by program managers with additional support from the manager of mentor engagement and mentor engagement coordinator as needed.

In addition to the operational necessity of mentor involvement, staff were asked to name some adjectives they would use to describe literacy mentors. The infographic below represents their responses:



Fig 3. Word cloud representing staff descriptors of literacy mentors

When asked to elaborate on the significance of the role of literacy mentors at the Writers’ Exchange, one staff shared:

I knew how important it was because I started out as a volunteer in those first couple months, and I had that feeling of “if I'm not here, who's going to be here? I'm really important to these kids.”

That's something that I've tried to really make sure we don't forget, that without the mentors we can't do our programs the way we do. (Employee 4, November 18, 2019).

Literacy mentors are central to the continued success of the Writers' Exchange, on both conceptual and practical levels, and staff acknowledge the value of their contributions in a number of ways.

4.2 b) Prioritizing relationship-building between literacy mentors, staff, kids, and community partners

Building connections between literacy mentors, staff, and kids was conveyed by all staff as an essential component of harnessing commitment to the organization; "I think to get someone from applying to actually becoming a long term mentor is about building that sense of belonging, building that feeling of connection" said one staff (Employee 3, November 18, 2019). The same employee also shared that she perceived prospective volunteers' journey from initial engagement with the organization to long-term retention was a reflection of the organization's capacity to connect with mentors on a deeper level:

We have this wonderful person who's out in the world, who's heard of the Writers' Exchange, who decides that they want to fill out an application, which is great. I think to get someone from applying to actually becoming a long term mentor is about building that sense of belonging, building that feeling of connection. And so that's what we've really been focusing on (Employee 3, November 18, 2019).

A particular activity that facilitated relationship-building between mentors and staff was the debriefing sessions that happen after the programs. All staff shared that the fifteen minute post-program debriefs that were crucial for giving mentors a platform to share insights and challenges with staff and each other, because:

It's not only the programmers hearing what's been going on personally for the volunteers that day, but it's also the rest of the volunteers getting to share in that day's experience to provide feedback to everybody else, or commiserate in the same way. It's a really nice community piece (Employee 4, November 18, 2019).

Building relationships is a tangible organizational objective that all five of the Writers' Exchange employees interviewed perceived as crucial for positive volunteer engagement and retention.

4.2 c) The significance of role clarity and flexibility for mentor success

Providing mentors with a clear understanding of what is expected from them was highlighted by all five employees during staff interviews. While the tasks and responsibilities that mentors perform are relatively clear, instilling the importance of being flexible and managing expectations was highlighted as significant by all staff. In conversation about how to address this balance, one employee said, "I've been emailing three mentors a week and trying to make sure that I'm noticing things within their shift, and providing them with feedback letting them know how well they're doing, and suggestions for them as well" (Employee 2, November 12, 2019). Another employee said:

We've found it's really important for the mentors to know their role.. [to] make sure we're setting them up for success. Those have been really big lessons we've learned in the past couple years – that managing expectations is setting them [volunteers] up for success (Employee 4, November 18, 2019).

One way of managing expectations is by ensuring that new mentors know that connecting with the kids can take time; “the kids don't necessarily give that really, initial hit of ‘I love you, you're so important,’ but when you stick around and build that long term connection, you get it back,” said an employee (Employee 4, November 18, 2019). As the organization has grown, the need to formalize the volunteer orientation process was beneficial for both staff and mentors in developing stronger role clarity. As one staff noted:

When I started, we were quite low on [volunteer] numbers and so I was leading orientations every month, sometimes every few weeks... We were kind of constantly recruiting, we didn't have deadlines for recruitment, just trying to respond to a real lack in mentors and trying to kind of deal with that in a bit of an emergency sort of situation. And that's really changed, where we have firm deadlines now for when people apply, we have two orientations per term that folks can choose one or the other to attend. It's a lot more structured (Employee 3, November 18, 2019).

By creating a more structured intake system, staff became better-equipped to provide training to mentors in a timely and organized fashion. As one example, the organization offers a workshop on how to support children with challenging behaviours, because “that content is so important and it's also a lot more useful if you've been in programs for a few weeks, and actually have a sense of what programs are like and what behaviours might come up” (Employee 3, November 18, 2019). A more streamlined volunteer engagement and recruitment strategy also meant that mentor engagement planning could be allocated to the program managers working alongside them, in lieu of being a task that was being fulfilled by multiple employees. One staff explained that program managers:

...Come up with [mentor engagement plans] themselves knowing that the goal is that we want the volunteers to feel valued and heard and seen and want to return. Having everybody come up with their own plan - you know they're actually going to do it, because they came up with it themselves and are invested in it (Employee 4, November 18, 2019).

Managing expectations can also mean managing different, and occasionally opposing, personalities within the volunteer group. As stated by one program manager:

We want everyone to feel supported, so for people who do need the structure you want to [ensure they] feel they are getting that in coming to the program. And also those [mentors] who are kind of free and want to just be here to provide support to the kids... yeah [my job is] kind of like mediating those two (Employee 2, November 12, 2019).

Elaborating on ensuring that volunteers are given the tools they need to succeed as literacy mentors, one manager acknowledged:

If we're assuming that people are coming in with no experience, we need to be ready to provide support and provide guidance and to also to recognize that the way that the Writers' Exchange works with kids might be different from other experiences that folks have had, either with their own kids, or as themselves as kids, and so really providing support and an explanation in terms of why things work the way they do and why we're successful [is important] (Employee 3, November 18, 2019).

4.2 d) Exploring diversity, inclusion, discrimination

The aim of increasing diversity within the literacy mentorship program was a secondary research question, which led to conversations about whether any staff had witnessed incidents of discrimination in

interactions at the Writers' Exchange. When asked about instances of discrimination amongst or between kids, mentors, staff or community partners, none of the staff interviewed said they had personally experienced or witnessed explicit instances of racism, sexism, or other forms of bigotry. Some staff noted that they had encountered instances where kids had been curious and direct in their acknowledgements of difference they noticed about others. Though kids' comments did not appear to be deliberately harmful, they were acknowledged by staff as learning opportunities. One employee shared a particular instance that captured this sentiment:

Kids say things simply out of not understanding and seeing something different that they don't see in their everyday lives. One of our volunteers a couple years ago was non-binary and a kid just didn't understand; "why aren't you a girl?" And they [the mentor] actually ended up explaining it really well to the kid with [my] support. I just kind of sat there and came in when necessary. The volunteer was very confident and outgoing and willing and excited to educate. But when it's something new, something different they [kids] don't see, sometimes they may make a comment that maybe they don't understand or they've heard those words [before]; they just don't understand the meaning behind what they're saying. I think it's about conversation and making sure the volunteers feel comfortable, but also making sure that it can be an open conversation [with the kids] essentially. I think we try and make the space as welcoming and inclusive for everybody, so that if something did come up, it would be definitely something we addressed right away (Employee 1, November 12, 2019).

