Honors Research Project

Grace House Akron Volunteer Information and Training Kit

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 3

Description and Rationale ............................................................................................ 3

Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 4

Materials Introduction .................................................................................................. 8

Reflection ....................................................................................................................... 9

References ..................................................................................................................... 11

Appendix ......................................................................................................................... 13

Volunteer Training and Information Kit ................................................................. Appendix, Pg. 1
Abstract

Grace House Akron is a non-profit organization that provides housing and care to people on hospice who are homeless, living in indignant conditions, or do not have an able and/or willing caregiver. Over the course of Grace House’s first year in operation, they have worked alongside over 200 volunteers. Now, they are seeking to expand the demographic makeup of these volunteers. The objective of this project is to create a deliverable volunteer kit that will include 4 sections: Introduction, In-House Volunteering, Out-of-House Volunteering, and Reference Materials. This kit will streamline the process of onboarding volunteers by introducing them to the organization and the roles that are available for volunteers. This will free up time and resources for Grace House to focus on other endeavors.

Description and Rationale

For my honors project, I created a Volunteer Information and Training Kit for the non-profit Grace House Akron to assist in onboarding new volunteers. The kit was designed with high school and college-aged volunteers in mind and to make their introduction to volunteering at the organization more seamless. By providing this kit, the process of acquiring new volunteers will be easier not only for the volunteers themselves, but for Grace House as an organization as well.

Grace House Akron is a fairly new non-profit, with their facility having only opened in August of 2022. This recency in conjunction with the nature of being a non-profit means that the organization does not have as many resources as they would like; in terms of both on-hand materials and manpower. This is why utilizing and retaining volunteers is vital to Grace House’s ongoing success. By streamlining the process, Grace House will be able to dedicate resources and time to other growth and management endeavors.
While Grace House does already have a good number of volunteers, the age demographic for these individuals is predominantly 65 and over. Grace House is hugely appreciative of its current volunteer base, but the organization does want to diversify and bring in volunteers from younger demographics; high school and college age individuals. Younger volunteers will bring new ideas and perspectives to the organization. Additionally, youth volunteers bring a level of passion and commitment unique to their age group; all of this will work to Grace House Akron’s benefit.

**Literature Review**

**Homelessness**

Homelessness is an issue that warrants very little introduction. Unfortunately, much of the current infrastructure designed to help homeless individuals often does more harm than good. Homeless shelters often treat their residents with little more regard than they would a criminal. Many homeless individuals have compared their experience in shelters to prison, saying “[i]t’s almost like I’m in jail,” and “[i]t's like prison basically. They tell you when to eat, when to sleep” (Kerr, p. 408). Even individuals who have been incarcerated describe shelters as a type of “open penitentiary” with the main difference being the security, saying “[i]t’s not a penitentiary where you got shotguns and towers looking at you, guard dogs or they call the goon squad in your cell to pull you out if you don’t come out. Other than that, you know yeah, it’s like an open penitentiary” (Kerr, p. 408). These conditions are why Grace House – where residents are allowed to go outside, eat, sleep, leave, and come back whenever they like – is a change of pace desperately needed when it comes to homeless outreach.

Homeless individuals also face a much higher risk for both physical and mental health issues. The homeless population in northeast Ohio has “a median of 4 chronic conditions” such
as cardiovascular or pulmonary diseases; as compared to two for non-homeless populations (Bensken et al., 2022). Nearly 50% of these individuals are reported to have some form of depression, 45% reported as having some kind of anxiety disorder, and 20-25% reported as having bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or other psychoses (Bensken et al., 2022). These numbers are far above the percentage of non-homeless individuals in northeast Ohio reported as having these same conditions. Understanding this information is important to understand that Grace House residents are coming into the home with far more health concerns than just what they are dying from and that they will continue to struggle with these even when they have a roof over their heads.

