Youth volunteering for youth: Who are they serving?
How are they being served?

Debbie Haski-Leventhal a,⁎ Natti Ronel b, Alan S. York c, Boaz M. Ben-David d

a The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel
b Department of Criminology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel
c School of Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel
d Centre for Research on Biological Communication Systems, University of Toronto, Canada

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Abstract

Youth volunteering for at-risk youth can have an impact on the clients’ willingness to receive help as well as the youth who volunteer. The current study, undertaken in drop-in centers for youth at-risk in Israel, studied youth volunteers in comparison with adult volunteers as well as the clients of the service. It combined quantitative and qualitative data in order to understand the motivations, benefits and commitment of youth volunteers and to compare these aspects with those of adult volunteers in the same organization. Findings show that youth volunteers have different motivations, benefits and costs than adult volunteers. Youth volunteers are more relationship oriented; adult volunteers are more service oriented; and the volunteer group plays several important roles in youth volunteering. The clients (at-risk youth) perceived the youth volunteers as helpful and described how volunteers their age changed their world view and empowered them to volunteer themselves. In addition, there are blurred boundaries between youth clients and volunteers.

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1. Introduction

As social capital declines in the economic and social reality today (Putnam, 2000), youth volunteering can offer important services to other young people, and to human service organizations to help overcome social exclusion and social discord. Youth at-risk often avoid turning to social welfare or to the Establishment for help, and find volunteers trustworthy (Ronel, 2006). This article presents services for youth at-risk which involve youth volunteers sometimes with the same...
background as the clients, as a way to reach the organizational clients and to empower youth. Our study focused on youth volunteers in drop-in centers in Israel, in which we had the opportunity to study the unique features of youth volunteers (motivations, rewards, and group affiliation), their relationship with the clients, and their status as semi-clients.

Adolescence is a critical period in human life and is important in developing the adult self. According to Erikson (1950) adolescence is the time in which ego identity emerges through conflicts, and peer influence is at its strongest. Ego identity means knowing who we are and how we fit in to the rest of society. It requires that the adolescent takes what he or she has learned about life and him/herself, and mold it into a unified self-image, one that the community finds meaningful. Thus adolescence can be an important time to develop one’s altruistic identity and to start working in and for the community. Indeed, it was found that 44% of adult volunteers started working for their communities at adolescence. Adults who began volunteering at adolescence are twice more likely to volunteer than those who did not volunteer when they were younger (Independent Sector 2001; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004).

Existing knowledge about volunteers in the human services has mainly focused on adult volunteers. Different aspects of adult volunteering have been studied: definition of volunteering (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Handy et al., 2000; Smith, 1981); motivation to volunteer (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Yeung, 2004); rewards (Cnaan & Amrofell, 1994); satisfaction (Field & Johnson, 1993); volunteer retention and turnover (Blake & Jefferson, 1992; Cnaan & Cascio, 1999; Cyr & Doerick, 1991); and the effectiveness of volunteers (Golden, 1991). These aspects have seldom been examined among youth volunteers, and the differences between adult and youth volunteers in the same context or organization remain unstudied. Particularly, youth volunteers as service providers to their peers have scarcely been studied, although the manner in which these volunteers make services for youth at-risk available could shed light on an effective intervention method.

Furthermore, very little is known about the clients of volunteering. The influence of volunteering usually refers to the volunteers themselves and the benefits they may gain, not their clients (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder, 1998; Moore & Allen, 1996; Schondel, Boehm, Rose, & Marlowe, 1995). When Edwards, Mooney, and Heald (2001) examined “who is being served” by the volunteers, they mainly focused on the community and on organizations, and not on individuals. In another article based on the current study, we separately address the impact of volunteering on the clients (Ronel, Haski-Leventhal, Ben-David, & York, in press). Therefore here we shall focus only on the youth volunteers, their impact on the clients, and how different they are from the adult volunteers.

1.1. Youth volunteering

We define youth volunteers as people from the age of 12 to the age of 19 who work for their community with no monetary reward. Some youth volunteers are encouraged or obliged to do so by their schools, or even as part of the school curriculum, and therefore may not be considered as volunteers in the narrow sense (which includes only volunteers who work of their free will, with absolutely no monetary reward, and for strangers). In 2005, 38% of American high school students (10.6 million adolescents) participated in school-based services (Independent Sector, 2005). In Israel, 32–40% of adolescents volunteered for their community in the years 2005–2006. Of those who volunteered, 40% did so through school community services (the program in Israel is known as “Personal Commitment”) and 94% of the youth volunteers did so at least once a week, for 3 or 4 hours a week on average (Geo-cartography, 2005).

The current body of knowledge on youth volunteers has mainly focused on what may lead them to volunteer and on the impact of their work on both the community and the youth themselves. As Rosenthal, Feiring, and Lewis (1998) indicated, almost no data exist on the nature or development of volunteering in youth, and most of the existing information is related to the likelihood of volunteering in youth, the characteristics of those who volunteer, and those factors that predict youth volunteering.