Some staff also spoke about making concerted efforts to target diverse groups and ensure their volunteer orientations were as accessible and inclusive as possible, though staff also acknowledged that building diversity in their literacy mentor program has been a slow-going, continuous challenge. One staff noted that the organization had recently attempted to set up a focus group of Indigenous volunteers, with the aim of checking in and learning more about their experiences in the literacy mentor program. This focus group was ultimately tabled due to scheduling challenges, although a manager was able to speak with the mentors individually (Employee 3, November 18, 2019). Two employees described the goal of having former program participants (the kids) become mentors in the future, which would benefit volunteer engagement and build greater diversity in the program, as the kids attending programs at the Writers' Exchange are a more culturally and ethnically diverse group as compared to their literacy mentor counterparts.

4.2 e) Patterns of volunteer engagement, retention and attrition

Additional findings from staff interviews pertaining to the research questions included observed patterns of engagement and retention, as well as reasons people stopped volunteering with the organization. Four employees stated they observed fluctuating levels of volunteer engagement between terms, which one employee characterized as "different rhythms. Each term has its own kind of characteristics. Summer, for example is a complete turnover of volunteers where people who couldn't volunteer in other terms are now able to" (Employee 5, November 18, 2020). Staff also acknowledged that program timing itself likely impacted volunteerism; because most programs occur in-school or after-school, volunteers are required to be available during daytime or otherwise "working" hours, signalling a challenge for the organization's volunteer engagement and retention process. It was also noted that volunteer opportunities at the Writers' Exchange tend to attract a particular type of person who is not typically able to remain with the organization long-term. While the W/E attracts many post-secondary students who seek work and volunteer experiences, and are in transitional phases in their lives, one staff who has been working with the organization for over five years noted that longer term volunteers tended to be individuals with more stable careers and schedules (Employee 3, November 18, 2019).

Two staff spoke about the rate of volunteer attrition relating to issues such as geographical proximity to the programs, and mentors leaving Vancouver to pursue job opportunities elsewhere, along with other challenges associated with Vancouver's high cost of living. Staff also spoke about observing a general pattern of the Writers' Exchange attracting and engaging post-secondary students in new volunteer orientations, as recruitment and outreach activities are often hosted at post-secondary institutions like job and volunteer fairs. It was also noted that longer term volunteers tended to be people who were either retired or were working professionals who were more established in their career trajectories and had more stable and flexible schedules.

4.3 Writers Exchange Literacy Mentor Focus Group Findings

The focus group was held in November 2019 and was comprised of nine people, seven of whom currently volunteer as literacy mentors and two former literacy mentors who both stated they intended to return to the organization when their schedules/circumstances permitted it. Because the purpose of a focus group is to elicit qualitative information, it was important to ensure the group was a size that facilitated a communal discussion (Walden, 2019, p. 2). To protect their confidentiality, participants were not named in this project.

A diverse range of literacy mentors were initially invited to join the focus group. Those who were able to confirm attendance shared many salient characteristics; all mentor participants were women; all had post-secondary education or were currently attending a post-secondary institution; all appeared to be white/Caucasian-presenting; all were fluent/first-language English speakers. Five participants were working professionals (either full-time or multiple part-time/contract jobs), three mentors were retired or semi-retired, and one mentor was a full-time student. Those with work experience had currently or previously held positions in the publishing industry, in libraries, post-secondary institutions, public school education, graphic design and writing. When asked about length of service with the organization, the responses ranged from one school year (two three-month terms) to eight years, with the average length of time with the organization being approximately three years. As compared to the average length of service that individuals volunteer with the Writers' Exchange for (one to two school terms), eight of the nine participants would be considered long-term volunteers (S. Hamilton, personal communication, February 18, 2020). The participants ranged in age from early twenties to retiree-aged. Focus group participants were asked questions relating to volunteer engagement and retention, and were asked to share some of the highlights and challenges they had experienced in their time volunteering with the Writers' Exchange. Questions around diversity and discrimination were posed as well. The primary themes that emerged from the focus group discussion were the significance of role clarity, role satisfaction, and the centrality of relationship-building to facilitate organizational connectedness.

4.3 a) Role Clarity

Aligned with the responses from W/E staff during key informant interviews, the value of role clarity was a significant theme that emerged in the volunteer focus group. Two mentors shared their experiences of volunteering with other organizations, underscoring how it was important for them to feel useful as volunteers. One mentor shared that: "previously I volunteered at [another local non-profit organization] and it may be different now, but I kind of felt a bit on my own there a lot of the time... Here I've never really felt like that" (Participant 7, November 18, 2019). Having an explicit understanding of the need for flexibility within their role was also emphasized by many participants, especially in situations when mentors felt challenged by a child's behaviour or actions. Recognizing that it may not always be possible to adhere to the directives of a given activity was a valuable lesson. As expressed by one mentor:

I wouldn't be able to stay volunteering if I felt that it was absolutely necessary that [we follow the rules and] do the project. I just figure that [the kids are] here, they're having one-on-one or two-on-one attention from somebody who is nice to them – that's already really great. And then they might not want to write the project, but one little guy I worked with, he.. I could say “well, let's make a list [instead].” So we made a list, and then one day he came in and I had to make a sign. I said, “oh come on, let's make a sign,” and so we made signs. It's all we did, we put a sign on everything. And if I couldn't do that, if I felt that it was really important that that thing that they're talking about got done, when I know that the kid doesn't even care... I wouldn't be able to stay [volunteering] because I would feel too [much] like a failure (Participant 3, November 18, 2019).

Checking expectations at the door was echoed by all focus group participants, particularly when it came to situations where kids demonstrated challenging behaviours or actions, or how kids did (or did not) show their appreciation for mentors. According to one mentor:

My first shift was tough because I was with a particular group of kids. At the end [of the term] I understood that they had grown and [we had] developed a relationship, but they didn't show that, or particularly express that. It was a matter of me understanding that I had shown up consistently and that mattered to them, and that did make a difference (Participant 6, November 18, 2019).

Regarding the specific tasks performed by literacy mentors, there was a demonstrable range in the tasks, duties, and programs that literacy mentors preferred and disliked. Findings from the focus group showed that specific task preferences and dislikes were as commonly shared amongst participants as they did diverge; some mentors enjoyed the playtime between school and activity, while others appreciated the in-school programs that had more structure, for example.

