

**Evaluation of a Nutrition-Based
Peer Education Program**

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ABSTRACT

The Healthy Eating Volunteer (HEV) Program, which began in March 1997, was developed to establish a network of volunteers from the general public with practical skills to promote healthy eating in Saskatoon. The HEV Program set out nine objectives it wished to accomplish in its first year. This research project was framed to evaluate how well the HEV Program met these objectives.

This research study was a program-based, goal-oriented evaluation. Data were collected from: the researcher; the 20 HEVs; the Nutrition Resource and Volunteer Centre (NRVC) staff; and the users of HEV services. Data collection consisted of interviews with program participants and a review of HEV/NRVC documents.

The HEV Program evolved quite differently from its original plan. As the year unfolded, there was a shift in emphasis away from a peer education program to one that was providing volunteer opportunities in the area of nutrition. The demand for the services of the HEVs was not as great as was originally anticipated and this affected the number and types of projects the HEVs completed during the year. There was a wide variety in the level of involvement by HEVs and program communication to the HEVs.

The planning form sent out to all HEVs in the spring of 1997 turned out to be a key management tool of the program; however, not all HEVs completed it. The HEV Coordinator was a key factor in the successes attained by the HEV Program but the program did not have adequate coordinator support in place to manage all the HEVs.

Even though the HEV Program evolved very differently from how it was first planned, almost all of the subjects were satisfied with the HEV Program. While it can

be said that the HEV Program met 3 out of 9 objectives, it did not meet 3 out of 9, and the data were inconclusive for the other 3. The goals and objectives of the HEV Program no longer match the function and activities of the current program and this mismatch makes the results of the evaluation of the HEV Program challenging to interpret.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Healthy Eating Volunteer Program is a program of the Nutrition Resource and Volunteer Centre (NRVC) of the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, University of Saskatchewan. The HEV Program was developed to establish a network of volunteers from the general public with practical skills to promote healthy eating in Saskatoon.

The implementation of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program occurred in two stages. The first stage, which occurred during the summer and fall of 1996, was the recruitment and training of 20 Healthy Eating Volunteers (HEVs). This was evaluated by another researcher, for a master's thesis project.¹

In March 1997, the second stage of the program began, when the volunteers became part of the NRVC as HEVs. Upon doing so, they agreed to provide 20 hours of time over the next year to the program. As HEVs, their role is to promote healthy eating in Saskatoon by giving presentations in the community and working on nutrition-related activities.

1.2 Problem Statement

Peer educators have been used by health professionals to disseminate health information to many age groups in many areas including nutrition. The Healthy Eating Volunteer Program uses the peer educator approach to encourage healthy eating and to

provide general nutrition information to members of the public. While peer education in the area of nutrition has been extensively studied in the elderly population, there is little literature that discusses the use of, and evaluation of, peer educators providing nutrition education to the general public.

1.3 Background to the Problem

Canadians have access to nutrition information through many channels. In a recent survey of Canadians, 76% agreed that nutrition information is easy to acquire.^{2,3} Overwhelmingly, 86% of respondents considered nutrition and health important when making choices about food and eating.^{2,4} However, 45% indicated that it is difficult to eat consistently in a healthy way.^{2,3} Conflicting messages about what constitutes healthy eating was a concern that was expressed by 56% of respondents.^{2,3}

Canadians want to eat in a healthy fashion, and nutrition is a key consideration in decisions made about healthy food choices. However, with ready access to nutrition information from many sources and many conflicting messages in this area, it is difficult for Canadians to make informed choices about nutrition and eating.³ They want and need clear and accessible information on nutrition and health. The challenge is to provide sound and reliable information that can be used as a basis for decision making on healthy eating.³

Peer education encourages health educators to use the abilities and momentum of volunteers to effectively deliver messages to specific target populations.^{5,6} People are more likely to hear and personalize a message that may result in changing their attitudes

and behaviors if they believe the messenger portrays an identifiable lifestyle and discusses the same concerns and pressures that they face.⁶

Nutrition promotion using peer education has proven an effective strategy for health promotion for seniors.⁵ However, there is little literature available to support the use of peer educators in the area of nutrition, with the general public as the target population. If peer nutrition education can be shown as an acceptable method for delivering basic nutrition messages to the general public and peer nutrition educators are readily accessible, then more members of the public will have access to accurate nutrition information. The more this type of information is available, then the easier it will be for Canadians to make healthy food choices while at the same time decreasing their confusion about nutrition messages.

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program.

The research questions are:

1. To what extent did the HEV program meet its stated objectives?
2. What recommendations can be made for its improvement?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Five major stakeholders have the potential to learn and benefit from this study.

This includes the primary researcher, the Advisory Committee for the NRVC, the Director of the NRVC, the HEVs, and the HEV Coordinator.

As the primary researcher, I will gain valuable experience in completing a program evaluation. These skills will contribute to my professional skills as a researcher in the area of program evaluation. The Advisory Committee for the NRVC and its Director will gain from this study as decisions about the future shape of, and changes to, the program will be made based on its results and recommendations.

The HEVs will benefit from the study by finding out if, collectively, they were effective as peer educators in the area of nutrition. They will benefit from any recommendations that are made to improve the program as well. The HEV Coordinator will gain valuable information on the process of coordinating the HEVs. Recommendations for changes to this process will be made, if required.

Lastly, this study will also provide information to nutrition educators that will increase knowledge on the use of peer educators in nutrition education with the general public.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Healthy Eating Volunteers (HEVs) - refers to the volunteers participating in the program

Peer Education - instruction or guidance from equals ⁷

NRVC Staff – refers to the HEV Coordinator, the NRVC Coordinator, and the NRVC Director as a collective group.

Users of an HEV Service – refers to an agency, group or organization who requested the service of an HEV and those who were the direct recipients of a presentation given by an a HEV, as a collective group.

1.7 Summary

An increasing desire to make healthy food choices and dissatisfaction with conflicting nutrition messages has resulted in the public being more receptive than ever to receiving reliable nutrition information. However, they have not always had easy access to this information. It is postulated that peer educators can play a role in bridging this gap. It is hoped that the results of this evaluation of the HEV Program will add to the body of literature on peer education, specifically in the area of nutrition, with the general public as the target audience.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first section of the literature review will present the concept of peer education, and review peer education programs, focusing on their benefits and elements necessary for their success. It will also review the literature on the area of peer educator retention; specifically, what motivates volunteers, and what elements of volunteer programs are critical to their success. The second section of the literature review discusses program evaluation, focusing on the use of process and outcome data in a goals-based evaluation. The last section of the literature review provides a brief overview of quantitative and qualitative research methodology as applied to this study.

2.1 Peer Education

2.1.1 The Concept of Peer Education

Peer education is defined by Gould and Lomax⁷ as “instruction by or guidance from equals.” Peer education is an effective means of delivering messages to any target population, whether student to student, senior to senior, or blue-collar worker to blue-collar worker. People are more likely to hear and personalize a message that may result in changing their attitudes and behaviors if they believe the messenger is similar to them in lifestyle and faces the same concerns and pressures.⁶

Peer education may be highly focused, as in the prevention of HIV infection; more general, as in human sexuality training; or multidisciplinary and holistic as in the training of peer education generalists.⁷ It exists in many forms, addresses many diverse

health content topics, and is administered in many formats. Peer education can be used to bridge gaps across many educational and occupational boundaries.⁷

Peer education programs developed from a recognition that with the use of peer educators, standard programs would be more effective in their delivery of various messages to specific target groups.^{8,9} There are many examples of how peer educators are used in the area of general health education. Peer education has been found to be an effective method of educating students on specific health issues such as HIV education,^{10,11} to promote sexual responsibility as rape-awareness educators,¹² in sexual assault prevention programs,¹³ and in sex education programs.¹⁴ It has been used with adolescents in injury prevention,¹⁵ to promote the use of conflict resolution skills,¹⁶ and for cardiovascular disease prevention programs.^{17,18} It has been used with adults in the areas of sexuality, such as HIV infection and AIDS, to promote preventive health behaviors.^{19,20} Peer education has also been used in prenatal care for low-income women^{8,21} and with adults in heart health programs.^{22,23}

In the area of nutrition, peer education programs have been used successfully with seniors, as indicated by a review of the literature.^{5,24-28} While in the past ten years there has been a growth in the number of food and nutrition peer education programs initiated,²⁹ the literature is lacking on peer education nutrition programs targeted at other adult age groups.

Moore²⁹ provides an overview of food and nutrition peer education programs, which can be defined by the following characteristics. The peer educators are often volunteers who are not required to have a degree or professional credentials related to food and nutrition education prior to their acceptance into a peer education program;

technical training is provided by professionals to prepare them for their role; and the role of the peer educator is to share information, attitudes, and/or skills with others to bring about desired change. Her research found that the effectiveness of peer education programs depends upon community involvement and the ownership of the programs by community members. Community involvement during a program's implementation maximizes its effectiveness and community ownership.²⁸⁻³⁰

The HEV Program was modeled after the Community Food Advisory Program (CFAP), a peer education based nutrition program. It has been operational in Ontario since 1992 and is run through partnerships among the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the Ontario Ministry of Health, and organizations and volunteers from the community. Initially developed as a pilot program, its goal is to improve and promote safe and nutritious food selection, preparation, and storage practices in Ontario by increasing individual and group access to reliable information and education.^{31,32} The main objectives of the program are: to increase community access to effective resources and education on food handling, preparation, and storage; to develop partnerships; to increase leadership skills; and to increase skills, knowledge, and confidence of volunteer leaders.³¹

Based on a peer education approach, program procedures of the CFAP include the recruitment of volunteers, provision of standardized technical and leadership training, certification of the Community Food Advisors (CFAs) upon completion of training, and CFA activity within local communities geared toward the accomplishment of the program's goals. The program, through peer education, seeks to effect changes in client knowledge and skills. It also aims to engage local communities and to ensure

effective and efficient structures and delivery systems for the program. Program resources, direction, coordination and support are provided through various structures that include a provincial steering committee, an advisory council and local sponsoring organizations along with their local coordinating committees.³²

The CFAP was piloted in three cities and was evaluated in 1992-93. It expanded to add seven sites in 1994-95, and added six more sites in 1996-97. In May of 1997, an extensive evaluation was completed of the CFAP. This evaluation recognized that the key driver for the inception of the CFAP was seen to be, at both the provincial and site levels, the need to fill gaps created by funding cut-backs, dismantling of services and subsequent unmet consumer wants. Key components of the program include: its peer education base; the purposive approach in first assessing community readiness and then matching the "message" to the audience; recruitment of the volunteers from the community broadly; and the program's intent to build community capacity. One of the recommendations of the report is to clarify whether client/consumer behaviour change is a realistic objective of the program or whether increased client/consumer awareness and knowledge/skill in food preparation, handling and safety are sufficient achievements.³²

The Community Nutrition Advocate Program (CNAP) in Coteau Hills is another example of a nutrition education program not restricted to seniors.³³ The CNAP trained selected informal community leaders, focusing on increasing their knowledge on heart healthy nutrition and advocacy and on developing skills required to improve availability of lower fat food choices within their communities. One goal of the program was to

develop a nutrition-based program founded on a peer teaching model and advocacy for positive individual and community changes.³³

Evaluation data of the CNAP encompassed the training workshops, Community Nutrition Advocate (CNA) actions, and impact, supports, benefits, and challenges of the CNAP.³³ It also looked at knowledge acquisition and the community nutrition advocacy role of the CNAs but did not specifically evaluate the methods used by the CNAs to disseminate their acquired nutrition knowledge. The impressions of the CNAs about their ability to be community nutrition advocates were also documented.³³ The CNAP is comparable to the HEV Program because it used peer educators to spread the message of healthy eating.

The evaluation of the CNAP focused on the advocacy role of the CNAs. It found that the CNAs were involved in numerous group and individual nutrition advocacy services. However, it also recognized that the 6 month time period for program implementation was not enough time for CNAs to establish their activities but that it did provide the program with a good start.³³

The evaluation of CNAP did not focus on the dissemination of nutrition education. It did not provide a detailed look at the specific services provided by the CNAs. Likewise, it did not collect any data from those individuals who engaged the services of, or interacted with, the CNAs.

2.1.2 Motivations of Peer Educators - Volunteerism

Organizations need to be aware of what motivates volunteers if they are to initiate or continue successful peer education programs.^{34,35} People volunteer for many

reasons. Sorce et al.³⁶ identified four clusters of reasons why people volunteer. These include extrinsic motivation (such as skill acquisition or professional development), reluctance to deny a request to participate, intrinsic factors (such as the desire to help others or for personal interest) and self-gratification motives (such as a desire to meet people). An alternate way of defining reasons for volunteering is by motivational categories.^{34,35,37-40} Categories often used are altruistic (the desire to help others) and egotistic (the focus is more on external rewards).⁴¹ Additional classifications have also been used, including social and material motivations.^{37,40,42}

Volunteering is often multi-motivational in that individuals have a primary as well as a secondary reason for volunteering. It is important for organizations to recognize this and understand which needs of the volunteer are the most compelling at a particular point in time.³⁵ Clary et al.³⁵ discusses the use of a functional strategy to match volunteer motivations with an organization's activities. They argue that this process helps organizations better understand what motivates their volunteers and thus be able to match volunteers with activities that can best meet those motivations.^{35,39,43} Placing volunteers in motivationally relevant activities and providing motivationally relevant feedback will increase volunteers' satisfaction. This increased satisfaction in turn increases their commitment to the volunteer task and to the organization itself. Volunteer leaders also need to be aware of changing motivational needs of the volunteers. Modifying assignments to satisfy emerging or changing needs of the volunteer facilitates commitment on the part of the volunteer.³⁵

2.1.3 The Benefits of Peer Education Programs

Peer education programs have many benefits. Peer educators benefit as the knowledge they gain has a significant positive impact on their own personal behaviors.^{34,44} Peer educators also benefit from interaction with one another because they learn professional skills,³⁴ share ideas, motivate one another to acquire new knowledge,⁴⁵ and are in contact with other people who share their interests.³⁴ Peer educators can be called upon to provide health information on a basic level - some material may be easier to understand if it is explained by a peer rather than a health educator.⁷ As well, peer education health programs are beneficial because they are financially efficient.⁷

2.1.4 Elements of Successful Peer Education Programs

Successful peer education programs are ideally characterized by: having program goals that are pre-determined; having training that is professional; and having its outcome confirmed by testing and certification. The volunteer's skills and knowledge then can be, to a certain point, guaranteed. As well, the volunteer's time is committed by agreement before training is offered.⁴⁶ A peer education program will have a better chance for success when careful attention is paid to its individual components, such as purposes and goals, recruitment, training, curriculum, and evaluation.⁴⁷

Keeling and Engstrom,⁴⁸ describe ten elements common to successful peer education programs. They must be able to: sense, monitor, and react to change; be frequently and carefully evaluated; match the talents, skills, and preparations of the peer

educators to the most appropriate tasks, activities, and programs; recruit people with specific talents that match the program's needs; recruit peers who are broadly representative of the population they are to serve; have highly targeted, carefully designed training activities tailored to the needs of each group of trainees; acquire an awareness of and responsiveness to the diversity of learning styles among its participants; be committed to inclusive programming; be flexible; and be effectively marketed to its target audience.

