

The Gifts of Giving: Motivations for Volunteers Who Bring Trauma-Informed Practices to Foster Healing and Resilience

Kimmie Romero | Department of Psychological Sciences |
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PROJECT QUESTION

What motivates volunteers to volunteer at Living Yoga, a program for supporting marginalized populations?

BACKGROUND

After COVID-19, I shifted focus in March of 2020 to Living Yoga, a volunteer program that focuses on healing and resilience through trauma-informed yoga with an emphasis on exclusivity. Based in Portland, Living Yoga brings yoga to more than 600 students each month in correction sites, addiction treatment and recovery sites, and community health programs. In addition, this program promotes diversity and inclusivity; Living Yoga strongly believes that it requires the acknowledgment of historical and institutional inequities in addition to one's personal trauma in order to be truly effective in healing.

I took particular interest in the motivations for volunteers as I believed that it takes a type of person to volunteer for people in addiction treatment and corrections facilities, both marginalized populations.

METHOD

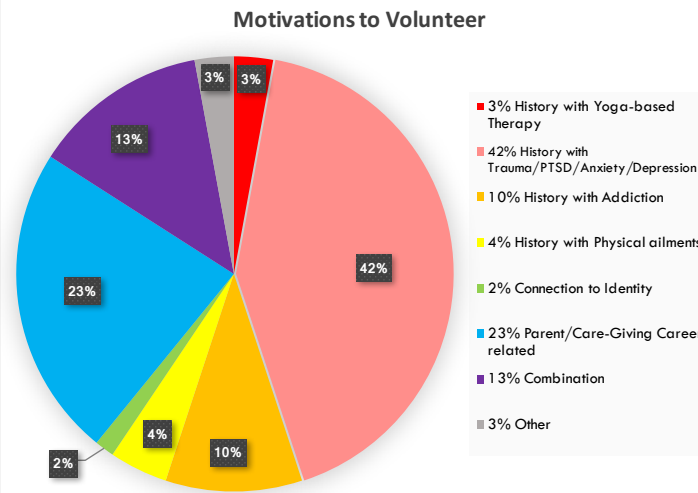
Participants

A total of 119 volunteers responded to the survey as a whole. Of the 119 volunteers, 69 participants (58%) gave a response to the question.

Procedure

I utilized qualitative data on volunteer motivations from a survey prior to volunteers beginning their training and categorized them based on their syntax. Certain syntax were grouped together due to the requirements of volunteering in the first place as well as what the program emphasized.

Results



Common Themes

Trauma

"...being able to see how yoga has helped me process and accept both the diagnosis [...] has given me the desire to help bring that practice to others in a way that helps them get through difficult situations in their lives"

"Almost all my clients have a personal history of trauma or abuse for which they had no help or coping mechanisms available. I hope through programs like Living Yoga, I can help the populations that need the recovery, healing, and support so they are able to move on..."

Abuse

Parent-hood

"I lost my beloved young granddaughter two years ago to a traumatic illness. I have found my yoga practice to be very helpful as I navigate the grief process."

DISCUSSION

The majority of motivations given are the result of resonating with the three main themes of Living Yoga: Yoga as therapy, a history of trauma and PTSD, and a history of addiction. Most volunteers cited at least one of these three themes. Many cited more than one of these themes. Living Yoga has also attracted volunteers with personal experience with anxiety, depression, abuse. The correlation between personal experience with anxiety and yoga as therapy tracks as yoga therapy has some clinical efficacy in treating anxiety and panic disorder (Williams, 2013).

It is not as surprising to see volunteers mention being in a care-giving profession, as people who choose to do so for a living tend to be people that like to help others. However, one surprising finding is that a significant amount of volunteers mention being a parent/grandparent as part of their motivation to volunteer. This may relate to the motivation that they want to give back to the community to help other parents thrive (Cloyes, 2014).

Some limitations to these results is that the data only shows what the volunteers are willing to give. All themes that Living Yoga touches upon are typically topics that are hard to bring up in any setting. The upside to knowing this is that the participants that were willing to respond to this question has used those difficult topics as a more powerful motivator to volunteer.

References

1. Cloyes, K. G., Rosenkranz, S. J., Wold, D., Berry, P. H., & Supiano, K. P. (2014). To be truly alive: Motivation among prison inmate hospice volunteers and the transformative process of end-of-life peer care service. *American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine*, 31(7), 735–748. <https://doi-org.ezproxy-eres.up.edu/10.1177/1049909113506035>
2. Williams-Orlando, C. (2013). Yoga therapy for anxiety: a case report. *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*, 27(4), 18–21.
3. Ramanathan, M., Bhavanani, A., & Trakroo, M. (2017). Effect of a 12-week yoga therapy program on mental health status in elderly women inmates of a hospice. *International Journal of Yoga*, 10(1), 24–28. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-6131.186156>