The factors that may lead youth to volunteer have been studied, and socialization to volunteering through parents, school and church was found to be very important. Raskoff and Sundeen (1994, 1998; Sundeen & Raskoff, 2000) analyzed data on over 1400 adolescents collected by the Independent Sector in 1991, and showed that schools, families and churches, all have an important role in socializing adolescents into volunteering, whether by promoting volunteering values, by modeling, or by giving support, information and encouragement. In 1998 the authors wrote on community service through schools, and showed that 82% of school provided opportunities for community involvement for their students, and in 46% of the schools it was even a graduation requirement. When Jones (2000) tried to understand the increase of youth volunteering in Canada, he showed that full time school enrolment had also risen notably, and that the two are related, as students volunteer through their schools.
Janoski and Wilson (1995) portrayed the role of family socialization in leading youth volunteering. If the family socialization is community-oriented, then the chances that youth will volunteer increase. When Lo (2001) wrote about his own experience as a youth volunteer, he emphasized his mother’s role: he grew up with a mother who worked for hospices and he volunteered there himself. In a study on political volunteering by youth, Rosenthal et al. (1998) suggested that family coherence and membership in pro-social organization (such as the Scouts) are related to volunteering.

Regarding factors that may impact the tendency to volunteer, Smith (1994) offered the dominant status explanation to volunteering: people with higher human capital (education and income) and social capital (social networks) volunteer more than others. Indeed, education, income and social networks were found to be the most consistent predictors of volunteering (Penner, 2002; Wilson, 2000). Sundeen and Raskoff (2000) showed that the dominant status is also relevant to youth volunteering: youth who volunteer tend to have access to social power, enjoy high personal competency, and experience socialization into volunteer experiences through family, church, and school. Social networks were as important in youth volunteering at least as much as in adulthood: personal contact with family, friends, and teachers who volunteered, prior participation in school and church-based service, and personal initiative, led youth to learn about and engage in volunteering activities.

Few studies have focused specifically on the personal motivations of youth volunteers. Motivation to volunteer in general has been shown to be a complex factor, usually combined of altruistic, egoistic and social motives (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991) serving different human needs and functions (Clary et al., 1996).

Schondel and Boehm (2000) investigated the motivational needs of youth volunteers and found that, in general, youth motivation to volunteer was similar to that of older volunteers, and common themes included helping others, social interaction and recognition. However, some motivations were more important in youth volunteering, such as socialization to pro-social behavior, self actualization and peer pressure. Omoto, Snyder, and Martino (2000) proposed that “as people move through the life course, they attach different meanings to the volunteer role, and that these meanings are directly related to the agendas they pursue through volunteerism” (p. 182). At different ages, they wrote, people have different life tasks, and from these life tasks, more specific motivations flow. In a study of 144 volunteers (both youth and adults), the authors demonstrated that younger volunteers were more motivated by relationship concerns and older volunteers by service concerns.

Jones (2000) demonstrated that Canadian youth volunteered for the following reasons: belief in a cause; the wish to use skills and experience, to explore their strengths, or to improve job opportunities; and having friends who volunteer. Studying youth volunteering in Israeli kibbutzim, Avrahami and Dar (1993) showed that volunteering may meet the special needs of youth, and that volunteering gives young people the chance for a moratorium experience. Motivation to volunteer among kibbutz youth was complex, and included collectivistic (altruistic) as well as personal motivations.

Studies on the impact of volunteering usually refer to the impact volunteering has on the volunteer rather than on the beneficiaries, their clients (Ronel, 2006; Ronel et al., in press). Volunteering was found to have a positive impact on adolescents’ success in school, and it helped reduce several behavior problems, such as drug abuse, violence and early pregnancy (Schondel et al., 1995; Uggen & Janikula, 1999). Youth volunteering was found to be related to better grades in school, an ambition for higher education, higher self confidence, and inner motivation to accomplish tasks and to less behavior problems and less unwanted pregnancies (Johnson et al., 1998; Moore & Allen, 1996).

In addition to personal gain, youth volunteers were found to have more positive attitudes toward society: volunteers acquired social responsibility, had more knowledge about others in their community, improved their skills, and were more capable of decision making than non-volunteers (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Sundeen & Raskoff, 2000). Youth volunteers who worked with people with disabilities showed greater willingness to interact with disabled people than non-volunteers (Carter, Hughes, Copeland, & Breen, 2001).