Programs that use peer education have identified specific factors that they felt were key to the program's success. Targeted recruitment of capable people,^{23,49} training workshops,^{23,26,49} supervision and professional support in the completion of their tasks,^{23,26,49} and a sense of contribution to the program^{26,49} were consistent factors in these successful programs. Providing feedback and incentives were also felt to be critical for a successful program because peer educators receive no financial reward.²⁶

Working with peer educators requires recognizing the skills and talents of each individual. Not all trained peer educators may have the qualities or communication skills necessary to provide nutrition information to others. Through the training, this must be identified and the peer educators then directed towards the tasks that will best utilize the skills they possess.²⁴

Activities completed by peer educators are diverse, but primarily involve the spread of information through formal activities such as workshops, presentations, and group discussions. However, peer education programs can also use informal means to communicate information to their target audiences. Rose²² describes a peer education program that focused on the spreading of information and skills to prevent heart disease

among older adults. In this program, the communication of information by the peer educators was done informally to their peers. As well, Pluska et al ¹⁷ discuss the use of lay leaders to informally communicate health information to a wide group of people. Both studies reported that information could be spread informally to specific target groups. Both studies also reported subsequent behaviour changes resulting from the information spread by the peer educators or lay leaders.

2.1.5 Elements of Successful Volunteer Programs

The administration of a volunteer program requires the successful matching of a volunteer to available activities. As already discussed, the motivations of a volunteer are important but it is also important to be aware of the expectations of the volunteer. The volunteer administrator or coordinator must help volunteers determine their goals and expectations and then help volunteers attain them.⁵⁰ Then the volunteer coordinator must identify activities which the volunteer will be most productive at and from which that individual will receive the most satisfaction.^{35,43} Providing the “good fit” between skills and abilities of the volunteer and the requirements of the specific task also leads to increased volunteer motivation.³⁹

There also can be a matching of benefits to volunteer expectations. Most volunteer organizations have many benefits for the volunteer but the volunteer may be unaware of them. Once these benefits are determined, they can be conveyed to current volunteers and can also be used in recruiting new volunteers. When an organization helps its volunteers become more aware of available benefits, the volunteers can more accurately determine if the volunteer opportunity matches their expectations. This will

enhance volunteer retention since the expected and received benefits will more likely match.⁴³

The challenge arises in identifying an activity that will fulfill certain needs of each individual volunteer.³⁵ As well, a challenge arises when the activities of an organization do not address the needs of the volunteer. Sometimes the volunteer may not see how a specific activity meets their needs. In these instances, the volunteer coordinator needs to provide the volunteer with feedback indicating how their needs can be met with this activity. In this way, volunteers can be placed into a greater variety of activities and volunteers can be directed to activities that may be less popular or may need more volunteers.³⁵

In order to prevent potential problems between volunteers and the organization, it is important to have a "contract" that recognizes a feasible level of time commitment on the part of the volunteer. This contract should allow for variations in time, energy, and interest on the part of the volunteer. Such a contract can prevent guilt or tension later between the two parties as divided loyalties and limited energy on the part of the volunteers may conflict with the organization's requests or demands for their time.⁵¹ As well, volunteers are increasingly seeking short-term assignments, flexible schedules, and more interesting tasks.⁵²

Good volunteer administration practices enhance successful volunteer opportunities. Successful volunteer programs are likely to exist in organizations with clear, communicated goals that are constantly evaluated. Other factors that contribute to successful volunteer programs include: involving volunteers and staff on an ongoing basis in decision-making; having regular feedback and staff-volunteer meetings;

providing opportunities for orientation, training, and competence improvement and growth of the volunteers; and having flexible ground rules.^{53,54}

One characteristic of successful volunteer programs is high volunteer retention, which is linked to volunteer recruitment. Targeted recruitment of individuals to a volunteer program facilitates a good fit between the expectations of volunteers for the program, and their actual experiences. The key to volunteer retention is to show potential volunteers how volunteer activity would satisfy their motivations better than inactivity.³⁵ Other essential parts of retention are providing adequate training, administration, and supervision of volunteers.⁵² Recognition is also important to volunteers in maintaining their involvement in a program.^{26,27,49} Both tangible rewards such as recognition events or thank-you notes, and intangible recognition such as verbal praise for worthy contributions can contribute to the satisfaction and retention of volunteers.⁵² Because many people volunteer to feel useful, it is important to let volunteers know when they have done a good job and to recognize that they serve a defined purpose.²⁷

Successful volunteer programs often invest much effort to integrate the volunteers into the organization, using such means as regular meetings with organization staff, newsletters, and volunteer recognition and appreciation events.^{37,49} Periodic performance evaluations for each individual are suggested for ongoing program strengthening.⁵² An unexpected potential benefit of a successful program can be the increased self-esteem of the volunteers at the end of their training and participation in a program.⁵⁵

Retention issues have also been linked to unrealistic expectations of the volunteer; the morale and working conditions within the organization; the sense of 'making a difference' or contributing to some significant service that changes or helps the lives of others; feeling appreciated; and that the organization that they are working with is motivated to make adjustments to fit their schedules and to support their participation in every way possible.⁵¹

A potential problem area is poor communication between volunteers and the organization.³⁸ Lack of support by the organization and motivating influences can cause volunteers to become frustrated.⁵⁶ All of these can lead to low volunteer retention.

In summary, peer education has been shown to be an effective method for communicating health messages to various target groups. In order to be successful, peer education programs require careful attention to the recruitment and training process, and supervision and support of the volunteers in the completion of tasks. Peer educators need to feel that their motivational needs are being met and that their contributions to the program are valuable. Integration into the program and recognition by the program fosters an atmosphere of appreciation for the volunteers which fulfills their need to feel useful. This leads to greater retention of volunteers, which contributes to successful peer education programs.

2.2 Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, or outcomes of programs for use by specific people to make decisions with regard to those programs.⁵⁷ Program evaluation is undertaken to clarify

options, reduce uncertainties, and provide information about programs and policies.⁵⁷

In its simplest form, program evaluation refers to the use of research methods to measure the effectiveness of operating programs.⁵⁸

According to Rutman,⁵⁸ a program evaluation should examine the manner in which a program is implemented, as well as the outcomes it produces. A program evaluation which proposes to measure and link the program processes to the outcomes, can then measure the extent to which program goals were attained.⁵⁸⁻⁶⁰ This approach to program evaluation encourages the clarification of the relationships that exist between specific activities of the program and the particular outcomes that are to be achieved.⁶⁰

When an evaluation is focused on program components, it provides a basis for modifying or eliminating particular components of the program.⁵⁸ This provides connections that are logical between activities, outcomes, and the procedures for measuring results.⁶⁰ The effectiveness of the program evaluation depends, however, on how well the program and its characteristics such as goals are defined and on the feasibility of implementing the required methodology to meet the purposes of the evaluation.⁵⁸ This evaluation approach is referred to as goal-based evaluation.

Goal-free evaluation, on the other hand, gathers data on a broad array of actual effects and then evaluates the importance of the effects in meeting demonstrated needs.⁶¹ This reduces the possibility of the evaluation results being unintentionally focused on data that only supports the goals. The evaluation is instead focused on studying the program effects including both negative and positive impacts. In other words, it focuses on what actually happens in the program and not on what the program

is trying to do.⁶¹ Decisions about whether the evaluation results are compatible with program goals can then be made.⁶²

Programs can produce both intended and unintended effects, both positive and negative.⁵⁸ In a goal-oriented approach, these unintended effects may be overlooked. These unintended effects may be major consequences as a result of the program and the evaluation should consider both types of effects in the evaluation of outcomes.⁵⁸

Finally, for an effective program evaluation, the questions asked during the evaluation need to reflect the needs of the stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders while the evaluation is in the planning stages is critical for the evaluation to capture data to answer questions that will meet stakeholders needs.⁶²

In summary, this research project is a goal-based program evaluation. It is also a process evaluation because it attempts to measure and link the program processes to the outcomes while measuring the degree to which goals were attained. Both intended and unintended effects of the program will be considered, as these will impact any recommendations made for improving the program.

2.3 Data Collection Methodology

Research data collection methods are often characterized as quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methodology collects data on certain predetermined response or analysis categories producing discrete numerical data. This approach is often used in randomized experiments, quasi-experiments, multivariate analysis, and sample surveys. Qualitative research, which provides depth and detail in the data collected, consists of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions,

perceptions, experiences, and observed behaviors. The data collected are most often in the form of words that can be grouped into thematic categories to describe the data set. Ethnography, case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and participant observation are some of the data collection methods that produce qualitative data.^{57,63}

Qualitative research methods are often based on a “naturalistic philosophy”, recognizing that they provide views of reality as constructed by individuals. The basic premise of this philosophy is that multiple realities exist due to variations between people.⁶⁴ Lincoln and Guba⁶⁵ define “naturalistic inquiry” as a “discovery-oriented” approach that minimizes investigator manipulation of the study setting and places no prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be. The evaluator makes no attempt to manipulate, control, or eliminate situational variables or program developments, but accepts the complexity of a dynamic and evolving program reality.⁵⁷

Each data collection methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses and its own particular uses. Different kinds of problems require different types of data. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods may be required to address research questions, by providing both numerical and descriptive information. Dey⁶⁶ describes qualitative and quantitative data as mutually dependent rather than being in opposition. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in program evaluation can maximize utilization of evaluation results by triangulating multiple data collection methods. This provides triangulation of results in which the results from the analysis of one type of data set are compared to that of the analysis of another type of data set in order to maximize the validity of the results.⁶³

Each research study must determine the type of data to be collected in order to determine which methodology to use. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods can both be used in the same study, to maximize evaluation results. This research, while using primarily qualitative data collection methods, also used some quantitative methods to answer the research questions.

2.3.1 Trustworthiness

In this research project, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. Lincoln and Guba⁶⁵ suggest that, in qualitative research, one cannot establish rigor by applying the conventional quantitative criteria of reliability and validity. They suggest, instead, the use of criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility reflects the fact that there are multiple realities and that truth is dynamic and contextual. The goal of the researcher is to ensure that the conclusions drawn are consistent with the multiple realities of the participants. Techniques used to develop this are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity, and member checks.⁶⁵

Transferability refers to the ability of the researcher to provide as complete a data base as possible in order to facilitate transferability judgments on the part of others who may wish to apply the study to their own situations. The major technique for establishing transferability is thick description.⁶⁵

The third criterion is dependability, which is concerned about the stability of data over time. Changes and shifts in data collection often occur during a maturing

inquiry. The tracking of this information in a journal allows for it to be audited to ensure dependability.⁶⁵ This does not mean that an audit is required, but by ensuring that the data is tracked, it is available should this be necessary.

Confirmability is concerned with assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes of the research actually occurred and are not the imagination of the researcher. This means that the data can be tracked to their sources.⁶³

2.3.2 Research Interviews

The research interview is a conversation between two people about a topic of mutual interest. Its purpose is to obtain qualitative descriptions of a specific subject. The challenge for the interviewer is to establish an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his/her experiences and feelings on the topic.⁶⁷

In a research interview, the researcher is the research instrument. The interviewer must continually make quick choices about what to ask and how; which aspects of a subject's answers to follow-up and which not; and which answers to probe further and which not.⁶⁷ The content of the interview, as well as the flow and choice of topics, changes to match what the subject knows and feels.⁶⁸ During a research interview, the interviewer listens intently to pick up on key words and ideas and marks important omissions. The interviewer listens to the words actually said and to the vocal cues that indicate emphasis and emotional tone. Probing is done to complete or clarify an answer given by a subject, or to request further examples and evidence. It allows the subject to expand on a specific topic to increase the depth of the response.⁶⁸

Immediately after an interview, it is important for the interviewer to record observations about the interview. An interview is also an observation and nonverbal data are important sources of information. Observational data such as where the interview occurred, who was present, and how the subject reacted to the interview helps to establish the context for interpreting the interview. Personal observations by the researcher on his/her role as the interviewer should be recorded as well, to capture how the style and approach of the researcher affected the interview.⁶⁴

According to Denzin,⁶⁹ there are three types of research interviews. The schedule-standardized interview is the most structured interview. In it, the wording and order of all the questions are exactly the same for every respondent, with the purpose being to develop an instrument that can be given in the same way to all respondents. In using a nonschedule standardized interview or unstructured schedule interview, the particular phrasing of questions and their order are redefined to fit the characteristics of each respondent. The subjects are all asked the same set of questions but they may be individualized to the particular needs of the subject. The third type of interview is the nonstandardized interview. In it, no prescribed set of questions is used, nor are questions asked in a specific order. An interview guide is not used, giving the interviewer a great deal of freedom to probe various areas.⁶⁹ These are similar to the types of interviews otherwise known as standardized open-ended interviews, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversational interviews, respectively.⁶³ In this research project, a nonschedule standardized or unstructured schedule interview was used with all subjects. This provided the researcher with the flexibility to adapt the order and phrasing of questions to suit each interview context.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research study of the HEV Program was a program-based, goal-oriented evaluation. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used.

This research study is both a process and an outcome evaluation. The evaluation studied both the internal dynamics of program operations and the “ends” of the HEV Program, attempting to determine the extent to which the program met its stated objectives. Because the objectives of the HEV Program were both about process and outcomes, this evaluation, being focused on the achievement of objectives, examined both.

Data were collected from many perspectives: from the researcher, the HEVs, the NRVC Director, the HEV Coordinator, and the users of the HEV services - those who engaged the service of HEVs and from the recipients of presentations given by HEVs.

This research project was framed to evaluate how well the HEV program met its objectives, at the end of its first year.

Specifically, the goals of the HEV Program are:

1. To improve nutritious food selection behaviors of Saskatoon residents.
2. To promote awareness and access to healthy eating resources and education.
3. To support individuals and organizations in their nutrition-related activities.

The objectives of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program are:

By April 1998:

1. HEVs have spread healthy eating information to the general public via a variety of ways and means (i.e. presentations, formal nutrition-related activities, informal discussions with people they know).
2. At least 10 requests have been received from individuals, organizations, and/or agencies for Healthy Eating Volunteers to give presentations on healthy eating in the community.
3. HEVs have consistently provided accurate information to the general public and/or in other nutrition-related activities of the Centre.
4. At least 75% of participants at each presentation given by a HEV indicate:
 - satisfaction with the presentation (i.e. content, presentation style, handouts)
 - learning of one or more important concepts related to healthy eating
5. Supervisors¹ and/or requesting individuals/organizations indicate satisfaction² with the work completed by volunteers.
6. 16 of 20 HEVs have indicated satisfaction³ with being a HEV of the NRVC.
7. 16 of 20 HEVs have participated in at least half of the planned Centre workshops for HEVs for the year.
8. 16 of 20 HEVs have contributed at least 20 hours to Centre activities.
9. The HEV program runs efficiently and smoothly as part of the NRVC.

¹ Supervisor refers to those individuals for whom a project or nutrition-related activity is completed, for example, NRVC Director, dietitian/nutritionist in the community

² Satisfaction refers to accuracy of information and quality of work

³ Satisfaction with: experience and skills gained as volunteer; administration of HEV program; meeting personal goals and objectives; ongoing training received; supervision, feedback and support received.