4.3 b) Role Satisfaction

When asked about role satisfaction, many mentors shared that what made their role as mentors important to them, as well as what continued to draw them to the organization, was a sense of commitment to the kids they worked with. When asked if the work they did at the Writers' Exchange felt meaningful to them, one mentor stated:

I feel such a responsibility to those kids. I've been working with the same girl for five years now and she comes on Fridays to see me, and that makes me feel good. And I come on Fridays to see her, so there is that sense of a real need to come – I'm inspired... I guess in that sense of her and her family being a really integral part of the Writers' Exchange...that contribution is valuable to me. It's valuable to them (Participant 3, November 18, 2019).

Another mentor shared that being around children was an especially rewarding experience because: “you can't just be despairing when you're working with kids who are discovering things for the first time... Whatever planet we end up giving them, it's going to matter a lot. They [the kids] matter a lot” (Participant 9, November 18, 2019). About two thirds of the mentors explicitly stated that their continued work with the Writers' Exchange was directly related to their perceptions of being important figures in the lives of the kids they worked with, framing their own satisfaction in their role as volunteers as intrinsically connected to the care and attention they provided for the kids they work with.

4.3 c) Relationship building within the organization

Focus group participants shared experiences that demonstrated the importance of building relationships with kids, staff and other mentors. Five participants highlighted specific reasons about why

cultivating relationships with kids was so valuable them. Two mentors in particular, who had previous training and experience in early education, reflected on how enjoyable it was to spend time with school-aged kids, citing their otherwise low levels of interaction with younger people. Mentors also spoke about how spending time with kids by attending the same program each week built rapport with them and provided insight into how to best work with them. Referencing how certain kids respond to different ways of working, one mentor shared that “when you're with the same kids and developing relationships with [them], it's a lot easier to know what will motivate them, and sometimes that takes three sessions before you figure it out” (Participant 4, November 18, 2019).

All nine of the mentors spoke unequivocally about the value of the debriefing sessions that happened after programs, providing regular opportunities for literacy mentors to share how the program went for them. All of the focus group participants agreed that the debrief period was an important piece of the volunteer experience, because it offered a platform for sharing what had happened over the course of the program, including highlights and challenges. Debriefs provided opportunities to interface more closely with program managers to share feedback and insights, and also facilitated space for peer support amongst mentors. The debriefs served to provide mentors with a platform for sharing their tips and tricks for working with kids based on their specific needs and interests. One mentor mentioned, “I think it's good to find out what happened with the other kids in the room that you weren't working with, because you might be working with them next week”, which incited a conversation about the various challenges and successes mentors had encountered when working with different kids (Participant 5, November 18, 2019). Another mentor described the debriefs as informal but nonetheless important:

At the end of a program, we just kind of get together and go around and everybody talks about how it went for them today. And I don't always say that much, but it makes you feel like you're supported, and I find that the staff here are pretty good at that, making you feel appreciated (Participant 8, November 18, 2019).

4.3 d) Diversity, inclusion and discrimination

Mentors were asked if they had experienced any instances of discrimination, either targeted towards them, between kids, or from parents, staff or other community partners. None of the participants said they had personally encountered any instances of discrimination based on visible minority markers such as race or gender. One mentor stated that she had noticed that there were instances where some mentors disclosed their preferences to work with “better behaved kids,” her observation stemming from comments made by other mentors during the post-program debriefs (Participant 5, November 18, 2019). It is important to note that none of the mentors who participated in the focus group were part of a visible minority group, as responses may have differed if the focus group was more demographically diverse.

4.4 Document Review Findings

Writers' Exchange documents that pertained to the research topics of volunteer engagement, retention and diversity were reviewed for this report. In-house training materials provided by the Writers' Exchange to volunteers during orientation sessions were examined as a means of comparing how these tools informed the experiences discussed by mentors in the focus group. The literacy mentor handbook, literacy mentor agreement, role-playing scenarios, a volunteer recruitment posting, a mentor engagement plan and the organization's diversity and inclusion policy were all examined for this purpose.

The literacy mentor handbook was the primary reference point for volunteers, explaining the history, mission and values of the organization, along with basic program information and procedures. The handbook also featured a number of “tips and tricks” for building successful relationships with kids,

as well as problem-solving strategies for specific issues. Interspersed throughout the handbook were quotes and drawings from kids and mentors about their experiences in the Writers' Exchange programs. Role-play scenarios depicted real-life situations and challenges that could come up for mentors during programs, serving as a reference tool to prepare new volunteers for their role as literacy mentors. The literacy mentor agreement outlined the goals, time commitment and deliverables expected from people who volunteer with the Writers' Exchange. A copy of a program manager's mentor engagement plan was examined to assess how staff goals aligned with mentors' experiences.

Themes that emerged during staff interviews and the mentor focus group were evident in training materials, emphasizing the crucial role of literacy mentors in the organization, making associated tasks and responsibilities clear, explaining strategies for building relationships with the kids they work with, and emphasizing how valuable literacy mentors are to the Writers' Exchange. Implications of how these materials relate to staff perceptions of engagement and retention, as well as the mentors focus group discussion regarding these topics will be explored further in the discussion and analysis chapter.

5.0 Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this section provides an analysis of, the insights gained over the course of this research project will be discussed, which include findings from key informant interviews and the focus group, the literature review, and document review. The process of addressing the research questions produced an analysis that demonstrates the highly contextual nature of volunteering in an organizational setting, mediated by individual/dispositional factors alongside the intersectional and systemic factors that influence engagement, retention, and diversity in volunteering. By locating this analysis within a feminist research praxis, considerations of how power and privilege shape volunteering become more apparent on organizational and systemic levels. By acknowledging that organizational, dispositional and intersectional factors affect individuals' capacity to volunteer, a clearer picture emerges to identify and mitigate barriers to participation. The primary areas of focus for this analysis relate to patterns of engagement and retention at the Writers' Exchange as compared to the literature, the relationship between role clarity and role satisfaction for literacy mentors, and the essential function of good management practices in building organizational support to bolster volunteer engagement and retention. Drawing centrally from the conceptual framework, an adapted version of Penner's interactionist perspective (2002), the accomplishments and challenges experienced in the literacy mentor program emerge. The aim of this chapter is to discuss elements of the W/E's literacy mentor program that will provide a foundation for recommendations the Writers' Exchange can consider in its efforts to build, grow and sustain volunteering in the organization.

5.2 Comparing and Contrasting Engagement and Retention at the Writers' Exchange

There were many points of interest where the research findings diverged or affirmed assertions from the literature review on volunteer engagement and retention, shedding light on some of the unique features and circumstances at the Writers' Exchange. As the majority of the focus group participants have volunteered as literacy mentors on a comparatively long-term basis (three or more years), their experiences should be considered primarily in this context, which can be helpful in understanding what drives retention specifically. This also highlights the value of a case study methodology, as what might be

considered a barrier to volunteering for a different organization may function to facilitate engagement at the Writers' Exchange. Some of the challenges and successes identified in the research of the literacy mentor program are discussed below.