**Hospice Care**

Hospice care, also known as end of life care, is a form of healthcare focused on minimizing pain and making a terminally ill individual as comfortable and cared for as possible. Curing a patient’s ailments is not at the forefront of care, as their disease(s) have been declared untreatable, they have been given less than six months to live, and/or the patient no longer wishes to undergo treatment. Another defining factor of hospice care is that it is typically administered in the patient’s home or the home of a relative. Finally, since the focus is on comfort and not prolonging life, patient behavior is less restricted when it comes to pain management and substance consumption (National Institute on Aging). It is proven that hospice care works in the ways it is intended. Individuals on hospice care have reported an overall “improved patient experience of care,” especially in regard to general satisfaction and pain management (Kleinpell et al., 2016). Grace House operates as if patients were receiving care in their own home. Not only do they provide medical care to residents, but they provide them with comfort and compassion, and that compassion is at the core of everything they do.
Homeless individuals are also less likely to receive as much assistance from the pre-existing hospice system as compared to patients who are not homeless. They are faced with various barriers to entry, “including stigmatization by health-care providers who are perceived to be unresponsive to their needs, or the challenges of receiving hospice care without stable housing” (Sumalinog et al., 2017). This disparity is what motivated Grace House founder Holly Klein as she “routinely witnessed patients falling through the gaps of the healthcare system” during her time as an in-home hospice R.N. (About Grace House, 2023). Grace House strives to eliminate those barriers for its residents and treat them the same as housed patients.

**Youth Volunteering**

Youth volunteering is utilized by many different types of organizations when they are in need of volunteer work. One of the main hurdles with youth volunteering – which is mostly referring to teenagers – is figuring out how to get them to want to be involved. Teenagers are the age group that is most likely to factor in social influence when it comes to decision making. When teenagers are faced with a decision, they will often “observe others’ previous decisions … or receive explicit advice … while making private decisions” (Ciranka & van den Bos, 2019). This provides the opportunity for gaining new youth volunteers through existing ones. Communicating opportunities to potential volunteers through their peers would increase how receptive they would be to the message.

Youth volunteering also has unique benefits not only for the volunteers themselves, but their communities as well. Becoming involved with volunteering at a crucially developmental age can lead to lifelong behaviors. Studies have found that “youth volunteering … generates a long-term commitment to volunteering and community involvement” (Kim & Morgül, 2017). Getting volunteers at Grace House engaged when they are young will increase the probability of
their retention as volunteers as they transition into adulthood. Even if they move out of the Akron community in their adult lives, they may be motivated to help carry out Grace House’s mission at other organizations across the country.

Communities are also able to reap the benefits of getting youth involved with volunteering and the behaviors that build from it. Research finds that there is a “correlation between volunteering and the creation of social capital, creating a feedback loop … where volunteerism builds social capital … and equally social capital promotes volunteering … social capital has the potential to strengthen civil engagement in communities” (Nursey-Bray et al, 2022). That feedback loop builds and builds, strengthening not only the greater community Grace House is a part of, but the community within the organization itself. With volunteers that become increasingly more and more engaged, there will be opportunity for volunteers to advance into more specialized and advanced roles and provide increased value to the organization as a whole.

**Internal Communication**

Effective internal communication is vital for the survival and success of any organization. Recognizing the importance of the individuals within an organization and treating these internal stakeholders with the same degree of attention as external stakeholders is incredibly beneficial. Internal communication should increase understanding, be informative, and strengthen the relationship between the organization and the individual (Hayase, p. 16). Aspects of effective internal communication such as “information flow and information feedback … [and] information adequacy significantly impacts organizational commitment,” and ensures those individuals are more committed and productive (Ma, 2022). Communicating clearly to Grace House volunteers will not only help with engagement and retention by portraying Grace House
as a desirable organization to work with that values them, but also will help with increasing the quality of work performed. Effective internal communication will set clear expectations and success metrics to ensure that volunteers will not be left with more questions than answers, and will be able to confidently and successfully carry out their tasks.

**Publics Theory**

Recognizing what kind of publics an organization’s publics are is essential when engaging with them. Inactive publics are groups of stakeholders that possess both a low level of knowledge and involvement with an organization (Hallahan, 2000). Turning inactive publics into active publics is vital for an organization’s growth. Monroe’s Motivated Sequence provides a layout for this process; grabbing the audience’s attention, establishing a need, satisfying the need by introducing a solution, visualizing the future, and actualization. Most of the volunteers that will be receiving this training kit will be past the first step and onto the second. Monroe’s Motivated Sequence is most often applied to situations of verbal communication, but research has found that it “can be used as scaffold for reading activities … it enthused the participants to engage in extensive reading,” making it applicable to the volunteer kit (Lidadun & Chiuh, 2021). The kit will help facilitate this inactive to active conversion by streamlining and enhancing the orientation process. Orientation training is more effective when “novice volunteers [are] provided with something to hold, something to see and something to hear during the orientation session” (Watson, 1994, p. 59). Providing these materials will keep trainee volunteers more engaged and more likely to retain information; eliminating the need for later remedial orientation training.

