



Nine Circles Food Bank Volunteer Feedback Session – Fall, 2012: Evaluation Report

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INTRODUCTION

The food bank at Nine Circles (food bank) provides a supplement of food to persons living with HIV through donations of food provided by Winnipeg Harvest. All persons living with HIV in Manitoba can become members of food bank.

The overall planning and functioning of the food bank and its volunteers is overseen by the Nine Circles Health Promotion Coordinator and Health Educator, and the Nine Circles Membership Coordinator and Membership Facilitator.

Between April 1st, 2012 and March 31st, 2013 food bank volunteers donated **1,184 hours** of their time, and there were **4,306 food bank contacts**.

Volunteers assist with: set up of the food bank room, unloading and assembling the food stuffs when the delivery from Winnipeg Harvest arrives, the running of food bank as clients go through the line and choose their food items, packing of food boxes (some clients pick up a pre-packed box of food), and room clean up.

SUMMARY

Five (5) volunteers participated in the feedback session. Their time as a food bank volunteer ranged from 3 months, to 1 year. Participants were offered a light snack as compensation for their involvement in the feedback session.

The volunteers identified working at food bank as an enjoyable and meaningful experience. Volunteers often spoke of the clients, staff and volunteers as a cohesive group working together towards improving people's situations – *"We create a circle here"*.

Furthermore, volunteering at food bank has been a positive experience and beneficial to their lives in several ways:

- Built strong personal connections, and have come to genuinely care about each other and the clients who attend food bank.
- Benefitted from the positive atmosphere, and the structure that has come with committing to volunteering.
- Found the experience fulfilling, and take pride in doing something to give back to the community.
- Received support, guidance, and recognition from staff.
- Improved food security.

The volunteers also identified some areas where Nine Circles can offer further training and information, including: guidelines around when (and if) to come to food bank if you are ill, First Aid training, and opportunities for more connection with clients.

This evaluation report will be provided to food bank volunteers, will be posted on the Research & Evaluation section of the Nine Circles website for general access/review, and will also be reviewed by the Nine Circles Health Promotion Coordinator and Health Educator, the Nine Circles Membership Coordinator and Membership Facilitator, and the Health Promotion Program Manager for follow-up with questions and suggestions put forward at the feedback session, and also for future service delivery and program planning.

HIGHLIGHTS

The volunteers were asked to identify some of the ***best things about volunteering at food bank*** (see Figure 1):

The participants provided several examples of how being a food bank volunteer has been beneficial to them.

- It's an opportunity to **get out and about**.
- **Caring about clients and other volunteers**, and gaining insight into people's different situations – *"You see people at their worst, and best"*.
- They can **socialize** and catch up with everyone as many of the clients are also their friends.
- **Feeling good** about helping others.
- The food they receive helps to minimize the strain on the household budget when it comes to **securing nutritious food***.

* Several of the volunteers are also utilize the food bank.

Figure 1:



CHALLENGES

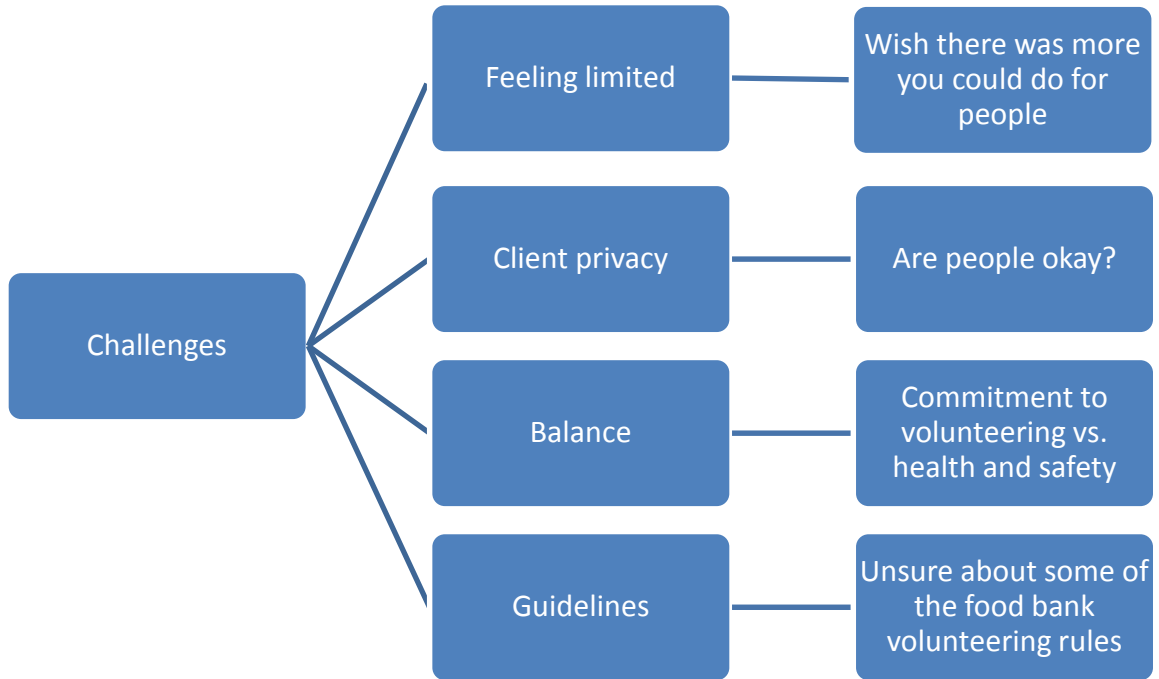
The volunteers were asked about some of the ***challenges they've faced while volunteering at food bank*** (see Figure 2):

Participants expressed struggling with the need for client privacy, but also caring about client's welfare. The volunteers highlighted that they realize Nine Circles cannot share client health and personal information, but there's concern when a client doesn't attend food bank. There's also concern when a fellow volunteer isn't present, the others wonder – "*Are they okay?*" Furthermore, it would be helpful to know how Nine Circles proceeds when a volunteer is away. The volunteers stressed that they don't want, or need, to know any details about someone's absence; just to know there is indeed a process in place for checking in with people would be a comfort to the volunteers.

The volunteers also requested clarification of guidelines around several items from staff:

- When should a volunteers not come to food bank? For instance, when they are sick. They've committed to being there, but don't want to make others sick. "*How sick do you need to be [to not volunteer]?*"
- Can volunteers bring food to another volunteer who has missed food bank? Can volunteers call the fellow volunteer who's missed and check in with them?
- Can volunteers drive a client home after food bank?
- When someone is sick (a volunteer or client), can that person call and have the volunteers put a box aside and/or deliver it?

Figure 2:



SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The volunteers were asked about *how safe they feel while volunteering at food bank*, including physical and cultural safety, and a respectful environment. Furthermore, if they feel they are well-supported by staff if concerns or questions arise (see Figure 3):

The feedback from participants exceedingly pointed to food bank a safe and productive environment.

- The volunteers expressed they feel food bank is a **very safe environment** in all aspects. They take pride in setting a “*good tone*” and atmosphere at food bank.
- Volunteers stressed that **staff do an exceptional job** of organizing and overseeing the running of food bank.
- Sometimes profane language has been used by individuals during food bank. The volunteers expressed that these are **rare occurrences**, and don’t negatively affect their experience and contribution to food bank.
- The volunteers also identified that the “Our Ideal Volunteer”[†] handout given to them by staff was **very helpful** in outlining the role and responsibilities of food bank volunteers.