5.2 a) Challenges specific to the Writers' Exchange

- The engagement/retention gap: the majority of individuals who initially become engaged to volunteer do not remain with the organization long-term; only one-third of current literacy mentors have been with the Writers' Exchange for a year or more (S. Hamilton, personal communication, April 9th, 2020). As noted in the findings section, recruitment at post-secondary institutions is common, but longer term volunteers are typically older working professionals, representing the divergent nature of engagement and retention at the Writers' Exchange. While short-term volunteers are required in order to make up the numbers needed to facilitate programs, an increase in longer term volunteers would require fewer organizational resources. Focusing on retention of current literacy mentors could result in a reduced reliance on shorter term volunteers.
- Scheduling and time commitment: due to program scheduling, the vast majority of volunteer opportunities are only accessible for individuals with availability during the daytime on weekdays. As programs typically run during school or after-school, the Writers' Exchange can only engage volunteers who have flexible schedules.
- Location/context: many of the students who volunteer at the Writers' Exchange leave Vancouver after completing their post-secondary education due to the affordability of housing and other costs of living. The location of the Writers' Exchange program space may also be a barrier for prospective volunteers unfamiliar with the DTES community.

5.2 b) Successes specific to Writers' Exchange

Given the wide variety of ways that organizations can work to improve volunteer engagement, retention, and diversity, the Writers' Exchange has excelled in the following areas:

- Debriefs: function as an ongoing engagement and retention tool, promoting communication, commiseration, relating, solidarity, decompressing, and learning between literacy mentors and staff, debriefs serve as an ongoing method for increasing engagement, assessing retention and creating stronger organizational connectedness.
- Constraints vs. connections: this research project has demonstrated there are few organizational constraints and relatively high levels of organizational connectedness amongst staff and mentors. The Writers' Exchange has made a concerted and continuous effort to minimize barriers to participation for volunteers, from designing their space to safeguard accessibility to ensuring that staff are trained in cultural competency.
- Volunteer satisfaction: all of the volunteer participants of the focus group reported high levels of satisfaction in their roles, signalling that organizational factors have contributed to volunteer retention. Volunteering is a central focus for the organization, and the value of volunteers is emphasized by staff and widely recognized by its volunteers. As such, attrition rates are largely related to factors outside of the control of the organization, as opposed to being due to volunteer mismanagement.

5.3 Management practices and organizational support as foundational

Managers, which include the co-founder/programs director, steer the organizational priorities and workplace culture through interactions with staff, mentors, and kids. As evidenced in the literature as well as through staff interviews and the focus group, the recurring theme of positive organizational support for staff, mentors, and program participants has been essential to the continued growth and success of the organization (Cnaan & Cascio, 1999; Nencini et al., 2015). Good management practices have helped the Writers' Exchange continue to expand their programming while remaining focused on their mission. With responsive, thoughtful management, the organization has adapted in periods of growth in various ways, including:

- Formalizing a more streamlined structure with regards to staffing and processes via clarifying roles and areas of focus, creating a more formalized volunteer recruitment and orientation processes, more concise divisions of labour within the organization, using templates for referral letters for mentors, etc.
- Focusing on the provision of training opportunities that support the goals of diversity and inclusion, including reconciliation/indigenizing education, and how to work with challenging behaviours, non-judgmental listening, etc.
- Creating a position and hiring a literacy mentor and development coordinator, a new role that works alongside the volunteer engagement manager, creating more capacity for grant-writing and fund development opportunities.
- Embedding regular engagement opportunities with mentors into the programs through debriefings, check-ins via email, personalized engagement plans, etc.
- Building capacity for a culture of diversity that stems from within an organization is central for encouraging diversity within its programs and practices (Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion, 2013; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Kartolo and Kwantes, 2019).

The value of good management practices cannot be overlooked, be they through explicit means, such as the implementation of policy, and by implicit understandings, such as fostering a culture of inclusion.

5.4 Useful tools and concepts for understanding volunteer engagement

5.4 a) The Four-Dimensional Connectedness Scale (4DCS)

The most helpful concepts from the literature review pertaining to the research project were the four-dimensional connectedness scale and the community self-service efficacy model. The four-dimensional connectedness scale (4DCS) served as a helpful tool for understanding volunteer engagement and retention at the Writers' Exchange (Huynh et al, 2012). The 4DCS model contends that volunteer engagement is sustained through positive connections with other volunteers, clients, required tasks and organizational values (Huynh et. al, 2012, p. 1058). Community self-service efficacy (CSSE) emphasizes the value of volunteers' belief in their capacity to positively impact their community through service activities (Reeb et al., 1998). The focus group confirmed the importance of these elements, especially how important connections between mentors and kids are, suggesting that the strength of a particular

element may diminish the importance of another, e.g. how certain tasks are perceived as being boring/unpleasant, but mentors continue to volunteer because of the strong relationships they have built with kids.

5.4 b) Role clarity and role satisfaction

While role clarity and role satisfaction amongst volunteers were discussed as distinct concepts in the research findings, the relationship between them is useful when considering volunteer engagement and retention, and was highlighted in both literature and research (Grube & Piliavin, 2000, p. 1109; Harp et al., 2017, p. 445). Both staff interviews and focus group mentors emphasized that awareness of one's role was crucial in meeting requirements for successful programming, and ultimately for cultivating volunteer satisfaction itself. Role clarity correlated with stronger organizational connectedness, volunteer retention, and overall satisfaction (Penner, 2002, p. 463). Role clarity was interpreted through the research as being one of the strongest antecedents to role satisfaction, and was echoed in key informant interviews and focus group.

The strength of role clarity amongst mentors at the Writers' Exchange was mediated by a strong need for flexibility, as evidenced in the findings chapter. As one focus group participant noted:

When I first started, I was worried that I wasn't getting [the kids] to do enough, but I kept hearing the programmers say well, just get them to make a list, or just read to them. Maybe they never get read to, and it all comes together, it gets back to the process being important, and flexibility being important (Participant 7, November 18, 2019).

Being adaptable is not simply a quality that staff seek in prospective volunteers, but an asset and skill that can be developed over the course of volunteering with the organization. Although this aspect of the volunteer experience was highlighted as essential by both Writers' Exchange staff and focus group participants, it can also be understood as a trait required by longer term volunteers in order to feel satisfied and successful in their role and continue volunteering. Connected to role clarity and satisfaction is the concept of volunteer motivation, seen as transient quality that can change over the course of the relationship between the volunteer and the organization (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This notion was illustrated during the focus group discussion about what brings satisfaction to mentors. As one focus group participant said:

Sometimes [you] think that maybe you're going to do something quite spectacular with the kid, but pretty soon you realize that maybe just reading to somebody for ten minutes who doesn't get read to at home, and that's a big thing, and it's cumulative (Participant 3, November 18, 2019).