**Materials Introduction**

The following kit is a training tool to be used in the onboarding process of new volunteers to quickly introduce volunteers to the organization and the volunteering roles within
it. After meeting with a potential volunteer and determining that they would be suitable, a volunteer coordinator will provide that volunteer with either the digital version of the kit or a printed version. The kit consists of four sections: Introduction, In-House Volunteering, Out-of-House Volunteering, and Reference Materials. The majority of content will be reviewed by the volunteer individually, but the list of in-house volunteering roles and the list of in-demand donation items should be gone over with the volunteer coordinator; to find the best fit for the volunteer and to note which items are currently lower or higher priority. The templates were designed in Canva and are intended for volunteer use. The flyers in particular are designed to be nearly ready for immediate use, they only need date and time information filled in. They can also be used as inspiration for a volunteer’s own design for flyers promoting similar fundraising events and/or donation drives.

Reflection

Through the creation of this Volunteer Information and Training Kit, I have learned how to use much of what I have learned in my communication and public relations classes over the last four years. I performed extensive research in fields of study and discussion that are related to my project, designed original and unique formatting, and created multiple different types of deliverables – both written and visual. I got to explore a new field of communication with this project, focusing on internal stakeholders as opposed to external ones.

I will be able to use the skills that I have cultivated and advanced during the course of this project in my future career. I have learned what it takes to take a project of this scale from inception to completion all on my own. Additionally, I have learned how to practically apply research, as opposed to only applying it in an academic setting. I have gained a greater
understanding of how to tailor messages to a highly specific demographic, specifically a younger
demographic, and the choices in both writing and visual design that help facilitate that message.

I hope that this project will be a valuable resource to Grace House Akron for years to come. Their mission and work helps a critically underserved part of the population and they pursue it tirelessly. It has been a true honor and a privilege to work with Grace House and to provide them with any assistance that I can. I look forward to seeing their organization grow and thrive in the future and for them to be able to reach and retain the groups that can help them achieve that success.
References


Appendix

Grace House Akron Volunteer Information and Training Kit

Lilly Wright

University of Akron
Volunteer Training and Information Kit
Table of Contents

Introduction Letter ......................................................... 2
Backgrounder .............................................................. 3
Grace House Fact Sheet .................................................. 4
Hospice Care Fact Sheet .................................................. 5
Contact List ....................................................................... 6
**In-house Volunteering** .................................................... 7
Volunteer Roles .............................................................. 8
Specialized Volunteer Roles .............................................. 13
**Out-of-house Volunteering** .......................................... 14
Fundraising Ideas ............................................................ 15
In-demand Donation Items ............................................... 16
**Reference Materials** ..................................................... 17
Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to Grace House Akron! You will be making a big impact in the lives of our residents and our organization as a whole. Grace House is dedicated to providing homeless individuals receiving hospice care with not only housing, but compassion, care, and dignity as they pass away.

This training kit will provide you with the knowledge and the tools you will need for your time volunteering with us to be fulfilling and effective. We want your experience volunteering with Grace House to be a positive one, so we want to help provide you with what you need to make it that way.

The kit contains four parts as listed in the table of contents. The first section is a brief introduction not only to Grace House as an organization and the staff who are here to assist you, but information about what hospice care is and why it is so important for those who might be less familiar.

The next two sections are about all the ways to volunteer in the house and outside of it. I suggest you read the responsibilities carefully so you can find which one best suits your skills and interests. Finally, the last section of the kit has various templates that you can fill in with your own information, or use as a reference to create your own.

We are so glad to have you here at Grace House Akron and we are looking forward to the incredible work you’re going to do with us.