3.2 Setting

The setting for this study is the city of Saskatoon, with a population of approximately 220,000 people. Saskatoon is the home of the University of Saskatchewan, where the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition is located. The Nutrition Resource and Volunteer Centre (NRVC) is located in the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition and the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program is administered from the NRVC.

The Director of the NRVC is a full-time faculty member of the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, Nutrition Division. In consultation with an Advisory Committee, the Director is responsible for setting the current direction of the NRVC as well as for future planning, fund-raising, and its staffing. The NRVC houses two volunteer programs – Nutrition Student Volunteers (NSVs) and Healthy Eating Volunteers (HEVs). The NSVs are nutrition students within the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition and their involvement in the NRVC is being put into their curriculum requirements. A paid coordinator manages the NRVC, and her responsibilities include coordinating the NSVs. The HEV Program is administered by a volunteer coordinator, typically a nutrition graduate student.

The HEV Program was conceptualized by a graduate student in nutrition, and the recruitment and training of the HEVs formed the basis for her thesis research. The evaluation of this aspect of the program has been reported elsewhere.¹ The HEVs were recruited over the summer of 1996, and the training program took place over the course of five months, from September 1996 to February 1997.

The training program had three components: eight 3 hour evening sessions held on consecutive weeks; two 6 hour communication workshops, which took place on

Saturdays; and one practice field experience. The evening and Saturday sessions took place from September to November 1996. The field experiences took place from December 1996 to February 1997. The HEVs were given homework assignments each week, and a certain amount of preparatory work was expected, prior to each session. The homework assignments were reviewed by the trainer (a graduate student) for accuracy of information and to assess the ability of the volunteer to apply concepts covered in the respective training session. HEVs were videotaped during the communication workshops, as they delivered a presentation. These were evaluated by both the other HEVs and the trainer.¹

Throughout the training program each HEV was given constructive feedback and assistance by the trainer as required^{1,70}. For the field experience, the HEV was responsible for designing and delivering a presentation to a specific audience. These were held at various locations and agencies in Saskatoon.

There were 21 people initially recruited to be HEVs; 1 person left the training program after the second session. The remaining 20 HEVs successfully completed the training program, and were certified as HEVs at the end of February 1997.¹

Once the training program ended, the HEVs came under the direction of the Director of the NRVC. From February to the summer of 1997, requests for HEVs were handled and assigned, as appropriate, by the Director. It was during the summer that a volunteer coordinator, the HEV Coordinator, was recruited. She took over the responsibility of coordinating HEV activities, and gradually assumed the responsibility of determining if the requests received were appropriate for an HEV to undertake.

From February to September 1997, there was only minimal activity within the HEV Program. As well, brochures marketing the HEV Program were not distributed until early September. These brochures were sent to various groups and agencies within Saskatoon, culled from a list kept by the Director. A record was not kept of all the groups and agencies the brochures were sent to, but it was estimated by the Director that approximately 50 such organizations were sent the brochure.

In the beginning months of the program, the Director was faced with the task of contacting all the HEVs. Not all of them could be contacted, and only those HEVs with whom the Director connected, were assigned an activity to work on immediately, if they so chose. Once the HEV Coordinator was in place, assigning of HEVs to activities began in earnest.

The initial plan for this research project was to evaluate the HEV program at the end of its first year; that is, the evaluation period was from March 1997 to February 1998. Because of the slowness with which the program became operationalized, it was decided by the thesis committee to extend the evaluation period by two months. This would provide the researcher with a broader range of activities and experiences that could be included in the evaluation. Hence, the evaluation period for the HEV Program ranges from March 1997 to April 1998. By the end of April 1998, 18 HEVs remained in the program.

3.3 Data Collection

Data for this research was collected from two main sources – from interviews with program participants and from a review of various HEV/NRVC documents. This

included a deliberate hunt for negative instances or variations, in an attempt to fully describe the program as it evolved. Data analysis proceeded simultaneously with data collection. This ensured the identification and interpretation of negative cases and the verification of main patterns.⁷¹

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data from the HEVs, the NRVC staff, and those agencies/organizations that had a project completed or a presentation given by a HEV over the course of the evaluation period. According to Kvale,⁶⁷ the interviewer is the research instrument. Learning to become an interviewer takes place through conducting interviews and an interviewer's self-confidence is acquired through practice. The researcher, from 11 years experience as a clinical dietitian, has significant experience in interviewing subjects. For the majority of the interviews, the researcher conducted unstructured schedule interviews and probed accordingly, when appropriate, for further clarification.

All of the interviews with HEVs and NRVC staff were audiotaped, with the exception of one HEV who did not want the interviews recorded. For that set of interviews, the researcher relied on written notes taken during the interviews, to capture the responses of the HEV. Notes and reflections on the interviews were recorded in a reflexive journal as soon as possible after the completion of each interview. As well, subsequent notes were made after the tapes were transcribed and verified by the researcher. The interviews with those who requested the services of an HEV were conducted either in person or over the telephone by the researcher.

HEV Interviews

The research goal was to interview all the HEVs twice – once in the fall of 1997 and once in the spring of 1998. The objectives for the first interview with the HEVs were to: introduce the researcher to the HEVs; obtain their consent to participate in the research project; collect some basic demographic data from them; and to ask some general questions about why they got involved with the program and their expectations for it. The objective of the second interview was to build on the responses from the first interview as well as to pose questions to the HEVs that could only be asked after they had some experience with the program.

The HEV interview guides (see Appendix A) were constructed based on the identification of key areas for discussion including questions to provide information to meet the needs of the researcher and to accommodate the information needs of the NRVC Director. The first interview included demographic questions because the researcher did not have access to personnel files of the HEVs. The guide for the second interview was based on data collected during the first interviews and events that occurred as the program proceeded through its first year, dealing with subject matter that only could be asked after a period of time had elapsed in the program's function.

A formal pretest of all the interview guides (for HEVs and NRVC staff) was not done because of the small numbers of subjects, all of whom had to be in the study population. There were no comparable non-program individuals or groups on whom the tools could be pretested.

Table 3.1 presents data from the HEV interviews. In the fall, the researcher interviewed all of the HEVs, including one who had just left the program. For the

spring interview, the researcher contacted all the remaining HEVs as well as the HEV who left the program in February. The researcher was able to interview all these HEVs except one, with whom contact remained elusive until the study ended.

Table 3.1 HEV Interview Data

	Fall 1997	Spring 1998
Number of HEVs interviewed	20 *	18 *
Number of HEVs left in the program at that time	19	18
Number of HEVs not included in the sample	0	1
Time range for the interviews	6 – 26 minutes	12 ½ to 31 minutes

* One HEV had just left the program in the fall and was included in the first set of interviews, in the fall of 1997. A second HEV left the program in February and was included in the second set of interviews, in the spring of 1998.

The interviews with the HEVs took place at a location chosen by the HEV; usually it was a coffee shop close to their place of residence. However, some interviews took place in their homes, at their places of work, or at the University. Each HEV was offered the option of meeting in a neutral place, to provide a more casual and hopefully relaxing setting for the HEV. For many of the HEVs, it was the first time meeting with the researcher, who wanted to do everything possible to create rapport with the HEVs as well as making them feel comfortable with the interview environment. Most of the time, after the completion of the interview, the conversation between the researcher and HEV continued on. The usual length of the initial meeting,

including interview, was 45 minutes. For the second interview, the length of the meeting varied between 30 to 45 minutes.

NRVC Staff Interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with the HEV Coordinator and the NRVC Director in the fall of 1997 and in the spring of 1998. For both sets of interviews, the interview guides were developed in a fashion similar to those for the HEVs (see Appendix B and C). The interviews were designed to ask broad questions about the program's functioning but they were also individualized to collect specific data from each individual, based on their relationship with the program. The objective of the first interview was to ask general questions about the program; the questions for the second interview built on the data collected at the first interview, and also reflected events that had transpired during the year.

The fall interview with the HEV Coordinator was 45 minutes long. The spring interview was conducted in two parts and they were 56 and 21 ½ minutes long respectively. The second part of the spring interview was done to explore some issues with the HEV Coordinator that were noted by the researcher during the second series of HEV interviews.

The fall interview with the NRVC Director was 44 minutes long. There were also two other meetings with the NRVC Director in the fall: one to provide evaluation feedback and one to provide specific feedback with regards to a specific HEV project. The spring interview with the NRVC Director was also conducted in two parts due to

the lengthy number of questions it contained. The first part was 81 minutes long while the second part took 34 minutes.

The NRVC Coordinator was interviewed only once during the evaluation period and that took place in the spring of 1998. The purpose of this interview was to collect any additional information with respect to the program's functioning as part of the NRVC so this data was collected only at the end of the year (see Appendix D for the interview guide). The interview with the NRVC Coordinator was 17 minutes long.

All of the interviews with NRVC staff were conducted at the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, University of Saskatchewan. They were held in their offices, the NRVC, or the graduate student study room.

Interview Methodology

All the interviews for the HEVs and NRVC staff used a flexible, open-ended style of interviewing, similar to Kvale's⁶⁷ unstructured schedule interview. The interviewer had a guide that, for the most part, was followed. However, flexibility was maintained such that if a subject brought up an issue that related to a future question, the researcher would often follow-up with that point at that time. The majority of the questions were open-ended, allowing subjects to respond in their own terms. However some of the questions had to be close-ended, to be able to collect specific information from the subjects.

Users of the HEV Service

Interviews were conducted with people representing agencies or groups external to the NRVC who used the services of HEVs. The goal of the researcher was to interview all six of these individuals; however, three of them could not be reached.

A number of HEV projects were administered by the NRVC, and the HEV Coordinator played the role of agency representative in those instances. Feedback was obtained from the HEV Coordinator on the 8 projects completed by or in progress for the NRVC by HEVs during the year.

To collect the necessary data from the agency representative, a questionnaire was designed by the researcher. As the number of people to be interviewed was quite small and all were included in the population, this form was not pretested. During the interviews with the agency representatives, the researcher completed the questionnaire, noting any additional comments. These interviews were conducted either in person or over the telephone, at the convenience of the agency representative.

3.3.2 Document Review

There were many documents reviewed for this project evaluation, including a planning survey, HEV request forms, HEV project assignment sheets, HEV communication logs, written communication sent by the program to the HEVs, and the Personal Activity Diaries (PADs) of HEVs. With the exception of the HEV PADs, all of the documents were made available to the researcher by the HEV Program. A verbal agreement had been made between the researcher and the NRVC Director to transfer the requested documents to the researcher in a timely fashion. The researcher did not

have direct access to any other program files and the access to the files mentioned above was indirect.

The NRVC Planning Survey was sent to each HEV in March 1997. The survey contained questions on four areas. HEVs were asked to indicate: the types of activities they were interested in working on in the next year; their preference for how often and when workshops should be held; the topics of interest that they would like to see covered in the HEV newsletter; and if social events should be held and how often. Only twelve such planning forms were reviewed because that is all that were either received by the program or all that could be found for the researcher to review.

When the data collection plan for this project was being discussed between the researcher and the NRVC Director, the researcher understood that the program staff would be completing a form on each request received for the services of an HEV. At the end of the year, the researcher asked to review these forms. Instead, she received a written response from the NRVC Director, which provided composite information with regard to how many project requests were accepted or rejected for the HEVs during the year.

The HEV Coordinator maintained HEV project assignment sheets. These completed forms indicated to whom the project was assigned, the date of assignment, a brief description of the project, project instructions, and a projected completion date. There were 19 projects completed by HEVs during the year and assignment sheets were completed for 12 of them. Table 3.2 presents the data on the completion of these assignment sheets. Of the 7 projects that did not have completed assignment sheets, 4 were assigned to HEVs before the HEV Coordinator was recruited and these forms put

into use. In all, assignment sheets were received for 17 HEVs (some projects involved > 1 HEV). Of the remaining 3 HEVs, 1 had completed 2 projects during the year but no completed assignment sheets were received by the researcher; 1 HEV left the program before she could be assigned to any projects; and the third HEV was on hold for most of the year due to health problems and had requested not to be assigned to any projects.

Table 3.2 HEV Project Assignment Sheets

Number of Projects Completed	External Projects	Internal Projects	Total
Number of Projects Completed	8	11	19
Number of Projects with Assignment Sheets Completed	7	5	12
Number of Projects Assigned before HEV Coordinator recruited	1	3	4

The NRVC staff completed 'Communication Logs' that captured telephone and face-to-face communication between NRVC staff and any HEV. The vast majority were completed by the HEV Coordinator. This log form captured who initiated the conversation, the date it occurred, the purpose of the communication, the outcome of it as well as any other comments.

A copy of all written communication sent by the NRVC to all the HEVs was reviewed. This included letters, newsletters, workshop notices, and social event invitations.

The NRVC asked each HEV to maintain a 'Personal Activity Diary' (PAD) during the course of their volunteer work. The PAD was almost like a reflexive journal

for the nature of the information that the HEVs were asked to provide. For each activity they were involved in, they were asked to complete the following: a description of the activity; their personal goals for the project; goals and a plan for the completion of the activity; how long it took to complete; list any resources used; personal reflections about the activity; suggestions for completing a similar activity in the future; and whether personal goals were achieved. The PAD also had a place for HEVs to document the activities they participated in within the NRVC, any training workshops they attended, and any informal activities they were involved with that involved the use of the knowledge they obtained from their training as a HEV.

The researcher wanted to review the PADs twice during the evaluation period – midway through and at the end of the year. This was to see if any trends emerged with regard to the types and frequency of information that was recorded in the PAD over the year. To facilitate this review mid-way through the year, the NRVC Director and HEV Coordinator agreed to allow the researcher to use the November workshop as a means of collecting and reviewing the PADs. As the HEV Coordinator called the HEVs to remind them about the workshop and to bring their PADs, she received many unsolicited comments from them, indicating that many of the HEVs did not appear to be using the PADs. The NRVC Director and the researcher decided to abandon the attempt to review the PADs at this data collection time as only 3 of the 7 HEVs who attended the workshop brought their PADs for review.

When the researcher contacted the HEVs for the second set of interviews, she asked the HEVs to bring their PADs to the session. A reminder telephone call made to the HEVs the day before the interview, also included a reminder about bringing the

PAD along. In all, 9 out of 18 PADs were received from the HEVs. This included the 3 PADs that were reviewed in the fall, along with 6 others.

The PADs reviewed by the researcher provided insight into the personal development of some of the HEVs and tracked some informal dissemination of the healthy eating message. Together with the program documents received by the researcher, they provided a foundation for the construction of a picture on how the program operated during its first year.

3.3.3 Reflexive Journals

Reflexive journals are defined by Lincoln and Guba⁶⁵ as "... a kind of diary in which the investigator ... as needed, records a variety of information about *self* (hence the term "reflexive") and *method*". The reflexive journal provides information about methodological decisions that are made and the reasons they were made.

Reflexive journals are also used in qualitative research to enhance the use of self-analysis and critical thinking. By recording observations and personal opinions, and by reflecting on what transpired during a specific interview or situation, the researcher begins to see emerging patterns and begins to articulate possible themes in the data. As subsequent interviews or observations occur, continued reflection allows the researcher to test the emerging themes and continually adjust his/her analysis based on the new data.⁶⁵

During this research project, reflexive journals were kept by the NRVC Director, the HEV Coordinator, and the researcher. The journal of the NRVC Director was reviewed only at the end of the evaluation period as she did not have it ready for

the researcher to review until then. The journal of the HEV Coordinator was reviewed two times – once in November and again at the end of the evaluation period. The journal of the researcher was reviewed continually throughout the year.