While their initial engagement may have been connected to their own interests, motivations, or ideals, it is the relationships built with kids they worked with that motivated continued volunteerism for many of the participants.

The Writers' Exchange worked to create a robust sense of role clarity amongst literacy mentors, which was established through a number of methods:

- A well-organized volunteer orientation session and accompanying training materials that outline roles, responsibilities, and deliverables for volunteers.
- Knowledge translation between literacy mentors by pairing more senior mentors with new ones to provide context, assistance and support.

- Organizational support: program managers are attentive to mentors' needs, mentors are attentive to kids' needs, managers provide support and oversight for program managers, etc. Organizational support is communicated and enacted on all levels within the Writers' Exchange.
- Provision of additional training sessions to facilitate effective literacy mentor role fulfillment, such as non-judgmental listening and challenging behaviours workshops.

By providing the guidance and resources required to instill strong role clarity amongst literacy mentors, it is likely that overall volunteer satisfaction rates also increase at the Writers' Exchange.

5.5 Translating diversity and inclusion from an organizational objective to an implemented practice

The secondary research question concerning building greater diversity in the literacy mentor program at the Writers' Exchange was an important subject to explore in the organization's efforts to thoughtfully expand its literacy mentor program. The challenges with this question were twofold; there is a limited amount of research in the literature about building diversity in volunteer settings and the qualitative data elicited from focus group findings was limited based on the relative homogeneity of the participants. Although efforts were made to invite a diversity of individuals to participate in the focus group, the nine who were available to attend were educated white women. Responses to questions about their volunteer experience and experiences of discrimination may have differed if the focus group demographic was more diverse. When asked about instances of discrimination amongst or between kids, mentors, staff or community partners, none of the staff interviewed had personally experienced or witnessed explicit instances of racism, sexism, or other forms of bigotry. While this can be interpreted as a positive finding, it also underscores that further research is required to better respond to this secondary research question.

One way of interpreting the lack of diversity within the focus group (and to a somewhat lesser degree, the organization) is that it is emblematic of the structural inequalities that exist in western culture and society. Individuals from diverse backgrounds may have more barriers to participation because they may lack the resources to volunteer their time, may be occupied by challenges related to their socioeconomic status, or may be committed to informal volunteering in their community/home (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Smith, 2005). Diversity and inclusion in volunteering is topic that must be explored more deeply by the Writers' Exchange and third sector researchers.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this report was to work with the Writers' Exchange to strategize ways to continue supporting its volunteer literacy program. The recommendations focus on addressing the topics of volunteer engagement, retention, and diversity and inclusion. While the conceptual framework and a feminist research praxis have helped to illuminate how systemic factors influence volunteer engagement, retention, and diversity, this chapter provides actionable recommendations that the organization can begin adopting in a time frame of one year or less, affording the Writers' Exchange the opportunity to implement different ideas over the course of each of its three terms. Recommendations hinge on practicality for reasons that are twofold: in consideration of organizational capacity (size, budget, staffing), and because the Writers' Exchange is already doing proficient work in building and sustaining

its volunteer literacy mentor program. Thus, recommendations do not reflect a need to overhaul of the existing structure of the organization.

The primary criteria used in the development of these recommendations was to provide a broad range of distinct options as they respond to the research questions and project objectives. The recommendations are presented in two separate categories: engagement (which broadly includes initial recruitment, ongoing engagement, and retention of volunteers), and volunteer diversity and inclusion. Both sections are organized by ease of implementation, beginning with simple or one-time changes and progressing to longer term, ongoing, or more complex recommendations that may involve more time, capacity, and/or resources. The intention of these recommendations is to complement the scaling up and strategic planning currently being undertaken by the organization, not distract from these efforts. Following each recommendation is an estimate of the time and resources required to implement a given activity or change.

It is also important to acknowledge that the following recommendations were developed in a pre-covid-19 context, and their applicability may differ from how they were initially conceived. In some cases, recommendations may require adaptation or revision depending on the context and conditions in which they are implemented. The need to balance structure and flexibility is one that the Writers' Exchange is well-versed in, and the intention of these recommendations is to function in a manner that serves both of these principles.

Lastly, areas of research that require further investigation are identified at the end of this chapter. Some of these research directions are more localized with the potential to be undertaken by the Writers' Exchange, or in collaboration with other local organizations, while others illustrate the need for a broader systemic analysis of issues impacting volunteering and third sector studies.

6.2 Recommendations to Bolster Volunteer Engagement and Retention

- 1. Increase place-based recruitment activities.** In advance of volunteer intake periods, prioritize posting Writers' Exchange volunteer recruitment notices in surrounding neighbourhoods to solicit local prospective volunteers. Catchment areas include: Strathcona, Chinatown, Gastown, Downtown Eastside, Railtown, Olympic Village, Commercial Drive, and Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhoods.
Estimated time and resources assessment: approximately one full or two partial days per term, three times per year. This activity could be undertaken by volunteers, and the process could be simplified by reaching out to community partners via email and asking them to print and post notices on community message boards.
- 2. Centre the importance of literacy mentors on the Writers' Exchange website.** Currently, information about volunteering is listed in its own section on the organization's website. By illustrating the value of literacy mentors in the "about" section of the Writers' Exchange website, it centres volunteers alongside the organization's values and mission. It is also recommended that the volunteer section of the website be expanded to include additional information outlining the benefits of volunteering with the Writers' Exchange, such as how the skills gained/practiced in literacy mentorship are transferrable to other vocations.
Estimated time and resource assessment: a one-time, relatively minor revision of the website with the addition of some material regarding the benefits of volunteering will take approximately one to two days.