Youth volunteers usually work in the fields of education and welfare (Geo-cartography, 2005; Raskoff & Sundeen, 1998), often helping others of the same age. A study of a cross-peer volunteer program indicated that such a model can be successful for everybody. It empowers youth to make a difference in the lives of others, and it makes it easier for youth to receive their help (Edwards, Safrit, Gliem, & Rudd, 2006). Katon and Etgar (1998) found that when youth volunteer for youth, their common language generates trust and facilitates interpersonal communication. Kulik (2007) studied 102 adolescents who volunteered in programs for youth in Israel. She showed that their overall satisfaction and perceived contribution were high, and that the youth volunteers reported positive experiences. Strong commitment and satisfaction were also found among youth volunteers in the Red Cross (Handy & Keil, 2001).
2. The organization in the present study

The present study was carried out within a prominent volunteer organization in Israel: “ELEM: Addressing Youth in Distress”, and with its encouragement. Established in 1981, ELEM is now a nationally-run organization for underprivileged, socially-excluded adolescents and “street kids.” It is unique in its outreach services, performed mainly by its 1500 long term volunteers in 25 different locations throughout Israel (www.elem.org).

The drop-in centers operate as coffee houses where at-risk youth can drop in to socialize, to get information on various issues that are relevant to their lives and, if they so wish, to receive initial counseling and a referral to an appropriate welfare agency. The centers are located throughout Israel, in major cities as well as in small and relatively remote towns, and ELEM operates the centers by intensively employing adult volunteers as well as youth volunteers.

The drop-in centers are run by the organizational employees – paid worker who manage the center; supervise the volunteers and give professional counseling to the target population. However, most of the outreach and services are the responsibility of the volunteers, who are divided into two groups: adult volunteers, mostly students in their twenties, and youth volunteers (the literature on youth volunteers is described above. For the review on student volunteering, see Haski-Leventhal et al., in press).

The target population of the drop-in centers is youth at-risk. Moving from childhood into adulthood can be stressful and may result in emotional and behavioral problems (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Most adolescents find the needed resources to cope with the stress of growing up, but at-risk youth find it harder than others: they have dysfunctional families, they have had difficult personal backgrounds, and they are subject to chronically severe stressors (Brown, 1990; Steinberg, 1990). In Israel many of them are relatively new immigrants, and so the strains of immigration are compounded by the pressures of adolescence.

Youth at-risk often avoid turning to human services for help because they feel alienated (Brown, 1990; Molnar, Shade, Kral, Booth, & Watters, 1998; Ronel, 2006), and volunteers may have a better chance of gaining their trust and helping them. In addition, youth volunteers present similar characteristics to those of the target population and thus may have a better chance to reach out to them. These similarities and the informality of the service can mediate between the service providers and the clients, and the latter tend to receive their help more willingly (Ronel, 2006).

2.1. Research questions

Following the literature review, a few research questions regarding the youth volunteers were designed, mostly focusing on the volunteers’ relations with other volunteers (youth and adult) and the clients. We shall compare the data collected on the youth volunteers with the data collected on the other groups. Therefore, our research questions are as follows:

1. What are the socio-demographic features of the youth volunteers in the drop-in centers and how do they differ from the adult volunteers and the clients?
2. What are the unique motivations and rewards which cause youth to volunteer, and how satisfied and committed are they?
3. What service do youth volunteers provide in the opinion of other organizational players?
4. How do the blurred boundaries between youth volunteers and youth clients impact the organization, the volunteers, and the clients?
5. What is the role of the group in encouraging youth to volunteer and in keeping them as volunteers?

3. Method

3.1. Sample and procedure

The study reported here was part of a larger project, conducted by the inter-disciplinary center on the study of children and youth at Tel Aviv University, which aimed to study volunteering in ELEM’s national network of drop-in centers for youth-at-risk. The extensive study focused on the different aspects of volunteering, including adult and youth volunteers, and their relationships with the paid employees and the clients. Although the study reported here is focused on the youth volunteers, the fact that we studied the other groups as well, allowed us to compare the data accordingly.
In order to address the research questions stated above, we combined qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis, to create an integrative method that is relationship centered (Langhout, 2003). This paradigm helped us to explore the meaning attributed to volunteers by the various groups of participants, and further opened up unanticipated research questions. The quantitative findings enabled us to validate the qualitative results, and to study the quantitative correlations between various qualitative variables. Using the combination of both methods constructed a richer and more holistic understanding (Langhout, 2003), which is likely to produce a wider knowledge than either method alone (Tebes, 2005).

The data were collected in 2002–2004, during 18 months in which we had two checking points, but in most of the study questions there were no significant differences between the two checkpoints. The research was held in six drop-in centers throughout Israel, with a supplementary center that acted as a pilot, where we preliminarily tested our various research tools. In each center there were four groups of participants: paid employees (managers, supervisors, and consultants), adult volunteers, youth volunteers and clients. We separately interviewed 47 employees, 31 adult volunteers, and 16 youth volunteers, in semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews which lasted between half an hour and two hours. Sampling participants for the interviews was not done randomly, but rather according to the theoretical sampling presented by Strauss and Corbin (1998), according to whom participants are chosen to answer the research questions.