3.3.4 Trustworthiness

In a qualitative research project based on a naturalistic design, ‘trustworthiness’ as opposed to ‘validity’, is the appropriate criterion of rigor. As previously discussed, trustworthiness may be ensured by taking steps to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Strategies used to improve the trustworthiness of the data and employed in this study included: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks, thick description, triangulation, and the use of a reflexive journal.

The use of a reflexive journal provided a means for the researcher to track changes and shifts in the data as it was collected. It also provided the researcher with an opportunity to regularly review impressions, opinions, and to explore emerging trends or ideas as the program progressed through its first year. A reflexive journal, by tracking data changes, also allows for a data audit to be conducted should it be necessary. As well, the researcher discussed all aspects of the process of data analysis with the researcher’s supervisor. These measures ensure dependability of the data.

Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks all provide a means of ensuring credibility of the collected data. The researcher met all of the HEVs except two at least twice during the year. She was also present at both workshops and one of the two social events held during the

year. This was done so that the HEVs would feel comfortable with the researcher. The researcher feels that this was achieved as many of the HEVs provided the researcher with some very candid thoughts and feelings about the program under review.

Peer debriefing was held with the HEV Coordinator and the NRVC Director twice each during the year. This provided the program staff with an opportunity to receive some comments and feedback about the program. They were also provided with an opportunity to comment on the feedback, allowing for frank discussion of sometimes differing perspectives with regard to specific issues or occurrences.

Negative cases are findings that do not fit within emerging data patterns. Analysis of negative cases was conducted with the researcher and the researcher's supervisor as they emerged. Negative case analysis provides the researcher with an opportunity to explore all emerging issues found in the data. This leads to a fuller understanding of data patterns that encompass all the research findings.

Member checks were used to ensure accuracy of the information presented by the interviewee to the researcher. This was done with all interviews with the HEVs and NRVC staff. A transcript was sent to each individual after each interview. Subjects were asked to contact the researcher if they did not feel the transcript accurately reflected the points they wanted to make on each question. Only the NRVC staff contacted the researcher to discuss specific points of their transcriptions; these were noted on the transcript by the researcher.

Thick description of the collected data required the researcher to provide as complete a picture as possible of the program being studied, thus facilitating transferability of the research results. This was achieved through the use of quotations

from the HEVs and NRVC staff throughout the presentation of the findings, and every attempt was made to reflect all viewpoints on the issues discussed.

Data triangulation is important to confirm the data are real. To ensure this, the data must be able to be tracked to their source. Triangulation helps to ensure confirmability, in that each data result must be found in at least two different data sources. The data results presented in the findings were triangulated and at times were present in three or four data sources.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, data analysis begins with the first data collection and continues throughout the investigation.⁶⁵ The analysis used the constant comparative method.^{65,66} The researcher examined the data for recurring themes and patterns, which were collapsed into categories. Quantitative data analysis consisted of content analysis and data counts.

3.4.1 Transcribing Interviews

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher went through each of them, line by line, checking for accuracy. The transcripts were then mailed to all the subjects for their approval.

3.4.2 Organizing Documents

All of the documents received by the researcher were carefully reviewed and analyzed. To facilitate this process, the researcher created a calendar of the HEV

Program, to document the activities of the program, the involvement of the HEVs in these activities, and the projects completed by the HEVs. The researcher also created a calendar that tracked telephone and face-to-face communication between the HEV Coordinator and the HEVs.

Data were cross-checked between various data sources, to provide the researcher with as complete a picture of the program as possible. For those PADs that were received by the researcher, the information in them was recorded by the researcher, and the PADs were returned to the HEVs with their second interview transcription. The reflexive journal assisted in developing emerging themes, which could be cross-checked using these multiple data sources.

3.4.3 Analyzing Data

The first series of interviews, in the fall of 1997, were analyzed soon after their completion, and data gathered from here were used to provide feedback to the program as it was perceived by the HEVs at that time, and to form the basis for the second series of interviews. Table 3.3 presents the data sources that were used to collect information to be used to measure the 9 objectives of the program.

The initial development of themes and categories, provided by the interview questions and the criteria for success, created the framework for the analysis. The in-depth analysis of the interview data consisted of classifying and categorizing the data into concepts. These concepts were then pulled together from all data sources to create the themes presented in the findings.

Table 3.3 Data Collection Sources

Program Objective	Subject Matter	Data Sources
1	Nutrition Information Dissemination	Request forms for HEVs Project Assignment Sheets HEV Interviews PADs of HEVs
2	Community Awareness	NRVC request forms for HEVs
3	Information Accuracy	Researcher observation of presentations NRVC Staff
4	Participant Satisfaction	Evaluation forms of presentation participants
5	Agency/supervisor satisfaction	Interviews with agency representatives or project supervisors
6	HEV Satisfaction with NRVC	HEV Interviews
7	Continuing Education	NRVC workshop attendance records Researcher's records
8	Volunteer Contribution	PAD of HEVs HEV Interviews
9	Program Administration	NRVC Staff Interviews HEV Interviews Reflexive journals

3.5 Ethical Considerations

My research proposal was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Sciences. Informed consent from the all study participants was sought, for their participation in the evaluation and to obtain access to the documentation that was kept by them during the evaluation period, that was relevant to the study. All participants were informed about the nature of the study, the extent and duration of their participation, how the information would be used, and anticipated benefits. All of the participants were assured that all information would be kept confidential, that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from the HEVs, NRVC staff as well as all the users of the service (see Appendix E for consent forms).

The consent form for the HEVs was designed to allow the HEV to participate in one, any or all of the evaluation activities. There were four evaluation activities listed, and the HEV was asked to indicate if he/she agreed or did not agree to participate in that particular activity. For 3 of the 4 activities listed, all HEVs agreed to participate in those activities. One HEV did not want to be observed giving a presentation so for this activity, only 19 gave consent.

NRVC staff were also provided with the opportunity to participate at different levels and this was individualized to each particular position. All of the NRVC staff agreed to participate with all aspects of the evaluation project.

Study participants were invited to contact the researcher or her supervisor with questions concerning the study. A summary of the results was offered to all participants and stakeholders, obtainable by contacting the researcher.

3.6 Limitations

The scope of this research project was defined by the three populations studied: the HEVs; the NRVC staff who are involved in administering the program; and the users of the service – that is, those individuals, organizations and/or agencies who requested the service of a HEV and those individuals who participated in a presentation delivered by a HEV (recipients of the service).

As a project for a master's thesis, the time frame, financial and personal resources were limited. It is within these limitations that the program was evaluated.

This research project evaluated a new program which began with 20 volunteers. There is no comparison group for the study. This program is an extension of the recruitment and training program of the HEVs that occurred in the summer and fall of 1996 and the winter of 1997. The program is ongoing, but the projected time frame for the study was approximately one year from the time the HEVs entered the NRVC.

The research project focused on outcomes, with process and impact evaluation occurring as well. It examined the implementation of the program and the outcomes achieved by the end of its first year, focusing on measuring how well the program met its stated objectives.

One limitation of the research is that the program was evaluated in its first year; some growing pains were expected to occur during this time frame and these may have

affected the ability of the program to meet its objectives. Evaluation results are likely different than if the program was evaluated at any future time.

Further, there were some unintended effects of the program that affected some of the data collected. For example, the initial plan was to conduct 1 or 2 focus groups with the HEVs. On the advice of the HEV Coordinator and the NRVC Director, this was abandoned. Asking HEVs to come together for other activities such as workshops had not proven successful in terms of attendance and they felt that only a few HEVs would likely attend the discussion groups. Since there would not likely be broad representation from the whole group, it was felt that the data collected would likely be skewed.

As well, it was the intent of the researcher to observe all presentations given by HEVs. Because there were fewer requests for presentations than anticipated, it was decided by the thesis committee that this data collection method would not be used. However, one presentation was observed prior to this decision, and results from this data source appear in later areas in this document, as appropriate.

Another limitation is that there were three interviews with users of HEV services that could not be completed because the researcher was not able to connect with the contact people.

Lastly, a major source of data was HEV program documentation. A final limitation of the evaluation is that it was dependent on how well other individuals collected, recorded, and maintained data records, and on whether the documentation was made available to the researcher, for review. The agreement between the

researcher and the program about document review was not as clear as it could have been and some program documentation was missed in the data collection process.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the research findings. It begins with a profile of the Healthy Eating Volunteers and moves to a description of the evolution and impact of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program. Next it reviews the management and coordination of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program and then the program supports provided to the volunteers. Lastly, it concludes with a discussion on the satisfaction with the program from the perspective of program staff, those who engaged the services of the volunteers and the HEVs themselves.

4.1 Profile of the Healthy Eating Volunteers

Twenty volunteers, who entered the HEV Program in March 1997, ranged in age from 19 to 52 years. There were 1 male and 19 female volunteers. The vast majority of the volunteers had completed grade 12, with most of them going on to take some type of post-secondary education. The occupations of the volunteers varied greatly, including homemakers, university students, a home care provider, and a retired individual. With the exception of one volunteer, they all had previous volunteer experience with a variety of organizations or agencies.

The goal of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program was to educate and train 20 lay members of the public to become peer educators in the area of general nutrition. The training course for the HEVs educated them in the areas of Canada's Food Guide to

Healthy Eating, making healthy food choices, adapting recipes to decrease fat content, and label reading.

4.1.1 Reasons for Participating in the HEV Program

The most often mentioned primary reason given by the volunteers for participating in the HEV Program was because they were interested in nutrition. Other commonly cited primary reasons included the desire to acquire more knowledge in nutrition, to meet people, to help people, to assist with making a possible career choice in dietetics, or because they were looking for something to do.

Often, the volunteer mentioned additional reasons for getting involved:

“... because I was going to learn more about nutrition which I’ve always been interested in. I was going to learn from a source I knew I could trust. I was going to be able to have more knowledge in feeding my family and myself, and just basically to get out of the house.”

One volunteer was also interested in the program because it would provide her with ‘free training’ and then the opportunity to volunteer.

“I thought it was really great because it was something I was interested in, ... and like, free training, it was training I probably would have paid for and this was the opportunity to ... get the training, and then volunteer.”

Another volunteer was also motivated by a desire to help others in her community.

“I thought that it was really a good idea. I was curious about ... what the program was all about, and how it could affect the community and such. I’ve always been a little bit concerned about nutrition issues. And I thought that in a lot of ways, it ties into quality of life as a whole ... for people who [are] not as privileged or live below poverty lines, this type of thing.”

This desire to help others was echoed by other volunteers. This motivation appeared to go beyond the realm of wanting to learn more about nutrition, to embracing the concept of being peer educators.

“I think it’s helping people. You know, like whatever age you’re working with, you know, as I see a real need for it ... you’re always helping people to become more educated.”

Many of the volunteers expressed the sentiment that this HEV program addressed a need in the community.

“I guess that I look at it more that there’s definitely a need and I think it [the program] can go a long ways because there’s such a need.”

As well, many volunteers expressed the hope that the program would continue and expand its focus, with more emphasis on activities in the community.

“So I really think as far as this being a pilot project, I don’t think it’ll end after one year. I really think it has ... tons of potential to expand into a real resource for the city.”

4.1.2 The Role of a Healthy Eating Volunteer

The volunteers were asked to define their role as a HEV. The descriptions ranged widely, from being someone who could do whatever activities needed to be done to being seen as an example of someone who has internalized the healthy eating message. Quite a few volunteers also described the role of a HEV as being a peer educator:

“Well, to take the information that’s been provided to us, and basically distribute on a basis where lay people can understand it. And that we can, you know, help to increase the knowledge and improve the ... I guess the basic health of the community.”

Another volunteer stated:

“I guess ...my main thing, as role as being a Healthy Eating Volunteer, is helping the Centre to relay the information to other people in other ways besides going in front of people and talking. ... I would say that’s my role is to help them convey information to the public and so forth, and hopefully carry on the program.”

One volunteer saw the role as much more personal than that.

“I think as a Healthy Eating Volunteer, in my opinion, I have to resemble somebody who, you know, is concerned about healthy eating You’re not only given the information, but [you have to] live the information, but live the lifestyle that I’m trying to speak of ...”

The HEVs were asked if they saw their roles as formal or informal disseminators of nutrition-related information. Formally, this information could be spread through presentations while the informal dissemination could occur through conversations with family, friends, or co-workers. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the volunteers saw their role as both formal and informal communicators of nutrition information. While a few saw it as primarily a formal role and a few saw it as primarily an informal role, most volunteers acknowledged that both roles were an important part of the HEV program.

4.2 Program Evolution and Impact

The HEV Program concept originated with a nutrition graduate student. As part of the program’s planning process, she undertook a needs assessment that included consultation with nutrition professionals and community educators, a review of manuals from 3 peer education programs, and a literature review. This resulted in the development of the structure for the training program for the HEV Program.

4.2.1 Implementation of the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program

The volunteers entered the NRVC as HEVs in March 1997. During the program's first year, there was a transitional phase as the volunteers moved from completing the training program to the program becoming fully operational. This spanned a period from March to July/August. The transition was characterized by the transfer of responsibility for the HEVs from the HEV trainer to the NRVC Director and then the passing of control for the day-to-day operations from the NRVC Director to the HEV Coordinator.

Early in this transitional phase, the NRVC Director attempted to contact each of the HEVs to begin assigning them to projects. By April, the NRVC Director realized that she needed help with the HEV Program and began to look for a HEV Coordinator.

“And through what I consider the weakest part which was the initial part, and that, as I say here, which is my fault because that came onto my shoulders and at that time I just couldn't put in the time and effort, and that's when I realized I needed the individual to handle the day-to-day contact and logistics of the program.”

The HEV Program is a non-funded volunteer program so the HEV Coordinator is a volunteer position. The amount of time the HEV Coordinator contributed to the HEV Program was mutually determined by the NRVC Director and the individual recruited for this position.

The HEV Program evolved quite differently from its original plan. Initially, there was a lag from when the volunteers entered the program to being recruited for activities, which created some frustration for the volunteers. It was during this transitional phase from March to July that the volunteers experienced the most frustration with lack of communication from the program, a lack of awareness of what

was going on in the program and a lack of activities to do. Many of them expected to begin working on activities immediately after completing the training program and were frustrated by this lack of preparation on the part of the program.

“... they [NRVC staff] should have had it somewhat organized before we finished the [training] program because they knew how long the program would take us to finish ...”

And:

“I thought it’d get off the ground a little faster.”

By the end of the evaluation period, the majority of the HEVs who had expressed any initial frustrations with the program indicated that these were no longer a concern for them.

“However, when the [training] program first finished, I felt things weren’t quite outlined well enough ... but as for things to do, lately, now I found out more about what’s going on than when I first finished [the training program].”