[†] See Appendix 1

Figure 3:



RECOGNITION & APPRECIATION

The volunteers were asked to identify some of the **ways *Nine Circles* shows recognition and appreciation** for the work they do (see Figure 4):

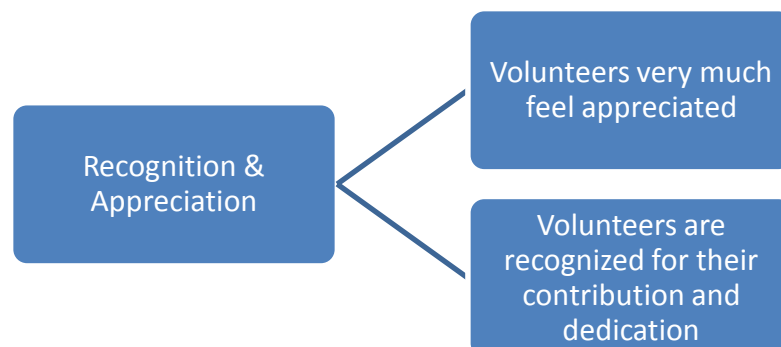
Participants expressed that the staff who facilitate food bank are always happy and friendly, and this in turn makes volunteers happy. Volunteers value the acknowledgement they receive from staff – *“You don’t volunteer looking for awards, but it’s nice when it comes”*.

Volunteers also identified several ways staff have demonstrated appreciation and recognition:

- **Snacks** during the break.
- A volunteer **appreciation lunch**.
- **Birthday cards** from staff to volunteers.
- **Fridge magnets and stickers** to honour outstanding work. For example, when a volunteer goes above and beyond in their duties, staff give them a “You Rock!” sticker to wear on their person for the rest of the day. This signifies to the volunteer, and others, that they’ve made a special contribution to the operating of the food bank.

Additionally, the volunteers identified that they themselves also contribute to appreciation and camaraderie. As an example, one of the volunteers hosted a BBQ for volunteers and staff which they found most enjoyable – *“It was awesome!”*

Figure 4:



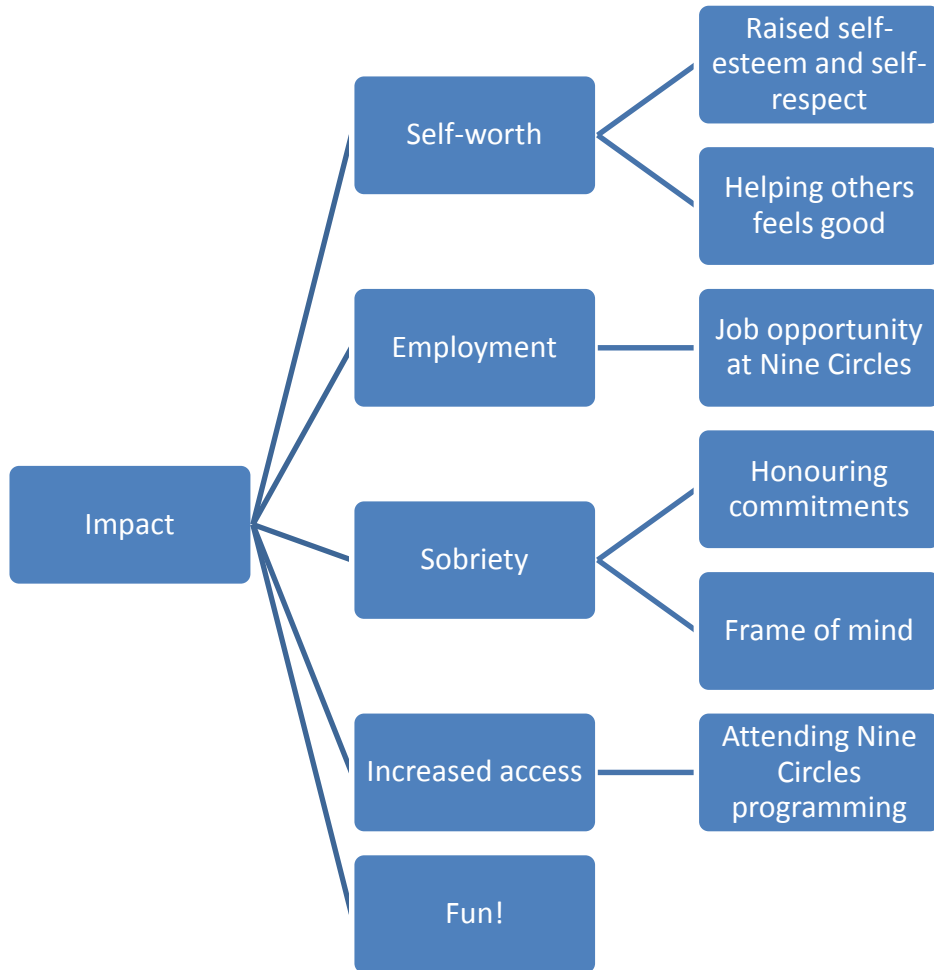
IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES

The volunteers were asked to communicate some of the ***ways being a food bank volunteer has impacted them*** (see Figure 5):

The participants identified several positive outcomes of volunteering at the food bank.

- One volunteer was able to secure term **employment** at Nine Circles when a job opportunity was posted.
- Several identified volunteering as helping them to **maintain sobriety**:
 - Have made a commitment to attending and contributing
 - Keeps your mind off of your own troubles
 - More appreciation for the things you have in life
- Learning about, and attending other **Nine Circles programming**.
- It's a **fun** thing to do, and something to look forward to.

Figure 5:



SUGGESTIONS FOR STAFF

The volunteers were asked to suggest some **things Nine Circles could do to make being a food bank volunteer better** (see Figure 6):

Participants expressed that there's no need for major improvements/adjustments to be made, they find food bank efficient, and "*the best place ever*" to volunteer. Additionally, the trainings they have received to date (e.g. safe lifting) have been very helpful.

Items the participants felt would be useful for them as food bank volunteers were:

- **First Aid training**, possibly for delivering First Aid specifically to HIV positive people. There was some debate amongst the volunteers as to whether specific training for delivering First Aid to HIV positive persons was necessary, or if the standard training would be sufficient.
- **Tasks to work on while waiting for the food delivery truck**, such as 'condom stickering'[‡]
- Volunteers could **sit in the Gathering Place and visit with clients**, or help them on the computers. They expressed that clients may be bored during the wait-time to go through the food bank line, and this would be a good opportunity for volunteers to connect with clients.
- The volunteers inquired about the possibility of **opportunities for food bank clients to also volunteer**, such as doing filing or other clerical work for Nine Circles.
- The volunteers also suggested implementing **exit interviews with volunteers** who are leaving, in the event they may have feedback or suggestions to pass on to the staff.

[‡] For special events such as Sexual Health Awareness week, small info-tab stickers with phone numbers of STI testing venues are affixed to condoms distributed to the public.

Figure 6:



INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

At the end of the session, participants were given a piece of paper with a sentence[§] printed on it prompting them to share **a highlight from their time as a Nine Circles food bank volunteer**; the participants were given time to fill this out privately before returning it to evaluator:

Below are the highlights shared by the volunteers, themes include: happiness and enjoying life, meeting people and socializing, and fostering a community.

{ *“I have met new friends and enjoying life better”* }

{ *“Ran into an old friend I hadn’t seen for 30 years”* }

{ *“Getting food. Meeting people”* }

{ *“I’m happy I met new people and old friends in the line”* }

{ *“In general, the creation of a little community of disparate but caring people, has been really great”* }

[§] See Appendix 2

Appendix 1 – “Our Ideal Volunteer” Handout

Our Ideal Volunteer



- Shows up on time and ready to lend a hand
- Is positive and friendly with clients, staff and other volunteers
- Understands the importance of safe food handling, especially with immune compromised clients
- Takes direction from Nine Circles food bank staff and asks for clarification from them when needed
- Can be flexible and calm in stressful situations
- Takes a break or switches tasks when s/he needs to
- Keeps fairness, safety and positivity in mind during their shift
- Knows that they are an incredibly important part of a vital program

– THANK YOU!

Appendix 2

**Please share a highlight from your time as a food bank
Volunteer:**