In addition, adult volunteers (n = 77), youth volunteers (n = 65) and clients (n = 190) filled in questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed by the employees of the organization and by the authors, and, after they were filled in anonymously, were deposited by the respondents in a box in each center. The sampling therefore was neither random nor representative, but as participants came from seven different centers, biases were somewhat controlled. We do not have the exact number of adult volunteers at the time of the research, nor of the employees and clients. However, the number of the youth volunteers was approximately 70, and we managed to interview about one-fourth of them and to distribute questionnaires to 90%.

In addition, 26 non-participant observations, following an observation guide, were held in the centers during everyday activities and staff meetings. The staff of the centers also provided various case-studies that fitted the research questions.

3.2. Measures

In order to address the research questions and to make comparisons between the adult volunteers, the youth volunteers, and the clients, we designed separate questionnaires for each group.

**Adult volunteer questionnaire**: this was a 16 page questionnaire which included: volunteering habits; attitudes toward volunteering and motivations; relationships with other volunteers and groups; attitudes toward the organization; general welfare, and socio-demographic questions.

**Youth volunteer questionnaire**: The questionnaires for the youth volunteers were a shorter version of the one distributed to the adult volunteers and were written in less complex language. The 43-item survey included information about the respondents’ volunteering habits; aspects of their volunteering activity (e.g., motivation, commitment, benefits, and costs); their roles as volunteers; their relationship with others; and social-demographic characteristics. All the sub-questionnaires were tested for their internal consistency and the Cronbach alphas ranged from 0.64 to 0.83.

**Client questionnaire**: This questionnaire was specially constructed by the research team, since no previous models were found. The questionnaire included seven items: whether the clients met volunteers; what kind of help did they receive from them; attitudes toward adult volunteers; attitudes toward youth volunteers; the level of perceived help; and the areas in which volunteers helped. In this article we use only the questions on clients’ attitudes toward youth volunteers which had an internal validity of 0.78 on a Cronbach alpha scale.

3.3. Data analysis

The qualitative paradigm mainly guided the analysis of the results (Shkedi, 2003). First, each of the authors read all the qualitative data separately and defined various categories of meaning. In this stage we attempted to make sense of the collective experience of participants by transforming their personal stories into research categories, based on our own experience and knowledge (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Following extensive discussion, we set up the various categories that stemmed from the results into a tree of meanings, constructed by main themes, sub-categories and their relations. Thereafter, we added the quantitative data, to support and broaden the described themes and to describe the relations between different categories. In addition, some of the quantitative data required new categories of meaning.
The validity and authenticity of the results were safeguarded by several procedures:

a. Peer validity – extensive discussions among the members of the research team (the authors) and additional responses from the staff of the centers and the management of the network;
b. Extended peer validity – feedback from several colleagues;
c. Triangulation – several sources of data provided support to our analysis, including two check points and two evaluation reports;
d. Thick description – Each category is exemplified by relevant quotations from the interviews.

4. Results

4.1. Volunteers in the drop-in centers

The volunteers were divided into two main groups: adult volunteers \(n = 77\), age 19 and up) and youth volunteers \(n = 67\), age 12–19 and the socio-demographic characteristics of each group are detailed in Table 1. In both groups the majority of volunteers (almost 60% in both) were female, which matches what we know from other surveys on volunteering in Israel (Gidron, 1997). The mean age of the adult volunteers was 27.7 (most of them in their twenties), while most youth volunteers were under 17, mean age 16.9.

Due to the operating principle of the centers the socio-demographic data on the beneficiaries of the service, the clients, are scarce and there are no clinical records available. Furthermore, the clients who filled in the questionnaires about their encounter with volunteers \(n = 179\) are not necessarily those who provided the socio-demographic data \(n = 75\). Most of them are girls (60%) and the majority (83%) study at high school. Their mean age is 15.7. About one-third (34%) were working while in school or instead of school, either in a full time job (14%) or part time (20%).

As can be seen in Table 1, adult volunteers indeed represented the dominant status: people with human capital (with 70% of them having some amount of higher education, and more than half working), and 78% of them were born in Israel. However, with the youth volunteers the picture was not as clear: many of them had to work instead of or in addition to going to school. Almost 40% of the youth volunteers were immigrants from the former Soviet Union and other countries. The fact is many of the youth volunteers have similar features to those of the clients of the organization, and the blurred boundaries between the youth volunteers and the clients will be discussed later.