As the year unfolded, there was a shift of emphasis away from a program based on peer education principles to that of one of providing volunteer opportunities in the area of nutrition. According to the NRVC Director:

“I think it’s different than what we initially thought. If you look at a peer education program and again it was initially that they would go out and teach others in the community or give presentations in the community. That has evolved. We’re still doing that as those requests come in. But it has evolved to more, probably more of a volunteer program versus a peer education program. ... It’s evolved from that concept. And I have no problem with that. I’ve no problem with programs evolving, based on the context or the circumstances in which things are happening in this case.”

The HEV Coordinator saw it a little differently.

“Because ... the volunteers are members of the community, non-nutrition professionals and they are passing the information on successfully to other members of the community. Whether it be through presentations or even

resource development that they have done. ... All that is communication of nutrition. I think they have done that.”

4.2.2 Demand for the Services of the Healthy Eating Volunteers

Creating demand for a new program requires the marketing of its services.

Marketing of the HEV Program occurred in two ways. Pamphlets promoting the NRVC with both NSVs and HEVs were sent out to different agencies in late summer and again in November. The only other advertising was by word-of-mouth. This limited marketing of the program resulted in few opportunities for HEVs to do presentations or other activities with different groups. As one staff member said:

“It [going out into the community and giving presentations] hasn’t happened as often as it could happen, I guess, probably because we haven’t advertised [it] as much as, we haven’t marketed that part.”

And the NRVC Director noted this as a limitation as well:

“... but I haven’t gone out and been proactive in marketing. And I’m not sure what I’m going to do about that ... Now, I recognize that’s a limitation because with that not marketing, I don’t think we’ll meet our evaluation goal of the number of presentations we wanted ... the volunteers to do. And I’m okay with that because the program and the role of the volunteers has evolved over time ...”

The NRVC Director made a conscious decision not to undertake a large scale marketing program of the volunteers’ services because she was concerned that the resources in the NRVC would be strained.

“... because the initial marketing was done in August where we sent out the brochures to all the community associations mostly. And I made the decision at that time, not to go beyond that in terms of the marketing. Partly because we were so busy in the Centre ... because I’m not sure we can handle it with the resources we have right now.”

The HEV training program, while teaching the HEVs basic nutrition information, also emphasized communication skills. Its focus was to prepare the HEVs to give presentations in the community. However, during the training program, some issues emerged. Some of the HEVs found that the time commitment to develop a presentation was overwhelming. Program staff recognized that this was an issue for the volunteers.

“... if they [HEVs] have to put in hours and hours to give a one hour presentation, they might be turned off by that ...”

As well, in the early months of the program, it became clear to program staff that not all volunteers wanted to give presentations:

“And that’s why at that time we recognized ... because they were telling us they didn’t all want to do presentations, even though they’d had gone through that training.”

So the program staff recognized that other opportunities were needed for volunteer involvement and they attempted to provide a variety of activities with which the volunteers could be involved.

“... there’s many activities that they could be involved in that their basic training would help them with. And I really like that. I am very pleased that we haven’t focused just on presentations for ... that group of volunteers ’cause I think there are many areas in which they could be involved. It’s them finding what they are most interested in and [what] works for them. For some that’s presentations, others that’s doing other activities.”

And:

“The focus has changed I guess. I don’t know if it is so much the focus but just the activities, many it is just an extension of what we already did. Because it is not beyond their training, we haven’t assigned them anything beyond their skills, but everything has been an extension of what they have learned.”

This variety in projects was seen as a strength by the HEV Coordinator:

“I think that a strength of the program is also that the volunteers are working on a variety of different things, and that ... their skills are being used in a variety of different ways, so they are not just working on one type of project ... or one small task.”

In an attempt to increase the variety of projects available for the volunteers, the NRVC staff began to develop project ideas. During the course of the evaluation, the researcher began to wonder if these projects were created solely for the purpose of providing enough opportunities so that every volunteer would be assigned to at least one project. This question was posed to the NRVC Director and HEV Coordinator.

“I don't consider any of the projects that they're working on projects that we just found for them for the sake of having them something to do. Before the Centre even started, what was evident to me – there is tons of things that nutrition students could be working on or other individuals could be working on and that would be beneficial to the general public, or to dietitians and nutritionists or anybody in the nutrition field.

There are no shortage of ideas for resources or activities that we could use to promote healthy eating in the community. So, no, I don't consider it as [make work projects] ...”

Even with the change in emphasis on the types of activities available for the HEVs to do, program staff still recognized the importance of the initial training program with its emphasis on presentations.

“I think the focus was in the training [on presentations] because, again, that was the most important part. If they're going to be talking to the community then you need ... to try and make [sure] as much as possible that they are giving reliable information, that they have the communication skills, that they know how to answer questions, that they know who to refer people to if they ask [a] question that they can't answer. So that's why it was a focus of the training.”

The shift in program focus was initially confusing for some HEVs as they still believed that they would be primarily giving presentations.

“... just from what they talked about, about being able to get into the community and talk to other people about what we’ve learned. I haven’t had an opportunity to do ... that ...”

By the end of the year, the majority of the HEVs were no longer referring to presentations as the only activity they could do. For those who completed more than one project, they seemed to enjoy the variety in projects and appreciated the opportunity to do different things.

“Initially when I was told about the different programs, there was things that were mentioned as options that I wasn’t that particularly interested in. So I was kind of hoping that what I would get was something that I was interested in and that happened.”

And:

“I like the different experiences. I was very overwhelmed with the different things that we could do. And I really enjoy that!”

A few of the volunteers recognized that a program has to react to the demand for its services and this program did just that.

“... when you start something like that [HEV Program] I think it takes the shape of what the demand is, of what’s needed, and you go with that. And I’m sure that’s what they intended on ... they may have intended it to look a certain way when they started, but if that’s not what the public is asking for, then you’re there to meet a need, so you meet that need in whatever way that it’s called for.”

Even with the expansion of activities available for the volunteers to do, for the most part, the volunteers understood the importance of the focus on presentations during their initial training.

“I thought when we did the training and it was a lot of presentations I initially had thought that would be the bulk of what we were doing ... but I think that why [HEV trainer] wanted that is to make sure that if, perchance we were out in public we would at least ... be comfortable and we could rely on that training. So initially I thought, well, there all these presentations we were supposed to do. But then I realized that was just probably one of the crucial parts that we needed to be

able to feel comfortable and have a working knowledge about how exactly to present to different populations. Yeah, the diversity [in activities] is a big plus to the program, I think. You can choose from a ton of things to do.”

However, one volunteer felt rather strongly that this emphasis on presentations in the training program was wasted.

“I sort of feel like maybe that part was wasted. ... I thought that was going to be the main focus, rather than all the stuff at the Centre, and everything else that’s going on. ... I just sort of thought that that’s kind of been lost. We’re not really passing it on, like when I sit and type there on the computer. Well, I’m not passing on anything I learned to anybody.”

4.2.3 Activities of the Healthy Eating Volunteers

The activities of the HEVs can be split into two categories – those that were formal activities assigned to the HEVs by program staff and the informal spread of nutrition-related information through their conversations with family, friends, and co-workers.

4.2.3.1 Formal Activities

The requests for formal activities of the HEV program were received from two sources - those from agencies or organizations external to the NRVC and those from the NRVC staff. External project requests could be rejected for one of two reasons: the requester did not give the program enough lead time to deliver the presentation or develop the project; or because the scope of the project was out of the range of abilities and knowledge of the HEVs.

During the evaluation period, 12 external requests for HEVs were received and 9 were filled. Two were rejected outright and one was later cancelled. Another project,

which was to be a joint presentation by a HEV and a NSV, was completed by a NRVC staff member because the volunteers pulled out at the last minute. Therefore, while there were 9 external projects requested during the year, only 8 of them were included in the evaluation.

These 8 external requests varied in the nature of the activity to be completed (see Table 4.1). The two requests for assistance with conducting surveys experienced some delays during the course of the year, and at the end of the evaluation period, one of these projects was just getting underway while the status of the second project was unsure.

Table 4.1 External Projects Requested, Completed, and Ongoing At the End of the Year

Type of Project	Requested	Completed	Ongoing
Presentations	3	3	---
Assistance at a health fair	2	2	---
General assistance with a program's activities	1	1	---
Assistance with conducting surveys	2	0	2
Total number of Projects	8	6	2

There were 11 projects requested by NRVC staff. These were overseen primarily by the HEV Coordinator and many of them involved the development of resources for the NRVC. They are listed in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 Internal Projects Assigned, Completed, and Ongoing
At the End of the Year**

Type of Project	Assigned	Completed	Ongoing
HEV Newsletter	4	4	---
Newsletter summary	1	1	---
Article scanning	1	---	1
Recipe adaptation	1	1	---
Canada Food Guide display	1	---	1
Canada Food Guide games for children	1	---	1
NRVC Silent Auction	1	1	---
NRVC resource organization	1	1	---
Total Number of Projects	11	8	3

Altogether, there were 19 activities that HEVs were involved with in the first year of the program. Three of those were presentations, and the others varied considerably in scope. At the end of the evaluation period, 5 of these projects were still ongoing.

4.2.3.2 Informal Spread of Nutrition Information

One of the evaluation components of this research was an attempt to determine the extent to which informal communication on nutrition topics occurred between HEVs and other individuals. It was hoped that this would provide an idea of the extent to which the HEVs were using their acquired nutrition knowledge. As one volunteer stated:

“I see it as an informal role because I think people are more comfortable with that than something that’s really formal. I think they tend to ask what some people consider silly questions, and they’re really not. So

I think it's, to me it's more an informal thing, and ... people are more receptive to that."

HEVs were asked to record any conversations they may have had with family members, friends, or co-workers where they used the information they had acquired during their HEV training. Only a handful of the HEVs recorded this type of informal communication. Even though it wasn't well documented by the HEVs, there is some evidence to indicate that this nutrition dissemination was happening.

"We're supposed to record who you talk to and I do ... I mean I've spoken to lots of my friends and family about this program so that's part of it too."

One HEV, who did not maintain a written record of this type of activity, noted:

"... you do [spread nutrition information informally] because something will come up and you'll say 'Well you know if you did this, this and this, it would be better than what you're planning on doing.' And without knowing it, you're doing it."

Another volunteer, when asked if she had been recording any of this informal communications, replied:

"... no I haven't because I looked, actually I looked at the Diary and I thought 'I have done this for so long now that I really wouldn't know how to even begin [recording this information down].'"

Another volunteer went a bit further to comment on the type of information that she would informally pass on.

"Well, I know that I informally talk to people I know about healthy eating and that sorta thing, but I'm very careful about saying too much or you know, putting it into that text of, you know, giving out information that I shouldn't be."

So while it would appear that some informal communication of healthy eating messages did occur, the extent or frequency of these activities cannot be determined.

4.2.4 Accuracy of Information

There were certain expectations placed on the HEVs when they undertook an activity. One expectation of the program was that the nutrition information provided by the HEV either through a presentation or the development of a resource would be accurate. While there were three presentations that took place during the evaluation period, data was collected from only one presentation. The first presentation took place without the prior knowledge of the researcher – she learned about it approximately two months after it happened. The second presentation was observed. At a subsequent thesis committee meeting, it was decided that with the low numbers of presentations being done by the HEVs, data collection on this aspect of the program would be abandoned. Therefore no data was collected on the third presentation held during the evaluation period.

For the one presentation that was observed by the researcher, it was a joint endeavour between an HEV and a NSV. Both of the volunteers contributed equally to the presentation of the material. The accuracy of information conveyed during the presentation was assessed at three levels: was the statement incomplete, was it inaccurate, or was it inappropriate. Overall, the HEV made only a few statements that were either incomplete or inappropriate. No statements were made by the HEV that were considered by the researcher to be inaccurate.

Other completed projects that were requested by external agencies were not assessed for accuracy of information due to the nature of the services provided by the HEVs. HEV projects requested by the NRVC staff were also supervised by the NRVC staff, all of whom are registered dietitians. Therefore, accuracy of information was

maintained as the direct project supervisor (the HEV Coordinator) and the NRVC Director reviewed any resources or materials during their development.

4.2.5 Healthy Eating Volunteer Involvement in the Program

There were 20 volunteers who started in the HEV Program. During the year, two HEVs left the program - one in October and one in February. The volunteer who left in October expressed conflicting reasons for leaving. This volunteer told the HEV Coordinator that she was too busy to be involved with the program. She told the researcher that she left because she did not have a car and that access to transportation was an issue for her. The volunteer who left in February indicated that personal time commitments did not leave her with any additional time to spend as a HEV.

Of the other 18 volunteers, there were 2 HEVs who were 'on hold' for most of the year. They did not want to leave the program but were unable to work on any activities. One of the HEVs was hampered with medical problems that impaired her ability to undertake any projects. The second HEV experienced some changes in her employment status, leaving her with little time to devote to the HEV Program.

The remaining 16 volunteers were all assigned at least one project during the course of the year and only one volunteer had not completed a project by the end of the year. The level of program involvement varied considerably: it ranged from a handful of volunteers who completed one project to a few who completed as many as 5 or 6 projects.

The level of HEV activity or involvement in the program was affected by many factors. One was that the number of requests for HEVs was lower than anticipated.

Another factor was the cancellation of one project after HEVs were recruited for it. As well, there were two projects for which HEVs were recruited that were then significantly delayed over the year. All three of these projects were requested by agencies or individuals external to the NRVC. Unfortunately during the year, the program was not always sure when these delayed projects would actually start. Most of the HEVs who only completed one project during the year had also been assigned to one of the projects that was either cancelled or delayed.

The HEV Coordinator was sensitive to the issue of not making too many demands on the time of the volunteers so she was reluctant to recruit the volunteers originally assigned to the delayed projects for other ones. She did not want to end up in a situation where the HEVs would have two different projects competing for their time, causing difficulty for both the program and the volunteers. During the evaluation period, the program staff decided to not begin recruiting volunteers until the person/agency was ready to use the volunteers.

“We will tell the requester that we will not recruit until we know for absolute sure it’s going to start. And they can guarantee it’s going to start at a certain time. So there’s limitations to that though. Because then there might not be very many volunteers available at the time they start. ... So it’s a limitation from their point of view but from a program management point of view, it’s been a learning experience to go through this. ... So I’m not surprised that they [the volunteers] are dissatisfied. I’m not satisfied with that either, and that’s why we’re going to look at putting things into place that can deal with those types of issues.”

The delay or cancellation of projects frustrated the volunteers, because they did not appear to know what was happening to the projects that they were assigned. As well, a few of them were unsure if they could still keep that commitment.

Another factor that also played a role in the level of involvement by the HEVs was their available time. Volunteers commented that even though they may not have been very involved, sometimes they lacked available time when they were called about a specific project.

“... I was unavailable. She [HEV Coordinator] wanted me to work on something – it was the newsletter again. And I was just unavailable at that time. It’s frustrating however, if you don’t have a lot of the time ...”

There were a few volunteers who, at the end of the evaluation period, indicated that they did not feel very involved in the program. Two of them related this to not having had many volunteer opportunities offered to them but they both also indicated that they could have been initiating contact with the program more, to get more involved. Another volunteer indicated that even though she did not feel very connected to the program, she was happy with her own level of involvement through the work that she did with one particular agency.

4.3 Program Management and Coordination

The HEV Program used a variety of methods and tools to manage and coordinate the volunteers. This section discusses the role of program staff, management tools used, and the time committed to the program by its volunteers – the HEV Coordinator and the Healthy Eating Volunteers.