All the best,

Cindy Browning

Cindy Browning
Co-founder and Volunteer Coordinator
Contact: Amanda Novelli
Email: amanda.novelli@gracehouseakron.org
Phone: (330) 572-4476

History of Grace House Akron

AKRON, Ohio – Grace House Akron was first started when former in-home hospice nurse RN Holly Klein noticed how many of her underprivileged and under-insured patients were not being properly served by the healthcare system. She would travel to where her patients lived and find them living in near-condemned buildings or tents; and they were expected to die there.

Spurred on by the belief that no one should die without dignity, safety, and compassion Klein and co-founders Cindy and Nicholas Browning founded Grace House Akron as a non-profit organization in 2017.

In 2019, Summa Health donated a parcel of land near one of their campus for Grace House to be built on. Construction began in September 2021 and was completed the following year. The home officially opened its doors in August 2022.

Grace House is a six bedroom comfort care home that houses hospice patients that are homeless, living in indignant conditions, or do not have an able and/or willing caregiver. Grace House provides all their services entirely free of charge, regardless of whether or not a patient is insured.

Housing is not the only service provided to Grace House residents. Residents are also provided with three prepared meals a day, 24/7 access to food and water, therapeutic massages, vigil companions, programs such as pet, music, and art therapy, and spiritual care. Support and care is also provided to the families and caregivers of patients.

About Grace House Akron
Grace House Akron is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides a loving home for indigent, homeless and abandoned individuals at the end of life while on hospice care. The home provides safe shelter, care with dignity and compassion, and a nurturing environment for individuals with terminal illnesses. Their vision is to offer access to compassionate care and comfort at end of life for all individuals in the greater Akron area.

###
Grace House Quick Facts

**Our Mission**
To provide a loving home for indignant, homeless, and abandoned individuals at the end of life - no one dies alone.

**Our Impact**
As of February 2024, Grace House Akron has housed 66 residents and provided them with over 6,500 meals since opening in August 2022.

**Our Cost**
There is absolutely no cost to live at Grace House, regardless of whether or not a patient has insurance.

**Our Needs**
What Grace House needs is people dedicated to our mission who are willing to donate not only money and resources, but their time and energy.
Hospice Quick Facts

What is hospice?
Hospice care is a philosophy of care focused on minimizing pain and making a terminally ill individual as comfortable and cared for as possible.

Where is hospice?
Hospice care is typically administered in the patient's/relative's home, but can take place wherever the patient is. This make it challenging to receive care without stable housing.

When is hospice?
Hospice care is administered when someone’s diseases are terminal, they have less than 6 months to live, and/or the patient no longer wishes to undergo treatment.

Why is hospice?
Individuals receiving hospice care typically report higher levels of satisfaction with care, especially in regard to pain management.
Contact List

Contact for: Volunteering questions
Name: Cindy Browning
Position: Co-founder and Volunteer Coordinator
Email Address: cindy.browning@gracehouseakron.org

Contact for: Volunteering questions
Name: Tracey Duncko
Position: Part-time Volunteer Coordinator
Email Address: tracey.duncko@gracehouseakron.org

Contact for: Donations and marketing/social media questions
Name: Amanda Novelli
Position: Director, Development and Communications
Email Address: amanda.novelli@gracehouseakron.org
In-house Volunteering
Volunteer Roles

Welcome Desk Host:
- Greet, check-in, and assist visitors.
- Provide hospitality to our guests and families.
- Conduct tours and distribute brochures.
- Occasionally answer the phone, record, and distribute messages.

Clerical Assistant:
- Assist with data entry, filing, record keeping, mailings, and other clerical projects.
- Assist with creation of brochures, PowerPoint presentations, invitations, and other publications.

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering.
Volunteer Roles

Special Events Assistant:
- Assist with the planning and coordination of events, fundraisers, volunteer events, and memorial services.
- Schedule and assist with campus use by community groups.

Caregiver to the Caregiver:
- Assist staff caregiver with resident personal needs.
- Assist staff with interventions according to plan of care.
- Maintain guests’ bedrooms/bathrooms.
- Observe Grace House Standards of Care.

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering.
Volunteer Roles cont.