As for their definition as volunteers, 79% of the youth volunteers can be defined as volunteers in the narrow sense, or as non-obliged, as they volunteered of their free will and received no monetary benefits. However, 21% of the volunteers did so as part of their obligation to the school community service. It should be noted that in big cities, where the pool of potential volunteers is larger, 90% of the youth volunteers were non-obliged and volunteered on their own initiative and free will, compared to only 65% of the volunteers in small towns. In \(t\)-tests for independent samples some significant differences were found between non-obliged volunteers and obliged ones: obliged volunteers had lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Youth volunteers (frequency)</th>
<th>Adult volunteers (frequency)</th>
<th>Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Girls – 59%; Boys – 41%</td>
<td>Women – 58%; Men – 42%</td>
<td>Girls – 60%; Boys – 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>17 and under – 68%; 18–19 – 32%</td>
<td>19–21 – 19%; 22–29 – 61%; 30 and over – 20%</td>
<td>17 and under – 70%; 18–19: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Israel – 60%; Former USSR – 32%; Other – 7%</td>
<td>Israel – 78%; Former USSR – 10%; Ethiopia – 1%; Other – 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>Non-religious – 67%; Observant – 16%; Believer – 13%; Other – 4%</td>
<td>Non-religious – 62%; Observant – 17%; Believer – 13%; Orthodox – 2.5%; Other – 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Currently at school – 88%; not studying – 12%</td>
<td>Currently students – 55.5%;Graduated – 21%</td>
<td>Currently at school – 83%; not studying – 17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Pure" volunteers (79% (21% were obliged by school community service). 64% (19% stipend, and 17% obliged by army or national service or by university).
scores on identification with clients ($m = 3.2$ vs. $m = 4.2$ in a 1–6 ascending scale; $t(69) = 2.4$, $p = 0.025$); and they volunteered less than other volunteers ($m = 4.8$ weekly hours vs. $m = 2.9$; $t(63) = 2.5$, $p = 0.015$).

4.2. What makes teens tick? Motivation and rewards of youth volunteers

Table 2 indicates that youth volunteers in ELEM showed complex and multileveled motivation to volunteer. Their most important motivation combined altruistic and egoistic motives: 86% agreed that volunteering made them feel good about themselves (this finding was similar in adult volunteers: 88% agreed), followed by “volunteering can help me in the future” (70% of youth volunteers agreed vs. only 39% of adult volunteers). The next two motivations were socially oriented: “It is easy for me to identify with the teenagers in the centers” (69% agreed compared to 36% of adult volunteers) and “I wanted to meet new people” (63% agreed. The question for adult volunteers was differently phrased and cannot be compared).

Regarding positive attitudes toward their volunteer work, the vast majority of the youth volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience: 42% were very satisfied and 54% were satisfied; only 4% were not satisfied (this is similar to the findings among adult volunteers). Moreover, when asked how important volunteering was for them, 51% said that it was very important to them, and an additional 20% even declared that volunteering was one of the most important things in their lives. We found a significant correlation (Pearson) between the amount of volunteering hours per week and the level of satisfaction ($r_p = 0.442$, $p < 0.01$).

As for the benefits related to their volunteer work, Table 3 shows that 76% of youth volunteers said that making social contacts was the most important benefit to them while only 46% of adult volunteers perceived this benefit as important to them, ranking it 9th. Another benefit that was just as important to the youth volunteers was the feeling that they were helpful to the youth: 76% agreed, giving it a mean of 4.3 on a 5-point scale. However, this benefit was far more important to adult volunteers: 91.5% with a mean score of 4.94. As can be seen in Table 3, all the important benefits to the youth volunteers were related to their relationships with others: clients (gratitude and progress), supervisor (training and...
supervision) and peers. All the less important benefits were not related to others: solving problems, directions for the future, material benefits and success in school. A female youth volunteer described the social benefits of volunteering:

I had my birthday here once, after six years of never celebrating my birthday. I was so happy. I have met so many friends here, and we are friends even outside the center. Time really flies by here. I love being here and not being bored at home all the time.

Some of the youth volunteers were satisfied with a larger number of benefits than other volunteers. In t-tests for independent samples we found significant differences between these two groups of volunteers. Volunteers who were satisfied with a larger number of benefits perceived their work as more beneficial and effective \( (m = 1.7 \text{ vs. } m = 2.4 \text{ in a 1–4 descending scale}; t(61) = 3.3, p = 0.002) \); said that volunteering was more important to them \( (m = 1.7 \text{ vs. } m = 2.5; t(28) = 3.8, p = 0.001) \); felt more affiliated to the center \( (m = 1.7 \text{ vs. } m = 2.3; t(29) = 2.1, p = 0.04) \); and were more satisfied with their volunteering \( (m = 3.5 \text{ vs. } m = 2.9 \text{ in a 1–4 ascending scale}; t(60) = 4.9, p < 0.001) \).

Thus, ELEM youth volunteers demonstrated high satisfaction and commitment. Commitment to volunteering was conceptualized by Cnaan and Cascio (1999) as a combination of the length and frequency of volunteering and the volunteer’s intention to volunteer in the organization in the future. Table 4 shows that ELEM youth volunteers were highly committed in all aspects: they volunteered quite often, 45% of them volunteered 3 or 4 h a week, and another 35% volunteered even more than five weekly hours. Seventy-seven percent of the youth volunteers came to the centers to volunteer at least once a week. Not only did they volunteer often, but also 75% of them were willing to volunteer even more and 39% indicated that they will probably volunteer more often in the future.