3. **Increase incentives for long term volunteers.** There are multiple ways that may incentivize volunteers to commit to the organization for greater lengths of time. These incentives can range based on individuals' interests, such as: gift certificates for businesses that are community partners, increasing access to training/workshop opportunities, provision of reference letters, opportunities for paid work as programming expands, and others.
Estimated time and resources assessment: ongoing and contingent on the type of incentive. This recommendation can function as a project that may be delegated in part to the Writers' Exchange board of directors, specifically in reaching out to other organizations for donated items such as theatre or art gallery passes, restaurant gift certificates, etc. The organization may want to explore setting aside a budget for incentives through organizational revenues.
4. **Partner with youth-driven community organizations and schools to encourage stronger youth involvement.** Partnerships can be built with schools that mandate service hours for students, or in youth-centred divisions of larger organizations such as Rotary clubs or religious/community youth groups. This will help fill the volunteer gaps that can occur during the school year and encourage ongoing commitment to volunteer.
Estimated time and resources assessment: dependent on the number of groups interested in participating. Engagement with outside organizations can be gauged based on organizational capacity at the Writers' Exchange, with the goal of reaching out to one to two per term.
5. **Host a focus group annually with literacy mentors, focusing on longer term mentors.** By setting aside time to discuss the experiences, challenges and opportunities gained by literacy mentors, the Writers' Exchange can attune itself more closely to the needs of its volunteers.
Estimated time and resources assessment: two to three days of work shared between the volunteer engagement manager and coordinator. The organization regularly hosts events for chapbook project, so the hosting logistics will be minimal. The research design for the focus group may take some time to develop but can potentially occur in tandem during strategic planning sessions already underway at the Writers' Exchange.
6. **Track volunteer demographics/statistics quantitatively.** Using a spreadsheet or similar method, input information about the current pool of volunteers and analyze for patterns of engagement, retention, diversity, etc. Subsequent analyses can lead to greater insights about how the organization recruits and sustains engagement and can inform future targeted recruitment plans.
Estimated time and resources assessment: initial design of the system may take some time (two plus days), with demographic information being input periodically over the course of the term, and major revisions performed two to three times per year. This would be an ongoing project that could be allocated to a specific staff person. Specific demographic information can be obtained through the form listed on the website that prospective volunteers fill out when applying to become a literacy mentor. To encourage greater specificity and ease of data processing, a drop-down/auto-fill menu can be added to the form instead of the current fill in the blanks style featured on the form.
7. **Create a formal structure for soliciting feedback.** Research from this project demonstrated the value of soliciting feedback from literacy mentors through debriefing sessions. Debriefs are useful not only in fielding substantive feedback from volunteers, but also serves as a way of demonstrating that the Writers' Exchange is invested in volunteer satisfaction. A more formal feedback structure can function as a tool for program managers to consult for ongoing engagement and retention purposes. This could be established through the creation of a "volunteer portal" on the Writers' Exchange website that enables mentors to submit feedback anonymously, given that they do not always participate equally in debriefings. It is recommended

that the invitation to participate in anonymous feedback be extended to former mentors as well, to track reasons why they have left the organization. This information can be included with other information gathered in Recommendation 6.

Estimated time and resources assessment: this method of soliciting feedback can be incorporated into mentor communications plans via email, and the portal can be built into the website alongside the other website adjustments (see: recommendation 2). Program managers, the volunteer engagement manager and coordinator can incorporate this feedback periodically at a frequency of their choosing.

8. **Strategize how to incorporate episodic volunteering at the Writers' Exchange.** Both the literature and the research for this project highlighted the popularity of episodic volunteering. The Writers' Exchange would benefit from leveraging instances of episodic volunteering with the goal of creating longer term opportunities for those who may have only initially intended to volunteer with the organization on a short-term/one-time basis.

Estimated time and resources assessment: unknown at this time. The time and resources required to devote to this strategy is contingent on organizational buy-in. One suggestion for an episodic volunteer opportunity would be to solicit a private/corporate sponsorship of a family literacy night or host a storytelling fundraiser.

6.3 Recommendations for supporting Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering

1. **Centre the importance of diversity and inclusion in the Writers' Exchange website and communications.** A simple and direct way of demonstrating the importance of diversity and inclusion would be to feature the organization's diversity and inclusion policy on its website, in the "about" and "volunteer" sections. As stated in the policy, the Writers' Exchange actively seeks to promote diversity; demonstrating this organizational value by emphasizing it on all public-facing materials, including emailed newsletters, can demonstrate to prospective volunteers that supporting equity is an organizational goal.

Estimated time and resources assessment: the policy itself is already written and an adapted version can be added to the website in coordination with other recommendations (Recommendations 2 and 7 from the volunteer engagement and retention category).

2. **Partner with organizations that support newcomers to Canada.** Connect with organizations that have diverse memberships, or neighbourhood houses that have the resources to transport volunteers to the Writers' Exchange to participate in programming, such as Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House, or Pacific Immigrant Resources Society.

Estimated time and resources assessment: consistent with recommendation 4 for bolstering volunteer engagement and retention, resources required will depend on the level of interest. It is suggested that the Writers' Exchange only reach out to one or two outside agencies per term so as not to exceed organizational capacity.

3. **Continue to strategize measures to improve accessibility.** As expressed during an employee interview for this project, "we want to make sure we're not putting boundaries on who can volunteer" (Employee 1, November 12, 2019). Lowering potential barriers will increase accessibility and can include a variety of measures, from the provision of bus tickets to non-student volunteers to cover transportation costs, to seeking corporate or community sponsorship of youth summer work experience program that provides honoraria to participants. *Estimated time and resources assessment:* unknown at this time, but longer term and dependent on organizational priorities and capacity. Additional funding would likely be required to fulfill certain activities.

4. **Continue to strategize ways to leverage privilege.** Continue to uncover, assess and leverage the assets and power of organizational and community stakeholders. As exemplified through the advocacy efforts that helped the organization successfully maintain its lease under new building ownership in 2014, the Writers' Exchange is strongly encouraged to continuously seek strategies that capitalize on the resources within its network to benefit underrepresented groups specifically. One way of achieving this would be through the creation of a scholarship program that promotes diversity and inclusion within the literacy mentor program. By 'sponsoring' one to two individuals each term, people who may not otherwise have the financial resources or time can participate in programs as literacy mentors.
Estimated time and resources assessment: the creation of a scholarship program would involve working with donors and program development, likely entailing many weeks or months to organize in addition to staff time necessary to implement.
5. **Allocate resources for a diversity officer/ambassador.** In consideration that these recommendations will effectively require more time and resources, allocating a specific individual to focus on diversity and inclusion activities may be beneficial for the Writers' Exchange. This could become a part-time position that the organization hires for, with funding for it built into grant applications.
Estimated time and resources assessment: this can be a medium to long term objective for the Writers' Exchange that can be mapped out during strategic planning sessions. The establishment of a position like this will likely be contingent on funding opportunities.

6.4 Future Research Directions

A number of compelling questions emerged over the course of this research project that fell outside of the scope of this report, signalling there are many areas of pursuit for future research in volunteer studies. Prospective future research directions are categorized into two sections: those that impact the Writers' Exchange specifically, or research that the organization could collaborate on in the future, and research that may have broader impacts that may inform third sector studies in general. Notably, many of these research directions overlap and may have implications for both organizations as well as on a broader societal level.