**Gardener:**
- Maintain lawn, gardens, annual beds, and perennial beds through mowing and/or watering
- Maintain patios, pavilion, outdoor areas, water features, and exterior buildings

**Handyperson:**
- Perform routine building maintenance
- Perform repairs as needed
- Perform basic construction and installations

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering.
Volunteer Roles cont.

**Household Assistant:**
- Perform housekeeping duties and routine cleaning
- Stock and inventory food and household supplies
- Organize and maintain books and resources

**Companion:**
- Provide emotional and spiritual support and hospitality to guests, family, and visitors
- Read aloud and participate in supportive activities with guests and families

**Animal Lover:**
- Perform routine pet duties — pet walking, grooming, shop errands for supplies, and routine cleaning
- Stock and inventory animal food and animal supplies
- Provide companionship to Grace House residents’ animals

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering
Volunteer Roles cont.

**Spa Services Assistant:**
- Perform hair care and styling
- Perform nail care (filing, nail polish)

**Guest Cook:**
- Provide a nourishing home-cooked meal to guests
  - Can be prepared in Grace House’s kitchen or at home and brought in
- Clean dishes

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering.
Specialized Volunteer Roles

**Music:**
- Perform music for guests, residents, and caregivers

**Art:**
- Create artwork to be displayed around the house and/or in a resident’s room
- Run an art event for residents

If applicable, please bring service hour sheet for signing at time of volunteering
Out-of-house Volunteering
Fundraising Ideas

1. Set up a donation drive
   Whether it’s for food, clothing, or watercolor paintings of ducks! Item donations are always welcome.

2. Run a fundraising sale
   Baked goods, candy, singing Valentine’s messages: something that people want to buy.

3. Reach out to local businesses
   Find places that are willing and ready to give back to the community. Restaurants are a great place to start!

4. Use your network
   Reach out to the people you already know: friends, family, teachers, coworkers.

Service hours signed off on will be based on total time spent working on fundraiser
In-Demand Donation Items

**Food**

*One service hour per item*
- Non-perishable snacks and other food
- Baked goods
- Individual juice and soda
- Coffee
- Paper plates, bowls, and cups

**Cleaning**

*One service hour per item*
- Trash bags
- Paper towels
- Vinyl disposable gloves
- Storage bins
- Laundry detergent
- Various cleaning products

**Personal**

*Two service hours per item*
- Hygiene products
- Toiletries
- Adult-sized clothing
- Adult undergarments and socks
- Adult diapers
- Pet care items
- Bedsheets and blankets

**Other**

*Service hours subject to approval*
- Wall art
- Decorative items
- Gift cards
- Auction items
  - Gift baskets
  - Event tickets
  - Vouchers and certificates
  - Artwork

*Grace House will sign off on a MAXIMUM of 5 service hours for item donations per individual*
Reference Materials
To | Business Owner/Manager
---|---
Cc | 
Bcc | 
Subject | Request for [Item] Donation to Non-Profit

(High school version)

Dear [Owner/Manager Name],

My name is [name] and I am a student at [high school name]. I am helping a local non-profit, Grace House Akron, collect donations of [item(s) that the business sells]. Grace House provides housing and care to individuals who are on hospice care and are homeless or in indignant conditions. Your donation would be able to help underprivileged members of the greater Akron area live out their last days in peace, comfort, and dignity. Anything you are able to give would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

[First and Last Name]

(Non-high school version)

Dear [Owner/Manager Name],

My name is [name] and I am helping a local non-profit, Grace House Akron, collect donations of [item(s) that the business sells]. Grace House provides housing and care to individuals who are on hospice care and are homeless or in indignant conditions. Your donation would be able to help underprivileged members of the greater Akron area live out their last days in peace, comfort, and dignity. Anything you are able to give would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

[First and Last Name]

This template can also be used for letters, just copy some of the information from the Backgrounder.
This template can be used as letterhead, a sign in sheet, stationary, or anything other branded document that you might need.
Bake Sale

Stop by and get a sweet treat! All proceeds benefit Grace House Akron

When: 

Where: 
FOOD DRIVE

DATES: __________________
DROP-OFF LOCATION: _______________

All donations to go to Grace House Akron

Most Needed Items:

Contact
Clothing Drive

Dates: ____________

Dropoff Location: ______________

Adult clothes only, all donations to go to Grace House House Akron