T-tests for independent samples show that frequency of volunteering was indeed related to commitment: 35% of volunteers who gave at least four weekly hours reported volunteering to be one of the most important things in their lives, compared to only 7% of other volunteers. In addition, volunteers who gave 4 hours and more per week felt that their volunteering was more beneficial to the clients \( (m = 1.9 \text{ vs. } m = 2.5 \text{ in a 1–4 descending scale}; t(63) = 2.8, p = 0.007) \).

4.3. Youth volunteers as service providers: doing and being

The youth volunteering in ELEM is part of the organizational mission: to promote empowerment and social inclusion of youth. The service they provide is twofold: first, by doing, that is by giving actual help to the clients who drop in the centers, to the adult volunteers and to the paid staff. Second, they help by simply being in the centers.

The actual help of the youth volunteers in the centers (doing) is through a wide range of roles they can fill. One of the youth volunteers’ important roles is to go out of the center with an adult volunteer and to reach out for new clients in the area. Youth volunteers also greet newcomers to the centers, help them orientate and often help them fill out forms. Although youth volunteers do not give formal counseling, they may still have a chat with another adolescent, and share their point of view and experiences. Such a role was undertaken by this young female volunteer:

It’s a conversation and I talk to them (to the clients), I don’t think about what to say, I just say it. I don’t say things that could hurt them, just my opinion. I am thinking about similar cases. I try to identify with them a little. If nothing similar had happened to me, then I bring my friends as examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Commitment of youth volunteers (n=77)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment indicator</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly hours of volunteering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2.5 h</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 h</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 h and up</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to volunteer more hours</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of volunteering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every other week</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected changes in future volunteering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will come more often</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will come less often</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No expected changes</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to out-reaching and talking to the clients, youth volunteers also undertake tasks in organizing the center. Through the observation in the centers, we found several such roles: putting a library in order, fixing the computers, small maintenance works and decoration. Youth volunteers also serve food and drinks to the clients and help tidy up at the end of the day. All these roles help the youth volunteers feel useful and helpful, and help the adult volunteers and the paid staff concentrate on their helping duties.

The importance of the youth volunteers also derives from their being in the centers. Their constant presence in the centers is a seal of approval to the clients that this is a place for youth, and it signals trustworthiness to the clients. The presence of the youth volunteers in the centers impacts the atmosphere and the culture of the place. In addition, youth volunteers may set an example of a more normative way of life, and even a model of volunteering. One of the employees said that the presence of the youth volunteers makes the center “groovy and social” and another explained how youth volunteers impact the center:

> It gives a special atmosphere to the place, that this is a place for youth, a place that respects youth, youth work here, and there is someone to talk to. If the youth give their approval that this place is OK, it gives a sense of security to the clients.

And one of the youth volunteers agreed that: “we give the place a special touch; if it’s a place for youth, then youth should be here, even as volunteers”.

Furthermore, we asked the clients about the youth volunteers, their perceived roles, and the clients’ attitudes toward them. As can be seen in Table 5, one of the important impacts youth volunteers have is simply by being role models: most agreed that youth volunteers showed them that they too can volunteer (83.5%; mean = 4.57, on a 1–6 ascending scale) and that they learned from the youth volunteers in the centers about volunteering in general (67% agreed; mean = 4.02, on a 1–6 ascending scale). In addition 72% of the youth clients said that “it is easier to feel closer to the youth volunteers because they are like us,” showing the importance of the youth volunteers both by doing and by being. Finally, 51% of the clients agreed that they were positively influenced by the youth volunteers in the center.

### 4.4. Youth volunteers as clients

As we have already shown, there are blurred boundaries between youth volunteers and clients. First, the socio-demographic features of the volunteers indicated that many of them did not belong to the dominant status, but rather had similar features to those of the clients. In addition, according to the employees at the centers, adolescents who used the drop-in centers as clients often became youth volunteers in these centers. Indeed, 34% of the youth volunteers indicated that they started volunteering after receiving some services in the organization.

Furthermore, youth volunteers may start working in the center because they seek counseling and support, but fear to ask for it directly. Under the title of volunteers, they can come to the adult volunteers and paid workers and ask for help, while avoiding the stigma of a client. One worker referred to it as the popcorn effect: “I see the youth volunteers as popcorn. They heat up and in their own time they each come to me: ‘can I speak with you for a moment?’”

The findings show that 60% of youth volunteers consulted with the adult volunteers on issues that were not related to their volunteering work. About one-half of the youth volunteers said that “solving problems that concern me” was an important benefit for them. A young female volunteer described the possibility of receiving help in the center:

> I feel that if I have a problem I can also come and talk to one of the (adult) volunteers. I know that it will remain between us and that I will receive help. We always love to know that we have the option of coming to talk with...
them, and the adult volunteers and our supervisors always tell us to feel free to come to them with anything in the world that concerns us.