6.4 a) Local/Organizational level

- This case study presents a strong example of how the fields of education, childcare, and non-profit sector represent gendered environments; not only are they primarily staffed by women, they are generally underpaid as compared to the private sector or male-dominated fields. As non-profit organization focused on child literacy, the Writers' Exchange as an organization embodies the intersection of all three of these environments; it would be compelling to analyze how to build greater equity and access using Gender Based Analysis Plus or a similar analytical tool.
- An evaluation on the effects of gentrification in the area where the Writers' Exchange is located has impacted volunteer levels, and whether the influx of those who can afford to live in the area might contribute towards a more robust, but prospectively less diverse volunteer pool for local organizations. An ethnography of the changing area could lend some insights and texture to this current analysis, and could also assist in directing effective targeted recruitment strategies.

6.4 b) Systems/Societal level

- As noted in the literature review chapter of this project, minimal research has been published regarding diversity and inclusion in volunteering. While many findings from other sectors can be applied to volunteer studies, this does not discount the distinctive value of examining how issues of diversity and inclusion function differently in volunteer settings, where labour is performed without remuneration. An examination of the relationship between individuals' economic and social capital and volunteer capacity could lend insights into how to address systemic barriers and facilitate greater inclusion. Related to this theme and highlighted in the project limitations is the influence of privilege in volunteering; research in this area specifically is lacking in breadth and depth.
- Further studies on how to leverage corporate support more meaningfully and how to sustain private and third sector partnerships for longer term commitments would be an area of study that could assist smaller non-profits like the Writers' Exchange.
- The majority of the data about volunteering in Canada cites survey information from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, last conducted in 2013; research should be conducted to update current knowledge and developments, as well as identify emerging trends in volunteering, detect gaps, and examine specific issues such as how organizations can leverage technology for volunteer engagement, specifically in targeting diverse groups. (Volunteer Canada, n.d.)

7.0 Conclusion

This research project was undertaken in an effort to help the Writers' Exchange explore its literacy mentor program from a critical perspective and seek ways to continue expanding its volunteer base through effective engagement and retention practices. Related to this objective was developing an understanding of volunteer motivation, from its initial onset in the recruitment/engagement phase, to its longer-term implications, through sustained engagement and retention. A crucial secondary question of this report was to explore how to increase diversity in the organization's volunteer literacy program.

The academic literature and the research conducted for this report has demonstrated that volunteer engagement is a dynamic topic, that dispositional, organizational and intersectional factors can motivate volunteerism, and volunteer motivations are subject to change over time. This report also highlighted the gap that exists between the junction of volunteer studies and diversity and inclusion, both in the literature as well as in the primary research conducted. A case study methodology was employed for this analysis, highlighting the significance of context when examining an organization, its staff, programs, and objectives. Various sources were analyzed in a bid to illuminate the research topics from multiple perspectives, achieved through a literature review, document review, focus group, and key informant interviews.

An adapted version of Penner's (2002) interactionist perspective served as the conceptual framework that guided this project, functioning as a tool for understanding the variety of factors that can bolster or limit volunteer engagement. By considering the volunteer experience through the interaction of individual, dispositional and intersectional factors, the successes and barriers of the literacy mentor program were identified, and recommendations were developed to build upon the organization's strengths and to respond to the challenges.

Findings demonstrated that the Writers' Exchange has been operating a robust volunteer program based on cultivating relationships with literacy mentors through a variety of methods. Role clarity, flexibility, and organizational connectedness emerged as important themes that foster volunteer engagement and retention. While the focus group demonstrated that longer term volunteers shared many salient qualities, their dedication to the organization was underscored by the relationships they had built with the kids they worked with, and the satisfaction garnered by serving as positive role models in kids' lives. Employee interviews demonstrated that volunteers are a continuous and primary focus for the organization, and their efforts to build and sustain long-lasting connection with volunteers is evident. The Writers' Exchange serves as a persuasive example of how focusing on and nurturing relationships with volunteers reaps benefits for all stakeholders within an organization.

The value of the interactionist perspective was especially evident when considering the organization's goal of increasing diversity in its volunteer program. While the organization has taken many measures to make volunteering accessible to everyone through measures such as diversity training, ensuring diversity and inclusion policies inform hiring practices and volunteer recruitment, and actively seeking pathways to accessible participation, systemic barriers continue to impact the individual and organizational capacities to increase diversity in volunteering. Power, opportunity, and privilege continues to shape who participates in the third sector, and in what capacity. Finding ways to decrease barriers for underrepresented groups and leveraging the privilege of those who can participate is a crucial and necessary piece of the work required to achieve greater equity in volunteering.

As the volunteer landscape continues to change, organizations must contend with a future of unknowns while working to build and strengthen volunteer programs. The Writers' Exchange has dedicated a range of organizational resources into bolstering their literacy mentor program, and the connections they have built with volunteers, kids, and community partners are evidence of their success as an organization. Through the gradual implementation of recommendations that build on established practices that work, they can look towards an expanded volunteer literacy mentor program to support the continued success and growth of the organization.

8.0 References

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9.0 Appendices

9.1 Key informant Interview and Focus Group Consent Form



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Interview and Focus Group Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Building and Sustaining Volunteer Engagement at the Writers’ Exchange” that is being conducted by Rory Marck.

Rory Marck is a Graduate student in the Community Development program in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Rory by email at: rorymarck@gmail.com

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this research project is to develop a better sense of what motivates individuals to volunteer at the Writers’ Exchange and how to support and sustain their involvement. In learning more about the people who volunteer with the Writers’ Exchange, the organization will be able to create a more informed, diverse, and inclusive volunteer engagement strategy.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because the non-profit sector relies greatly on volunteers, and The Writer’s Exchange strives to be responsive to volunteer engagement and retention in order to maintain and expand their programming.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you work, volunteer, or have formerly volunteered with The Writers’ Exchange.

What is Involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will involve attending one (1) interview **or** (1) focus group. If you are a volunteer literacy mentor, your participation will involve attending a focus group that will last approximately one hour. If you are a Writers’ Exchange staff, your participation will involve a one-on-one interview, in person or by phone, which will last approximately 30-45 minutes. All interviews and focus groups will take place at the Writers’ Exchange at 877 East Hastings. All interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time it takes you to attend a focus group or interview.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits to participating in this research include helping the Writers' Exchange improve their programming and service delivery, and contributing meaningfully to the wider pool of knowledge regarding volunteerism.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or explanation. If you are a focus group participant, your data will be summarized to maintain the conversational nature of the data. If you are participating in a one-on-one interview and choose to withdraw, I will ask you whether your data can be used or discarded.

Ongoing Consent

To ensure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will review and confirm with you the informed consent information at the beginning of each focus group/interview.

Anonymity

If you are a current or former volunteer, your anonymity will be protected as the results of the final report will not be linked to any specific individuals.

If you are currently an employee of the Writers' Exchange, you will not be named in the final report, but there may be limits to your anonymity due to the nature and size of the organization. You may waive your right to anonymity if you wish to be named in the report.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing password-protected files on a password-protected computer.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of the study will be shared in the following ways: through a final report submitted to the staff and board of the Writers' Exchange, and to be distributed to my supervisory and examination committees at the University of Victoria as a part of my Master's Capstone project, in partial fulfillment of my degree. The final project will also be posted on the university's web-based project and thesis page, D-space.