4.3.1 Program Staff

The roles of the HEV program staff evolved during the program’s first year. The NRVC Director, who provides leadership for the HEV Program, has the ultimate

responsibility for the program should anything go wrong. At the start of the program, she also assumed complete responsibility for managing the day-to-day operations of the program, assigning HEVs to various projects and handling all external agency requests.

After the HEV Coordinator was recruited, the NRVC Director gradually handed over to her the day-to-day operations of running the program and began to concentrate on setting policy and direction for the program. By the end of the first year, the NRVC Director played more of a consultative role to the HEV Coordinator:

“... it’s been that they [NRVC Coordinator and HEV Coordinator] are responsible for the day-to-day management of their programs and I am more of a consultant when they need to talk to me if there’s issues or decisions that obviously need my input. ... And I think for the whole year, it’s been a learning process for all of us, as we’ve found what our roles are.”

The NRVC Coordinator is a part-time paid position within the NRVC. Her role is to manage the day-to-day operations of the NRVC and to supervise the NSVs on their projects. She also assists the NRVC Director in strategic planning for the NRVC.

Coincidentally, the NRVC Coordinator trained the HEVs. She had minimal contact with the HEVs except to assist them with projects when the HEV Coordinator was away.

“... I’m not involved in the day-to-day with them, but I may, like if there’s any decision making for the program, I’d be involved with that.”

The HEV Coordinator is a volunteer position of the NRVC and is contracted to provide 5 hours/week coordinating the HEVs. She is the direct contact between the program and the volunteers and she is responsible for the day-to-day management of the HEV Program. Her responsibilities include assigning projects, assisting the volunteers in completing projects, and acting as a resource person for the HEVs. As the HEV Coordinator became more comfortable in her role, she gradually assumed the

responsibility of handling external agency requests and determining their appropriateness for HEVs.

The NRVC Director was grateful to have someone in the position as a volunteer coordinator:

“... if I didn't have somebody like [HEV Coordinator], I'm really not sure what would have happened to the program. I don't think it would have been as strong as it was, just because I couldn't have done the daily communication or regular communication like she [HEV Coordinator] did.”

The HEV Coordinator felt one of the requirements that was key to a successful volunteer program was that the volunteer coordinator should have prior volunteer experience. She also felt that, in some ways, it was a strength that she was a volunteer as well:

“I think that, in a sense, it puts me on the same level with the people that are volunteering with me ... even though I'm the Coordinator and I coordinate them, because I'm volunteer and I know they're volunteers and I know what it's like to be a volunteer, and so I don't put huge expectations on them beyond their commitment because I don't like to have that done to me and I think that's good for rapport.”

The HEV Coordinator made herself accessible to the volunteers and was flexible in trying to meet the needs of the volunteers. The volunteers appreciated her flexibility and her approach to working with them.

“I mean, with her [HEV Coordinator] everything is really positive. She ... always makes herself available – at home, at work, whatever --- ... and when she presents you with a project, you get a really good description of what it is, and you can pretty much gauge the time it would take you, and when it's due.”

4.3.2 Management Tools

The management tools used by the HEV Program included: a planning form; the method of project recruitment, assignment, and management; Personal Activity Diaries (PADs); and program communication with the HEVs.

4.3.2.1 Planning Form

In the spring of 1997, the NRVC sent out a planning form to the HEVs. This form was created as a means of collecting information from the volunteers about the types of activities they were interested in doing. At the same time, the NRVC Director attempted to contact each volunteer to set up an initial meeting with them. During this first meeting (either in-person or over the telephone), if the volunteer had not yet completed a planning form, one was filled out. In all, 12 planning forms were completed. Of the remaining 8 volunteers, the NRVC Director was able to establish contact with four: one volunteer informed the program that she would be out of the country until November; another volunteer indicated that she had some health problems that precluded her from accepting any project assignments at least until fall; and the other two volunteers were assigned to a project. Contact with the other 4 volunteers remained elusive during the spring of 1997.

The majority of the HEVs who completed the planning form were assigned to an activity during this first meeting. Over the summer, the NRVC Director turned over the task of project assignment to the HEV Coordinator who continued to use these planning forms as a basis for project recruitment and assignment. For the HEVs who did not complete a planning form, as they were contacted by a program staff member, they were asked to indicate the types of projects they were interested in working on. To the

knowledge of the researcher, this information was not formally recorded anywhere except in scattered references in the journal of the HEV Coordinator.

Upon reviewing the data, a pattern emerged. It appears that the majority of the HEVs who did not complete a planning form at the start of the program were slower to be assigned projects at the beginning of the year and completed fewer projects over the course of the year. As well, some of the HEVs in this group were also assigned to projects that ultimately encountered significant delays.

The information on the planning form also was used to assist the NRVC staff with planning workshops and social events for the HEVs. The majority of the HEVs who completed the planning form indicated that they wanted workshops to be held every 2 –3 months. Only half of the HEVs who completed the planning form indicated that they thought regular social events were a good idea.

The planning form appeared to be an important tool of the program. The NRVC Director referred back to it constantly, when discussing the issue of low attendance of HEVs at workshops and social events. As well, the HEV Coordinator used it as a basis for initially determining which volunteers were approached for different activities.

4.3.2.2 Project Recruitment, Assignment and Management

Project Recruitment and Assignment

A major challenge in any volunteer program is to match the volunteers with projects they are interested in. According to the HEV Coordinator:

“So that’s something that’s very important with a volunteer program, that you match people to projects that they’re interested in, that they’re comfortable in.”

At the start of her tenure, the HEV Coordinator found it challenging to match the interests of volunteers with available projects. The main source of information that she used was the planning forms filled out by the HEVs. However, not all the HEVs filled out the forms and those that did, often listed numerous interests. Initially, the HEV Coordinator found this process complicated to coordinate:

“I guess more at the beginning 'cause you're not sure where everybody's interests is, and sometimes, I'd address some projects that I think they might like to do and so I'd have to go back and re-evaluate where their interests really are, so mainly it's more in the early stages until you get to know the volunteers and until you get to know where their interests are and until you build up a little more rapport and then they offer a little more information and you offer a little more information too. So, it just takes time.”

There was also the challenge of matching projects to volunteers who appeared to be uninterested in any of the available choices. However, the HEV Coordinator made every attempt to match volunteers with projects of interest to them, remaining flexible and respectful of their ability to commit time at that specific point in time. However, it took until March 1998 before all volunteers were confirmed as being assigned to at least one project.

HEVs were recruited for projects in one of three ways. During the spring, the NRVC Director attempted to set up initial meetings with all of the HEVs, to review their interests and to start matching them up with available projects. During these initial meetings, half of all the HEVs were assigned to a project. This method was only used once, at the start of the program.

The second method of recruitment took the form of an informational letter containing a list of all upcoming projects. Sent out in the fall by the HEV Coordinator, it went to all the volunteers. She followed this up with a telephone call, to determine

which project (s) the volunteers were interested in working on. This recruitment method was also used only once during the evaluation period.

The third method of recruitment targeted specific volunteers for specific projects. The HEV Coordinator would contact specific volunteers by telephone, explain the project to them, find out if it interested them, and ask if they were available to complete this project.

“And I call them on an individual basis based on the areas they’ve indicated they’d like to work in. ... So the individual calls are made, based on their areas of interest and as projects come through.”

This type of targeted recruitment required the ability of the program staff to match the interests and abilities of the volunteers with the requirements of the project.

“As projects came to the Centre we looked at them in terms of what volunteers would they need and then would the Healthy Eating Volunteers enjoy doing this. Would this be something that fits with their skills for one thing. ... we often assigned them to projects that would build on their skills but what would give them other skills ... beyond what we specifically gave them. It’s been gradual, on a project to project basis. ... We haven’t consciously decided to not have them do any presentations but we just haven’t had many requests for presentations, more requests for other things. And also getting to know the volunteers and as they became involved in the program, you understand that not every volunteer likes to do presentations. And so, they still have so many skills and so much knowledge to offer where they are interested and where their skills fit. So that is why we did it on a project to project basis, because ... of who has indicated an interest in this area ... and who would have the interest here, who would like to do something like this.”

This was the primary method of recruiting used throughout the year because the HEV Coordinator felt that this was an economical and more efficient way to recruit volunteers rather than mailing the information to all HEVs each time. There were often only 2 or 3 projects available at a time because many of the project requests came in at varying times. The HEV Coordinator would call specific volunteers each time, with

these requests. Which volunteers were called each time was based on factors such as: availability; interest in the type of project; and skill level of the HEV.

As the HEV Coordinator would contact HEVs about various projects, she would use the feedback from them to update the information contained on the planning form, with regards to preferences or changes in interests. However, this was not kept in any written format that was accessible to the researcher except for what the HEV Coordinator recorded in her journal. For those volunteers who had not completed a planning form, the HEV Coordinator kept a mental record of their interests and preferences, some of which was recorded in her journal.

Peer education programs typically provide their educators with a variety of different activities to do and then it is up to the peer educator to decide which activities they would use with their target audience. The HEV Program did not follow this model. Rather, program staff chose to recruit for and then assign volunteers to various projects as the requests were received by the program.

The HEV Program staff felt strongly that when volunteers were recruited for a project, an emphasis was placed on the choice of the volunteer to accept or decline the project. They felt this was quite important:

“Again if we look at our philosophy or our approach ... in giving them a choice and really emphasizing for them that they can choose projects that they're interested in, then I think, I hope that has been accomplished. ... Other than that, we do approach them and we let them pick and choose what they think they might be interested in. We try to give them enough information to make a choice on. ”

The volunteers also felt very strongly about having the ability to choose the projects they were interested in. The volunteers knew that they did not have to accept a

request and they all indicated that they never felt any pressure from the program to accept any project requests.

“If she ever asked me something and I didn’t feel like I was able to do it, I feel like I could say ‘No’. And she’s always really good about that.”

And:

“I think she gives you a choice. I think she, like as much as she can, she’ll phone if she thinks that you’re, you know, the person for this, and tells you this is going on and whether ... you’d like to do it.”

One challenge in coordinating requests for the volunteers comes in balancing the number of requests with their needs and wants. Sometimes it can be a struggle.

“It’s a balance of volunteers between, you don’t want to be pestering them to do too much or feel like they’re being pestered. At the same time you don’t want to ignore them and not want to contact them.”

The use of targeted recruitment may have affected the different level of involvement by the volunteers, especially because it was initially based on completed planning forms received by the program. One volunteer noted that there appeared to be a discrepancy in the level of involvement of the volunteers and she wondered if she should be initiating contact with the program more.

“I find that there’s some people that really are involved. You see their names come up a lot and they’re really involved and then you wonder is it just ’cause they’re phoning and contacting them, or is there just more communication with them ... I could be phoning myself more, that that’s part of my responsibility.”

All the volunteers except one indicated that the level of requests from the HEV Coordinator was ‘just right’. The one volunteer who felt that the number of requests was too few also objected to being called about one specific project and not being offered any other alternatives. She also indicated that she preferred receiving a list of available projects because she needed time to reflect on them before she could make a

decision. For her, she did not respond well to being called about only one project at a time.

“... I think it would be important for me to see, to see something written down, see it, see what’s available and inquire. ... if I see it on paper ... it gives me a chance to think about it before I approach her. But just to go up and say, ‘Is there more?’ and then find out that it’s really not something [I would like to do] ... [it’s] not going to be what I’m really looking for and [then] to turn that down.”

Yet another volunteer linked the number of requests she received with the number of projects available at one time.

“... because we haven’t really had a lot of projects, like you can’t really say it’s too few requests because the number of projects hasn’t been up there yet ...”

One of the frustrations encountered by the HEVs was being recruited for a project that was then either cancelled or delayed. One project, for which the HEVs were recruited in October, had still not started by the end of the evaluation period. As already mentioned, this hindered the recruitment of these volunteers for other projects.

Project Management

Once an HEV was assigned to a project, the HEV Coordinator would meet with the volunteer to talk about the project in more detail, discuss resources that may be needed, and then outline the responsibilities of the volunteer. In this capacity, the role of the HEV Coordinator was to assist the volunteers, acting as a resource person for them.

For the most part, this structure worked well. However, there were two instances where this was not the case. In one situation, the project in question was

a presentation for an external agency. Both the NSV and the HEV assigned to the project had indicated well in advance that they would be able to meet the deadline for the presentation. However, two days prior to the date of the presentation, they asked for an extension because they were not prepared. Since this could not be given and the program staff felt that they needed to fulfill their obligation to the agency, one of the NRVC staff members gave the presentation instead.

This incident caused considerable anxiety on the part of the NRVC staff. In reviewing her journal, it would appear that the HEV Coordinator went out of her way to facilitate the development of this presentation by the volunteers. It does not appear that anything could have been done differently on the part of the HEV Coordinator. As a result of this incident, the NRVC staff made a decision to have one of the three staff members available as back-up for any future presentations. This would not prevent a repeat of this situation in the future, but it created a contingency plan in the event that it did. Because the individuals involved were volunteers, the program staff felt there was little they could do in the way of discipline. All they felt they could do was communicate to the volunteers their displeasure with the outcome of this project. During the second set of interviews with the HEVs, the volunteer involved in this incident did not comment on it, plainly ignoring it when asked about the different projects she was involved with during the year. The researcher sensed that the volunteer did not want to discuss this issue further and she decided not to pursue it with the HEV.

The second situation when the project management structure did not work well was with an issue of the HEV newsletter. Some confusion occurred because the

volunteers were unsure of what their role was in creating the newsletter, compared to the role of the NRVC staff. One of the volunteers thought that the NRVC staff made the final decisions about the content of the newsletter. She was quite upset to find that some of her articles had not been included in it and blamed the staff for this. In fact, it was the other HEV working on the newsletter who had made that decision not to include her articles. In this situation, the HEV Coordinator had thought that both volunteers were clear about everyone's role in creating the newsletter. For subsequent newsletters, the HEV Coordinator indicated to the researcher that she made it very clear to the volunteers what their respective roles were. She emphasized to the volunteers that the role of the NRVC staff was only to review the newsletter articles to ensure the nutrition information was accurate and to contribute sections for the newsletter, if asked.

4.3.2.3 The Personal Activity Diary (PAD)

The PADs were developed by the NRVC as a means to gather data on the time that volunteers spent in different program activities. It also included areas to record informal communication of nutrition information and personal goals for each activity.

During the first set of interviews with the researcher, 5 out of 20 HEVs indicated that they had either lost or misplaced their PAD. This was passed on to the HEV Coordinator, so she could replace the PADs for the volunteers.

At the second set of interviews, 9 of 18 HEVs provided the researcher with their PADs for review. Many of the different sections of the PADs were left blank. Many of the HEVs who did fill it out stated that they felt the PAD was not very useful and the

researcher noted that not all the volunteers recorded their time spent on activities. Only a few volunteers commented on how useful the PAD was:

“I don’t find it useful for myself. I feel like I’m just – I don’t put much into it. And if I was putting something into it, I feel like it’s just for, just documenting my activities for someone else.”

And:

I don’t use it as often as I should. ...I think it’s good like because now I can look back and see ... what I did but I find that sometimes if it’s a month, like after I do a project, I have to really struggle to [remember how much time was spent on it]”

And:

“I used it quite a bit. The front part where it’s talking about tasks or whatever, I didn’t necessarily use that all the time, but ... for referring back to things and what you might, what you did achieve, or even just for phone numbers, and stuff like that, it was good.”

