

## VCN Notes 8/16

At the last Volunteer Coordinators Network Brown Bag Lunch meeting, Linda Hilton from Crossroads Urban Center and Thrift Store gave a wonderful presentation on retaining volunteers.

Linda has experience with both supervising volunteers and being one herself. She spent 18 years volunteering for Crossroads before taking a staff position there. Like herself, there are many individuals who have been volunteering at Crossroads for decades. So what's the secret? How come so many individuals have been willing to donate their time to this cause for so many years?

The secret, Linda states, is getting your volunteers to become hooked on the mission of the institution. Someone took the time to explain the mission of the program to Linda when she first started there, so she in turn takes time to pass that along to new volunteers. Volunteers need to feel that their help is critical to the success of the program. With a sense of purpose and indispensability, a volunteer will be more dedicated for the long term with a program.

Sometimes it can be hard to make a volunteer feel as if the work they are doing is really helping those in need. Particularly when completing tasks such as stuffing envelopes. Linda related a story of an envelope stuffing party where the mailer was asking people to donate money so that eyeglasses could be purchased for those in need. Linda expressed to her volunteers that having a good pair of eyeglasses can change a person's entire life and that each envelope stuffed could mean a new pair of glasses for an individual. Letting your volunteers know that no task is menial will aid in their willingness to complete even those most mundane job.

Volunteer recognition is critical for retaining volunteers. Here are some ideas about simple recognition that could make the difference of a volunteer helping for a week vs. ten years.

- **Touch base every couple of weeks** – This gives your volunteers a chance to ask questions and vent if they need to. And it gives you a chance once again to tell them how much you appreciate them.
- **Handwritten cards or notes** – A simple “thank you” can go a long way in making a volunteer feel important.
- **Brag sheets** – Let your volunteers recognize each other. A board where everyone can see it where volunteers can write thank you notes and compliment each other can boost morale and friendships.
- **Annual recognition potluck** – Let's face it, most of us have a favorite dish or desert that we love to share with others. This is a great way for volunteers to meet

and mingle (translation – GOSSIP!) without spending precious resources that could go to help the organization.

- **Empower your volunteers** – Let experienced volunteers train new ones! This is a great way to make your most dedicated volunteers feel really appreciated. By asking them to train others, you are letting them know that you trust them and know they can do the job.
- **Make note of birthdays and recognize them** – Most people really appreciate a simple card or “happy birthday” on their special day. Being remembered on an important occasion will make anyone feel important and appreciated.