Disposal of Data

Upon completion of this research project, data from this study will be disposed of by deleting all computer and audio files and shredding any hardcopy/paper copies.

Contacts

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545, or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

9.2 Key informant interview questions

Interview Protocol – Writers’ Exchange Key Informant Interviews

Rory Marck

November 12th and 18th, 2019

Haley (interview 1, November 12th) program manager

Sarah (interview 2, November 12th) program manager

Sarah-Jane & Liz (interview 3, November 18th) are mentor engagement manager & volunteer coordinator

Jen (interview 4, November 18th) is the program director and co-founder of W/E

- a) Discussion of consent form (sent in advance to all participating staff). Go over any questions they may have about the research project, their participation, the consent form itself, etc.
- b) Let interviewees know that I am planning to record our session using my phone (and backup phone for good measure), that I will be taking some notes by hand, and that the interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes.
- c) List of questions:

General/ Literacy program:

1. Describe your role at W/E and the length of time you’ve been in this role
2. What is your degree of involvement with the literacy mentor program (e.g. do you interact with literacy mentors on a daily/weekly basis)?
3. When you first started the organization, how did you envision the role of volunteers? Did it work out the way you imagined? How about when you got started as compared to now?
4. How influential are literacy mentors in the success of your programming?
5. What are three words you would use to characterize the literacy mentorship program/literacy mentors?

Volunteer Recruitment

6. How do you go about recruiting volunteers? What methods have you used to recruit volunteers?
7. Have certain strategies for volunteer recruitment worked better than others? If so, which have worked best? why?
8. Have you noticed any factors in particular that affect volunteer levels (e.g. is the fall semester busier than the spring semester? Are there more mentors during the school year than over the summer?)
9. What are some of the challenges you would associate with volunteer recruitment/retention?
10. In your view, how can the W/E can overcome these challenges?

Volunteer Retention

11. What kinds of challenges have you encountered in working with literacy mentors?
12. Do you find your work demanding? In what ways?
13. Do you find the work satisfying? In what ways?
14. Do you think it’s possible to maintain a high level of support for literacy mentors should the program grow?
15. Do you have the current organizational capacity to support the potential growth in your programs? Is this something that has been explored by your board/ during strategic planning, etc?

16. Do you ever conduct exit interviews with literacy mentors, or do you typically have an idea of why they are leaving? What are some of the reasons?
17. What are some of the practices you engage in to monitor or check in with mentors?

Diversity and Inclusion

18. Would you consider the literacy mentor group diverse? Why or why not?
 19. How are diversity and inclusion important for W/E? Can you provide any examples?
 20. Does W/E have an outlined diversity and inclusion policy?
 21. Has W/E staff participated in any diversity and inclusion training? If so, what kind, and was it useful?
 22. In your time working with W/E, have you ever confronted issues regarding discrimination or prejudice between literacy mentors, kids, parents, or others? If so, how did you deal with it?
 23. How might the Writers' Exchange as an organization foster greater diversity in the literacy mentor program?
 24. Is there anything you would like to add before concluding this interview? Are there any topics you'd like to explore or questions you think I should have asked?
- d) Thank you so much for your valuable input and insights. If you have anything else you'd like to add later, you're welcome to email me or give me a call.
I will of course be in touch with Sarah-Jane about the progress of my research and would be happy to give you a copy of the final report if you're interested.
- e) Reminder to get signed consent form, one copy for you and another for them.
- f) Make a note to yourself (in your calendar) to follow up the next day or two with a thank you note.

9.3 Literacy Mentors Focus Group Protocol

Writers Exchange Focus Group Protocol

Rory Marck

November 18th, 2019

5:30-6:00 pm

- Meet and greet with snacks
- Name tags if appropriate
- Test record audio to see if it captures
- Introduce myself, my research, the reason for this focus group
- Discussion of consent
- Explain that candor is appreciated
- S-J will be in the office and not privy to our discussion
- Don't be afraid to offer constructive criticism if you have any, this is the kind of feedback that will make for a better literacy mentorship program!
- If I notice that you haven't yet contributed to the discussion, I might prompt you to answer a question, but there is no pressure to do so, you can skip.

6:00-7:00 pm

General Qs re: yourself & involvement with organization:

1. Is everyone present currently a literacy mentor?
2. How long have you been a literacy mentor for?
3. Were any of you involved with W/E in any other capacities prior to volunteering as a literacy mentor?
4. If you're comfortable sharing your job and education experience, please do.
5. Did you attend any literacy/education-related after school programs as a kid?

Moving along to the topic of volunteer engagement, retention & satisfaction:

6. How did you first come to hear about the Writers' Exchange?
7. What is your time commitment with W/E?
8. What types of activities does your role as a literacy mentor encompass?
9. Do you generally enjoy the tasks and roles you have?
10. Are there any that you dislike or feel less engaged in? Does your level of engagement change based on the tasks/responsibilities you're fulfilling?
11. Have you ever felt stressed out in your role? If so, what was happening?
12. Do you feel supported by W/E as a volunteer? If so, how? If not, why?
13. Are there any things that W/E could do to better support you?
14. Do you find being a literacy mentor personally/professionally satisfying?
15. Have you ever collaborated with staff in designing/implementing programs?
16. Do staff solicit feedback on new programs?
17. Do your contributions to the organization feel personally meaningful?

Diversity and inclusion:

18. Do you feel that W/E is a diverse and inclusive environment to volunteer in?

19. From your perspective, does W/E promote diversity and inclusion in its staffing and programming?
20. Have you received any training with regards to diversity and inclusion, and if so, was it helpful?
21. Have you ever encountered any instances of prejudice or discrimination (from kids, parents, peers, or community partners)? If so, how did you deal with it?

As a final request, I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect and would like you to write down 2 or 3 things that are important to you, or things that you want to be sure I convey in my analysis. This can also include experiences you've had that you prefer to share privately, or takeaways about your experience volunteering with W/E that you feel are worth highlighting.

Thank everyone for their participation and let folks know they can contact me by email if they have any follow ups or additions or concerns.

9.4 Document Review List of Sources

Note: all documents belong to the Writers' Exchange and are not publicly accessible. Hardcopy or pdf versions can be made available upon request.

1. Literacy mentor handbook
2. Literacy mentor agreement
3. Role Play scenarios (in-school and after school programs)
4. Mentor engagement plan
5. Writers' Exchange Diversity and Inclusion policy
6. Volunteer Recruitment posting
7. Writers' Exchange Annual Reports: 2016-2017, 2017-2018