It is interesting to see how those volunteers who received some help in the center had different attitudes from those who had not. In $t$-tests for independent samples, we found that youth volunteers that consulted with adult volunteers expressed stronger identification with the center (means of 1.7 and 2.5, respectively, in a 1–4 ascending scale, $t(34) = 3.11, p = 0.004$) and with ELEM (means of 2.7 and 3.4, respectively, $t(35) = 2.35, p = 0.024$) than their peers who did not do so. In addition, volunteering was more important to those who consulted (means of 1.9 and 2.4, respectively, $t(33) = 2.02, p = 0.05$) and a higher percentage of them were more willing to increase the number of weekly volunteering hours (84% and 60% respectively, $\chi^2(1) = 4.67, p = 0.03$) than their peers.

4.5. The power of the group in recruitment, motivation and commitment of youth volunteers

The findings of the current study convincingly demonstrated the highly important role of the peer group in volunteering: it is one of the most important motives for youth to volunteer, and it acts as a major reward, impacting volunteers’ satisfaction, commitment and retention.

The peer group can encourage volunteering and the recruiting of youth volunteers. Our study shows that about two-thirds of the youth volunteers came to volunteer with friends or as part of a group, compared to only 18% of adult volunteers. Among those who came to volunteer through a school program, this number rose to 87%, compared to 59% of the volunteers who came completely of their own free will. However, the volunteers who joined the organization alone volunteered more than those who came with a group ($m = 5.2$ vs. $m = 4$ weekly hours; $t(63) = 1.88, p = 0.065$) and considered the benefits of volunteering more highly.

Whether the young volunteer joined alone or in a group, volunteering can still be a social activity and encourage social contacts and networks. It was shown above that 76% of the youth volunteers perceived social opportunities as an important benefit. The youth volunteers who participated in this study indicated that, while volunteering, they created an affiliation group of peer volunteers. No less than 80% of the youth volunteers said that other youth volunteers were their closest friends and that they met them beyond the volunteering boundaries (only 22% of adult volunteers had such close relationships with the other volunteers.) We found that volunteering was more important to volunteers who said that other volunteers were their closest friends ($m = 1.9$ vs. $m = 2.6$ in a 1–4 descending scale; $t(33) = 2.2, p = 0.04$) and that youth volunteers who did not have friends in the center showed higher role ambiguity. One of the field workers in the centers noticed the power and the impact of the group for the youth volunteers:

The group has an immense power, far beyond just making a project happen. The group can put together different people’s abilities and extend them. It impacts the atmosphere in the center: if I am part of a group that does something important, then I am part of this work. I think that when the youth volunteers work together on something, and see it emerge and manifest itself, then it binds together their strengths, their responsibility, and their abilities.

5. Discussion

Youth volunteering has an important impact on the volunteers themselves and on the society and the community they belong to. The similar age, culture and language often help the clients overcome initial suspicions and they are more willing to receive the offered help and to come to the drop-in centers. As youth volunteer for people their age, they promote social inclusion, and the trustworthiness of the organization in the eyes of the clients. Youth at-risk are outreached by other youth, who come to the center and see other adolescents there, and who may even receive some initial help from people of the same age. Thus, services for youth provided by youth, whether it is by giving actual help (doing) or by their presence in the center (being), signal to the clients that this is an informal, youth-friendly place (Katan & Etgar, 1998; Kulik, 2007, Ronel et al., in press).

However, in order to maximize the benefits of youth volunteers and to assure that services given by them to youth clients are adequate, we need to better understand the features of youth volunteering, how different are they from adult volunteers, and what factors may enhance youth volunteering and maintain it. Thus, an extensive study was undertaken to address these questions and compare between youth and adult volunteers and between youth volunteers and their youth clients.
Looking at the socio-demographic features of the three groups, we found that youth volunteers and clients came from the same age group and even, in most cases, had similar features and backgrounds. Therefore, in youth volunteering for youth, the distinction between helpers and helped is no longer valid. Furthermore, often young people who came to volunteer had problems and concerns, and volunteering gained them access to help without being stigmatized. The findings even indicate that those who consulted with adult volunteers were more satisfied and committed to the organization. The blurred boundaries also enabled youth who came as clients to start volunteering, and thus to move from a position of being helped to one of being a helper. Since volunteering is perceived by the organization as a way to empower people, the fact that so many of the clients started thinking about it and doing it is part of the positive process the youth undergoes.