Of the 9 HEVs who did not provide their PADs for review, one of the HEVs indicated that she had started to use it and then misplaced it. A second HEV indicated that she also had started to use it but threw it out when she withdrew from the program. Both of these volunteers indicated that the PAD was ‘somewhat’ useful. Two other HEVs thought that the PAD was a good idea but never used it while three others indicated that the keeping of a diary was not an activity they were used to doing.

Of the 5 HEVs who lost or misplaced the diary at the beginning of the year, 4 of them were HEVs who did not have one for review at the end of the year, stating that they hadn’t used it all year.

4.3.2.4 Program Communication with Healthy Eating Volunteers

Communication from the program staff to the HEVs occurred in both written and verbal forms. The purpose of this communication with the volunteers was to keep

them up-to-date with the different activities going on as well as to update them on the different opportunities for their involvement.

The written communication from the program staff included one recruitment letter from the HEV Coordinator, notices of the workshops, invitations to the social events, and the HEV newsletter, "Tasty Times". Altogether, the program staff sent out 11 pieces of written communication to the HEVs during the evaluation period. HEVs received at least one piece of written communication from the program during each of the 14 months of the evaluation period, except in July, August, and December.

Verbal communication with the program staff occurred primarily between the HEVs and the HEV Coordinator. This was either over the telephone or at in-person meetings. Verbal communication from the HEV Coordinator was the primary means of providing support and assistance to HEVs currently working on projects. The HEV Coordinator consistently called the HEVs as they were working on projects, to follow up with them and offer assistance. Verbal communication by the HEV Coordinator was also seen as a means of keeping in touch with the volunteers.

"Keeping in contact with them and you know, keeping track of how the volunteers are doing ... and if they're [un]happy, what changes can be made."

During the year, the volunteers also initiated communication with the HEV Coordinator. As the program progressed, the amount of this communication increased probably because the volunteers got more comfortable with the HEV Coordinator. The HEV Coordinator tried to make herself as accessible to the volunteers as possible, to maintain open communication lines.

"They call me at home, they call me morning, noon, or in the evening
You know, ... it's very informal the way that ... I communicate and

I don't mind when they call me at home and they do. So that makes me think, 'Oh, they must feel comfortable [to call me]'."

For those HEVs who completed a planning form and had projects assigned to them early in the program, verbal communication from the HEV Coordinator was established earlier and there was more verbal contact between the volunteers and the HEV Coordinator. For those volunteers who did not fill out a planning form, the verbal communication took longer to establish. By September however, the HEV Coordinator had established verbal contact with all HEVs and the frequency of contact with most of the volunteers improved after that. However, a few of the HEVs who had not filled out a planning form did experience less communication with the HEV Coordinator than all the other HEVs.

The amount of verbal communication between the HEV Coordinator and the volunteer appeared to be directly related to their level of participation in the program. The more projects a HEV was involved with, the greater the amount of verbal communication that took place between the HEV Coordinator and that volunteer. Those volunteers who completed the planning forms and had an initial meeting with the NRVC staff were involved in more activities and received more verbal communication from the HEV Coordinator. The opposite also appears to be true – the volunteers who did not complete the planning forms appeared to be harder to match to activities, participated in few projects and had less communication from the HEV Coordinator.

During the data analysis, the researcher found that there were 5 HEVs for whom there was no verbal communication recorded between the HEV Coordinator and those volunteers for a period of 4 –5 months. This does not mean that it did not occur, but the researcher did not receive any communication records for these individuals for that

period of time. Most of these volunteers had been assigned to projects that ended up encountering significant delays and these volunteers were almost exclusively the ones who were involved in fewer projects.

During the first set of interviews with the volunteers, many commented that they felt 'out of touch' with the program. As the year progressed, they noted that the communication between the program staff and themselves had improved. By the end of the year, there were still a few volunteers who indicated that they still did not feel a part of the program and that communication from the program could have been better.

"I don't think that's changed much within the year because like I said, I haven't really been that active. I think I need to see what's available. There has to be more activities being presented out there that I'm not aware of. ...at least I don't know what's going on here ..."

And:

"I'm not fully informed in exactly what the whole program entails"

And:

"I think the communication could be better ... I know that they have a lot of work to do, have a lot of people to keep in contact with, but I think some important things we could be better informed [of]."

All the volunteers appreciated the telephone calls from the HEV Coordinator.

"Like she'd [HEV Coordinator] call me a fair bit. And she'd tell me of different things that were happening or if I'd be interested. So she was always giving me the information ..."

And:

"I think it's [verbal communication from the program] has been really good. She [HEV Coordinator] has been really great about calling us and just seeing how we're doing sometimes. Sometimes it even feels like a social call and that's just fine."

This was especially true for the two volunteers who were on hold. They both commented that they were surprised that the HEV Coordinator still telephoned them regularly even though they were not active in the program.

By the end of the evaluation period, it was clear that some of the volunteers were unsure of what was happening next with the program. When this was brought to the attention of the NRVC Director, she acknowledged that the program staff would need to communicate this to the volunteers shortly. With regard to communication from the program staff:

“I think what it comes down is, is refining our communication with ... people involved with the program It’s complex. It takes time. It’s complicated. We have to refine those procedures”

4.3.3 Time Commitment to the Program

Both the HEV Coordinator and the HEVs had specific time contracts with the program.

4.3.3.1 HEV Coordinator

The HEV Coordinator was contracted to spend about 5 hours a week coordinating HEV activities. Even though this was set up as a volunteer position by the NRVC Director, she was careful to make sure that the HEV Coordinator stayed within her contracted time commitment. As well, the NRVC Director recognized the limitations of this time commitment.

“... She [HEV Coordinator] is very good and does very good work for the Centre as volunteer coordinator and I’m just delighted to have her, but I have to remember for myself is that it is only a volunteer position and we had negotiated about 5 hours a week on the program. So, and she could do a lot more than that, she would do a lot more than that if I didn’t ... So I have to keep on bringing myself back and say, this is a volunteer ... but it’s not a paid position.”

As well, the HEV Coordinator found it challenging to keep her time commitment to the program:

“I could do this easily for 40 hours a week. It’s sometimes it’s more work than I thought, but it’s more in the coordination of things, like getting in touch with people and assigning people and then other factors like there’s some projects that I haven’t confirmed volunteers to yet because I’m waiting to talk to the organizers of that project who happen to be away for a couple of weeks or not clear about the details and then getting back to them and back, so it’s much it’s taking more time, [not] because of anything the volunteers are doing, it’s more just external circumstances.”

On average, the HEV Coordinator spent 7 hours per week coordinating HEVs. However, she felt frustrated because she would have liked to put more time into it but was reluctant to do so because of academic and personal commitments and because of the parameters of her contract with the program. Most of her time was spent on communicating with the HEVs, meeting with them about projects they were working on, HEV Program staff meetings, and preparing resources for the HEVs as needed.

4.3.3.2 Healthy Eating Volunteers

When they entered the program, the HEVs agreed to provide 20 hours of service to the program, in its first year. This 20 hour commitment for the volunteers was predetermined by NRVC staff. This was done to prevent individuals from taking the HEV training for purely personal reasons and so that the volunteers were aware that after the training, they were expected to commit some time back with the program.

“I do think it’s appropriate that they have time commitment for the training that they’ve received. ... I think it gives structure to ... what their role is then after the training is over. So that they don’t think, ‘Oh my, now my training’s over and what do I do now?’.”

This reason for having a defined time commitment was also understood by the volunteers:

“... but I think it is kind of good, because if you’re going to spend their time ... and their resources training people to go out and do this, you want some to at least return something to the Centre.”

However, the program staff also had other reasons for wanting a record of the number of hours contributed by the volunteers:

“We want them to record their hours, not as a check to make sure they’re meeting their twenty hours but for all the volunteers, it gives us the data we need if we ever want to go for funding. ... they’ve put in tremendous amount of hours, whatever those hours might be, it gives us the clout when we try to get grants for funding to have that data about the Centre and about the work they’re doing.”

This expectation of a time commitment was initially called a requirement by the program staff and was included as part of the HEV Program’s objectives for its first year. However, the NRVC Director indicated that from the perspective of the program staff, this actually was considered to be more of a guideline:

“We’ve called it a requirement. But it’s probably not good for the Centre to be hard-line on that That doesn’t work in volunteer work. You have to have some guidelines, and I guess, instead of more requirements, consider it a guideline ... I have stressed this when I interviewed them that ‘... give what you can. Twenty hours is what we hope you can give. But give what you can.’”

The amount of time volunteered by the HEVs was gathered from their PADs and/or from the HEVs by the researcher during the second set of interviews. For the purposes of the discussion on this topic, the results are presented only for those volunteers who devoted time to the program. It does not include the 2 HEVs who dropped out of the program and the 2 HEVs who were on hold for most of the year, so the data is presented for 16 “active” volunteers.

During the evaluation period, the time contributed by the “active” HEVs ranged from 0 to 41 ¾ hours. Table 4.3 provides a breakdown of time contribution by the HEVs. There was one HEV who had contributed no time to the program while only 3 HEVs met or exceeded the objective of contributing 20 hours or more to the program in the first year. There were 4 volunteers for whom this data could not be determined; 3 of the HEVs had not kept track of this information; and 1 HEV was unavailable during the second set of interviews after repeated attempts to make contact with her.

Table 4.3 Volunteer Time Contributed by the HEVs

Number of Volunteer Hours	Number of HEVs
0 hours	1
0 – 4 hours	0
5 – 9 hours	3
10 – 14 hours	2
15 – 19 hours	3
20 + hours	3
Unable to determine	4

Many volunteers commented that they had not been able to meet their time commitment to the program. Some noted that they felt that the program staff were flexible in this regard:

“Yeah, I do think a time commitment should be there. And the other thing too is, I think it was made fairly clear that if one wasn’t able to live up to that, ... that wasn’t problematic. So I think, I think it’s a good thing for people to undertake that with the sense of giving back some of that time.”

Others felt that the program staff needed to be clearer still about this flexibility.

“... I think it should have been stressed upon them that ... if they were a Healthy Eating Volunteer and [that] they give what they can to [meet] their time [commitment]. ... So I think that should have been made much clearer.”

Some volunteers indicated that they felt pressured to meet this time commitment, but that this was a personal issue as they tried to keep any commitments they make.

“Because I can’t give them my time and I feel lately, very obligated. ...
.... So, I would say most of it is myself [feeling pressured], thinking that.
.... So I’m bringing it on myself.”

And lastly, one volunteer had this to say:

“So, provided the program can provide enough opportunity to fulfill twenty hours, I think it’s perfectly adequate. If there’s not adequate opportunity to participate, then your volunteers feel like they’re not meeting commitments.”

The HEV Coordinator did recognize that the issue of not fulfilling this 20 hour requirement was causing some concern for the HEVs and indicated to the researcher that she had attempted to reassure the volunteers. She did not want the HEVs to feel that there would be any negative consequences if they did not meet this 20 hour time commitment.

“So there’s never been a problem where they haven’t met their hours. Sometimes they got concerned but they would call me and say, ‘You know, is it okay?’ And I would say, ‘Of course it’s okay.’”

4.4 Program Supports

Supports were provided to the HEVs through recognition of the volunteers, social events, workshops, newsletters, and assistance by the HEV Coordinator to help the volunteers complete assigned projects. As well, the program staff provided the volunteers with financial assistance for activities and feedback on activities that they had completed.

One of the issues that the program staff grappled with during this year was the level of support that should be provided to the volunteers.

“I think we’re still trying to find our way about what level of support do they need, how much support, and we’re struggling with that, I mean it can’t be the same level of support they had in their training program.”

And:

“It’s a balance of volunteers between, you don’t want to be asking them to do too much or feel like they’re being pestered. At the same time, you don’t want to ignore them and not want to contact them. So what is that balance of the volunteers [time] so they don’t feel like they’re being pestered to participate in social events or other activities or to do projects, to give a certain amount of time. So where do you find that balance?”

By the end of the year, the program staff still felt that they could not answer these questions and decided to wait for the outcome of the evaluation before making decisions about these issues.

4.4.1 Financial Assistance

The HEV Program, even without a funding source, was able to procure enough funds to assist the volunteers in completion of their projects. This provided the volunteers with funds to pay for expenses such as: photocopying handouts; purchasing food for demonstrations; and purchasing supplies used to build displays.

“They [HEVs] need financial support for any activities they work on as part of the Centre. And we’ve agreed to provide that. So if they go out and do a presentation and buy food, then we cover that.”

4.4.2 Feedback Provided to the Healthy Eating Volunteers

Feedback was provided to the volunteers on an informal basis by the HEV Coordinator.

“We’ve definitely given feedback. ... I think it’s probably been more informal ... After they do projects, then we call them and fill them in ... on where the status is –if we have to do corrections, if it has to be edited. When it’s done and complete we always call them and say, how happy we are with it or how it’s being used. ... So we give lots of feedback. A lot of it’s encouraging ... we make a point to make it positive.”

“And you know, I usually call them and say ‘I just wanted you to know you did a really good job...’”

However, the NRVC Director grappled with the issue of implementing a more formal review process for the volunteers. By the end of the year, it was clear that this was still something that was not yet determined.

“She [HEV Coordinator] would have given that informal feedback. I would say we didn’t do formal feedback. ... we’ve done the informal feedback, so she [HEV Coordinator] would have been giving them informal feedback. ... But not a formal feedback, and I think this is an issue we’re grappling with all the volunteers is the feedback process, the formal feedback process. How do we do that? And how do you do that with volunteers?”

4.4.3 Recognition of the Healthy Eating Volunteers

There was one formal recognition event in the HEV program and that was a graduation supper that was held after the volunteers completed their training program and before they entered the HEV Program. Program staff also provided other forms of recognition to the volunteers. These took the form of notes, cards and telephone calls from the HEV Coordinator. However, the researcher was not always able to determine which volunteers did or did not receive them so this form of support could not be fully assessed.

The HEV Coordinator often sent cards to the volunteers, to thank them for completing a project, to wish them well if they were ill, or to congratulate them on a

new job. She made a point of calling the volunteers who were on hold, just to find out how they were. She also made a point of calling the volunteers just to keep in touch.

From the program's perspective, recognition of the volunteers was important but program staff noted that it didn't have to be in big ways.

"I don't think recognition has to be a big celebration all the time. We do it in very little ways but we do it consistently and we do it a lot."

The volunteers who commented on this aspect of the program really appreciated receiving the cards and calls. One of volunteers who left the program during the evaluation period had this to say:

"... they [NRVC staff] sent me a thank-you card and I thought 'Why are you thanking me? I hardly did anything. ...'"

This is what another volunteer had to say:

"And I think, I want to also make a point that the program has sort of become like a family because I've had a lot of health concerns and some major stuff has come up, and I just open my mailbox and there's a card. And all of them [the program staff] have signed it or there's a thank you note for doing something that I never even thought was a big deal. But they really take time to recognize that you've done. And she [HEV Coordinator] touches base and I think it's really excellent that they've done that."

4.4.4 Social Events

Social events are another form of support provided to the HEVs and two of them, which were combined with the NSVs, were held during the year. Only 3 volunteers attended the first one, and only one attended the second one.