Understanding motivation and rewards of youth who volunteer for youth can help in recruiting and maintaining such volunteers and make their work more effective (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Handy & Keil, 2001; Kulik, 2007). Our study of youth volunteers in ELEM showed that these volunteers are capable of volunteering frequently, giving many hours a week, being very committed and satisfied, and giving an example to other adolescents. This is in accordance with other studies on youth volunteers which show that they have positive attitudes regarding volunteering and that this satisfaction, together with relatively more free time than adults, makes them very committed (Handy & Keil, 2001; Kulik, 2007).

However, Omoto et al. (2000) asserted that, since the life stages in adolescence and adulthood are so different, and since there are different life tasks and agenda, volunteers of different ages must attach different meanings to volunteering and have different motivations to do it. Indeed, our findings show that the adolescents who volunteered in the drop-in centers for other adolescents and participated in this study had different motivations and orientations from those of the adult volunteers: youth volunteers are relationship oriented while adults are service oriented.

The relationship orientation of the youth volunteers was expressed in different aspects of volunteering. Making social contacts and meeting new people were some of the most important motivations for youth volunteers. The most important benefit of their volunteer work was making new friends, far more important than it was for adult volunteers. Having a feeling that they were helpful was also important to youth volunteers, but not in any way as important as it was for the adult ones. In addition, all the benefits that were important to youth volunteers were relationship oriented, such as gratitude, clients’ progress, and relationships with supervisor and peers. Most of the youth volunteers joined the organization in groups, but even those who joined individually could still become part of the existing volunteer group and feel affiliated to the organization. Many of the youth volunteers in ELEM indicated that other volunteers were their closest friends and that they saw them beyond their volunteering duties, a finding that was unique to youth volunteers.

The period of adolescence is known to be characterized by the vast importance given to the peer group and friends, and the potential positive and negative effects the group has on the adolescent individual (see Brown, 1990). Although the volunteer group is known to have a strong impact on volunteers (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, in press), the group role in youth volunteering has not been studied sufficiently. The current study sheds light on the importance of the group in recruiting and maintaining youth volunteers and this aspect should be further studied. Joining a volunteer organization in a group can help people overcome some social obstacles and fears which may hold them back from volunteering: the anxiety of being new and a stranger, and the need to be accepted into a group (Handy & Cnaan, 2007); all of which can be much stronger in adolescence. Thus it may be easier to recruit young volunteers collectively, but those who join individually, of their own initiative and will, may be more committed.

This study has some limitations. First, the questionnaires were distributed among the youth volunteers by the paid workers in each center, and therefore our sample is not random and may not be representative for all the youth volunteers in Israel or elsewhere. However, since the data were collected in seven different centers, and distributed by several workers in each center, biases in sampling were somewhat controlled. In addition, the researchers interviewed 16 youth volunteers and thus received confirmation of the quantitative data. Moreover the data were triangulated, as we used different research tools and different target groups, and two checking points. Second, although one of our aims was to compare youth volunteers and adult volunteers, we had to adjust the research tool (questionnaire for youth volunteers) to make it suitable for the youth volunteers: a shorter version in less complex language. As a result, in some aspects of volunteering in the current organization, the comparing of the two groups was somewhat problematic. However, most questions were identical or similar, and so we were able to compare most aspects.

Further research on youth volunteering is still needed. We have shown in the current study that youth volunteers cannot be treated as adult volunteers: not by volunteer managers, nor by scholars on the subject. Only a few studies
have tried to understand personal motivations of youth to volunteer and to compare them to those of adult volunteers, but some have concluded that there are no major differences between the two groups (e.g. Schondel & Boehm, 2000). Since the current study indicates rather strongly that this was not the case in the organization we studied, further studies need to be undertaken in other organizations and countries. We suggest that the role of the volunteer group in general, and in adolescence in particular, be further investigated. Youth volunteers play different roles (as clients and as care givers) and do so both by giving help to others, and simply by being in the organization. The multiple roles of youth volunteers could lead to role conflict and role ambiguity and these issues should also receive attention.

5.1. Practical implications

The findings of the current study should be of importance to those who try to help and outreach youth at-risk. The current study, as well as the one on the clients (Ronel et al., in press), emphasizes the important impact that young volunteers have on that target population. Receiving help from peers and from an organization that is so oriented to youth is easier for youth at-risk. The open possibility of volunteering by the clients can be an important part of helping intervention and their therapeutic process.

The notion that youth volunteers are truly different from adult volunteers can have an important impact on encouraging volunteerism at this age and on managing, motivating and retaining young volunteers. Many organizations may turn to schools to recruit young volunteers, as it is so widely encouraged in many countries (Geo-cartography, 2005; Independent Sector, 2005; Jones, 2000). However, our study shows that youth volunteers who started volunteering through school obligation or encouragement were often less committed than volunteers who came of their own initiative and free will. Since we also found that it is easier for adolescents to start volunteering together, organizations may recruit groups, be it from schools or other social contexts, such as the Scouts. In addition, feeling affiliated is so important to the young volunteers that organizations should work toward building and working with groups, and initiating more social contact between volunteers.

References