"Now, not all the volunteers have attended, but ... even for the volunteers who don't attend, for whatever reason, they have indicated that they think it is nice that we are having these parties, that is, we are at least offering the opportunity for them to come together and they recognize that."

However, almost all the HEVs felt that as a support, social events should continue to be held. Some volunteers did feel though, that social events could be combined with educational events, rather than having them as separate functions. One HEV suggested that attendance at social events would possibly improve if the HEVs were reminded about it by a telephone call a few days before the event. Another HEV recognized the challenge of hosting social events for volunteers:

“... I know from the other side of actually doing the volunteer appreciation, that I find that I don’t get a lot of support from my volunteers as well, but I also realize that they have other things to do ... I think it’s beneficial to have them because it portrays the message that you [as a volunteer] are important and we do want to have this for you.”

4.4.5 Assistance Provided to the Healthy Eating Volunteers by the HEV Coordinator

The assistance provided by the HEV Coordinator to the volunteers during a project was also seen as a support provided by the program. This was seen by program staff as a key element of the program.

“And the support that they [program staff] give the volunteers – that has to be decided ... And we’ve decided that that level of support will be any review of materials that they [HEVs] have been developing or presentations they’re planned, guidance on how they might do that, directing them to resources that they might use to develop that. So putting them in touch with the resources that they might need to work on their project. Putting them, giving, having the supervisor review any materials – that’s a form of support.”

Almost all of the volunteers commented that support and assistance was available from the program, namely from the HEV Coordinator and that it was valuable and was always there if needed.

“I kind of lean on her [HEV Coordinator] as my support. I feel like if I have something that I need from her, or need, I feel like I can just call her and she knows what, what support I could use. You know, whether

it be a kit or a resource or whatever.”

4.4.6 Workshops

Three workshops were planned for the volunteers during the evaluation period but only two were held – one in June and one in November. Another one had been planned for March but was cancelled due to lack of pre-registered participants.

According to program staff:

“The workshops ... started out from initially when we did that green questionnaire about whether they [HEVs] wanted a workshop. And they said yes they would like that, continued updating on that.”

And:

“I think that it’s good that we had the workshops. And I think that it helped the volunteers and helped with their skills and – even for those who didn’t attend, they did get the section for [their] binder...”

Seven volunteers attended each of the two workshops. In addition, a ‘make-up’ workshop was held for those volunteers who wanted to attend the June workshop but could not attend it – three volunteers attended that session. The program staff decided not to provide make-up workshops again because of the limited resources of the program.

Overall, the program staff appeared somewhat disappointed with the turnout of the volunteers at the workshops.

“I am committed to updating and enhancing the Healthy Eating Volunteers’ knowledge and skills. I think that’s a given – that has to be done. How that is done, I’m not sure. I don’t know the workshops worked. We really tried hard. We did offer three or so workshops. We really tried hard to get people out there, but we weren’t getting the numbers that we probably wanted.”

Program staff struggled with trying to determine how many volunteers needed to attend the workshops in order to justify the time and resources required to put a workshop together.

“... I’d like to get more feedback ... to know whether it’s worth our time and effort to do that. ’Cause it is a lot of time and effort to plan the workshop, to put the material together, and to offer it. And to coordinate it. That’s a lot of time and effort for very few people.”

And:

“... it’s too bad that more volunteers didn’t attend. I don’t know if that’s an indicator of success or not – how many people attend.”

Attendance by the volunteers at the workshops was voluntary, but program staff were considering making attendance mandatory. That is, to be considered an ‘active’ volunteer, volunteers would be required to attend so many workshops a year. By the end of the year however, the program staff were no closer to resolving this issue.

“If we’d continue with the workshop or any form of education – is it voluntary, is it mandatory to continue on as being a Healthy Eating Volunteer Program?”

Just over half of the volunteers attended at least one workshop. Almost all of the volunteers, regardless if they attended a workshop or not, indicated that they thought the workshops were useful and should continue to be held.

“I think they added [an] opportunity for all the Healthy Eating Volunteers to see one another. But I also think it focused on a specialty group of the program that we never covered enough in the actual first program. So I think that it was a very good idea ...”

And:

“I find them really, really helpful. I like they do target specific groups because you know, with twenty volunteers, there’s many different areas of interest among those twenty people.”

The primary reason cited by volunteers for nonattendance was because they had other time commitments at the time of the workshop(s). Others volunteers stated that their nonattendance was because the topic was of little interest to them. Finally, some volunteers felt that attendance at workshops should be kept optional and not be made mandatory.

4.4.7 Newsletters

There were 4 HEV newsletters produced during the evaluation period, created by a pair of HEVs each time. The newsletters were sent out in May and October 1997, and February and April 1998. They were two pages in length and featured some consistent items such as an editor's note, a note from the NRVC Director, and either a recipe or a food of the month. The second and subsequent newsletters added a column from the HEV Coordinator.

The NRVC staff felt quite strongly that the newsletter was something in which the volunteers should take ownership. It was the view of the program staff that the volunteers would determine the content and layout of the newsletter. Even once a template was developed, they felt that each group of volunteers could choose what to include or exclude in the newsletter.

“Our view was that it would be a volunteer newsletter and they [HEVs] would determine the content. They would determine how it was set up, so they determined all that.”

And:

“... let's make it their newsletter ... And the only thing we would look at is nutrition content in that is it correct... Aside from that, it's their newsletter, what they consider to be most important as it is a linkage between the volunteers. So we've tried very hard to maintain that.”

Overall, the majority of the volunteers enjoyed the newsletter. Some volunteers felt that the newsletter should contain more information about what other volunteers were doing, including a list of how many hours volunteers spent on different activities. However, the NRVC Director was not comfortable with the extent of these requests.

“I don’t think we’re going to be able to give them [HEVs] what they want in terms of how much everybody’s contributed ’cause I’m not going to put in the newsletter that somebody’s putting in 10 hours or 15 hours. We can just list the projects but ... projects don’t give you a sense of how much time is involved.”

The newsletter was seen by many of the volunteers as one way of keeping in touch with the program.

“I think the newsletter is a great ... tool for the program. And that you keep up-to-date with what everybody’s doing. The message from [HEV Coordinator] and [NRVC Director] are always really positive and upbeat, and it really makes you feel like you’re part of a team, and you are making a difference.”

But like all print material, not all volunteers read it, as evidenced by some of their comments about its content. During the second set of interviews with the researcher, some volunteers commented that they wanted to know more about what other volunteers were doing yet the two previous newsletters had contained an update on the different projects going on. These were the same volunteers who commented that they still felt ‘out of touch’ with the program.

“I mean if the newsletter was providing information to the volunteers on the program and communicating information on the program or the information that you use in there, [it would be useful]...”

4.4.8 Staff-Volunteer Meetings

It is well recognized in the literature that regular staff-volunteer meetings are a means of support and program integration for volunteers. Initially the NRVC Director considered holding a staff-volunteer meeting at the end of the year, to collect some feedback from the HEVs. However, program staff decided against this. They felt that because the HEV Program was undergoing an extensive evaluation, any information they might collect at a staff-volunteer meeting would likely be duplicating what was already being gathered by the evaluator. As well, the program staff felt that HEV attendance at such a meeting would likely be poor, given past trends of HEV attendance at workshops and social events. Program staff felt that a staff-volunteer meeting would be just one more request asked of the HEVs and they did not want to burden the HEVs with additional requests for their time.

4.5 Satisfaction with the Healthy Eating Volunteer Program

Satisfaction with the program will be discussed from the perspective of the program staff, those who used or engaged the services of the volunteers, and the volunteers themselves.

4.5.1 Program Staff

All of the program staff – the NRVC Director, the NRVC Coordinator, and the HEV Coordinator – indicated that they were satisfied with the HEV Program.

“I think given our limitations of time, people and money, I think the program is going fine. I think she [HEV Coordinator] has been wonderful ... in terms of keeping in contact with the volunteers, in terms of approaching them about various projects and keeping them informed about the Centre. There might be more that we can do, but not with the limitations we have in terms of money and funding. So I think, that basically, I’ve been happy with how the program has run this

year, once we got over our initial starting point.”

And:

“I’ve been extremely happy with their work and with the relationship that we’ve formed as well. Being able to communicate and knowing them beyond their work, and giving them that kind of respect, too.”

4.5.2 Program Users

Of the 14 completed projects during this evaluation, 11 were assessed with respect to satisfaction of the work completed by the volunteers. Overwhelmingly, all agencies or supervisors reported that they were at least satisfied to very satisfied with the work completed for them by the volunteers.

For the one presentation observed, the participants were asked to complete an evaluation form; 9/15 did so and they all indicated that they were satisfied with the presentation. Six of the nine indicated that they had learned a new concept related to healthy eating. There were no negative comments received except that one participant noted that the volunteers could speak a little louder and more clearly.

For the other two presentations that took place during the evaluation period, the HEV Coordinator reported to the researcher that she did talk with representatives from these organizations. They had indicated to her that they were extremely satisfied and very pleased with the presentations given by the volunteers.

4.5.3 Healthy Eating Volunteers

Almost all of the volunteers indicated that they were satisfied with the program and they all indicated that if another training program were to be held, they would

recommend it to others. Almost all of the volunteers also indicated that they would continue on with the program.

Some of the volunteers provided reasons for their satisfaction with the program.

For most of them, it was because the program met individual personal goals.

“I think one of the personal goals ... was that I wanted to ... encourage my husband to change his eating habits, to want to change his eating habits. ... And I’ve noticed that my husband, I’ve achieved that because one day I came home and he was making my little boy lunch and he had [included] a vegetable [in it]. And he had a food from each food group. ... My personal goal, that has been achieved.”

And:

“I find even not just myself but my husband, when we go shopping together, he picks up something and the first thing he looks at is the label. So I notice that, and this has become habit... it’s become part of our lifestyle. I’ve definitely met my goal.”

For others, this satisfaction was because of a change that occurred in their home environment or personal practices, as a result of being involved with the program.

“Like we have changed our eating habits in our home, like probably 85%. Almost a direct turn-around.”

And:

“And I like hearing new things. ... Sometimes when you see something in a magazine, I always look and see who wrote it, like what kind of credentials they have and is the article actually worth reading or is this just someone that’s a self-proclaimed [quack]...”

4.6 Summary

The HEVs were a diverse group of people, coming from different education, occupation and cultural backgrounds. They were interested in nutrition but also were motivated by a desire to help others as peer educators.

The HEV Program evolved very differently from its intended plan. Staff roles changed and a HEV Coordinator was recruited. The types of activities available for and completed by the volunteers changed as well, for a variety of reasons. Volunteer involvement in the program ranged widely, also due to many reasons, including personal choice of the volunteers and problems encountered with delayed or cancelled projects.

Overall, project recruitment, assignment and management worked fairly well during the year. Targeted recruitment was the primary method used and while it appeared to be reasonably effective, it was evident that some volunteers were unhappy with this approach. It also appeared that it did not give equal opportunity to all volunteers to undertake projects during the year. Project management also worked fairly well and when it did not, the program took steps to try to ensure that this would not happen again.

The HEV Program staff attempted to establish open and frequent communication with the volunteers. This was achieved, with varying degrees of success. Even at the end of the year, the NRVC Director acknowledged that program communication with the HEVs could still be improved.

The HEV Program staff provided both informal and formal supports to volunteers. Formal supports met with varying degrees of success, depending on the

perspective being considered. The extent to which recognition of the volunteers occurred, was difficult to assess. The program staff and volunteers differed on their perspective of the effectiveness of workshops and social events held during the year. However, both groups tended to agree that supports such as the assistance provided to the volunteers by the HEV Coordinator and the newsletter were valuable.

Overall, the program staff, users of the program, and the HEVs indicated that they were satisfied with the program, all for very different reasons. For the volunteers, their involvement with the program sometimes led to unexpected personal benefits.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter brings together the research findings and the literature review to answer the research questions. It is divided into six sections. This first section discusses the performance of the HEV Program as a peer education program; the second discusses the operations and management of the HEV Program as a volunteer program; the third section discusses HEV Program satisfaction; the fourth and fifth sections present conclusions and recommendations respectively from this evaluation; and the last section presents future research questions, arising from this research project.

The HEV Program had 9 objectives to be accomplished in its first year. These are discussed in the first three sections of this chapter. Each section is similarly structured. First the objectives are presented; next follows a discussion of how the program fared in meeting these objectives; and lastly, the relevant literature is presented, in relation to the points covered by the objectives.

5.1 Healthy Eating Volunteer Program Performance

The first four objectives of the HEV Program deal with its performance as a peer education program.

Objective 1:

HEVs have spread healthy eating information to the general public via a variety of ways and means (i.e., presentations, formal nutrition-related activities, informal discussions with people they know).

Objective 2:

At least 10 requests have been received from individuals, organizations, and/or agencies for Healthy Eating Volunteers to give presentations on healthy eating in the community.

Objective 3:

HEVs have consistently provided accurate information to the general public and/or in other nutrition-related activities of the Centre.

Objective 4:

At least 75% of participants at each presentation given by a HEV indicate:

- ◆ satisfaction with the presentation (i.e. content, presentation style, handouts)
- ◆ learning of one or more important concepts related to healthy eating

The first objective deals with the scope and nature of the HEV activities as well as its target audience. The second objective concerns the demand for HEVs to give presentations while the third objective deals with the accuracy of information disseminated by the HEVs. The fourth objective focuses on presentation attendees – their satisfaction with the presentation they attended and new concepts learned.

The audiences for the activities completed by HEVs were varied, including seniors, women and children. The variety of means used to spread healthy eating

information to the general public was limited though. The only formal activities that involved the dissemination of nutrition information were the three presentations given by HEVs and the assistance provided by HEVs to one child education program. The other activities completed by the HEVs during the year had limited audiences, such as the HEVs themselves, NRVC staff, or other volunteers using the NRVC. There was some evidence that the HEVs informally disseminated nutrition information to their family, friends, and co-workers, but the extent to which this happened could not be accurately determined. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the general public was reached due to the small number of formal activities completed by the HEVs. Data were inconclusive with regard to the first objective being met.

During the first year, only three requests were received for HEVs to give presentations. Therefore the second objective was not met.

Accuracy of the nutrition information provided by the HEVs could not be assessed for all the completed projects. This was because of the nature of the activities the HEVs were involved with and the fact that only one presentation was observed. For the one presentation observed, the information was accurate. For the other external projects completed by the HEVs, accuracy of information could not be determined. For the internal projects, the direct project supervisors were all dietitians, so the information relayed was nutritionally accurate. For these projects, the third objective was met.

With respect to the fourth objective, data were collected on only one presentation. Those who attended the presentation and completed the evaluation form were satisfied with it and reported learning a new concept related to healthy eating. However, data cannot be generalized and is inconclusive for this objective.

The HEV Program was initially set up as a volunteer program that used a peer education approach to teach basic nutrition concepts to Saskatoon residents. Successful volunteer and peer education programs have many consistent elements. Where the literature has made a specific point that is unique to either a peer education or volunteer program, those elements will be discussed separately, as related to the HEV Program.

Targeted recruitment of volunteers to match the goals of the organizations and needs of the target population is important.^{23,49} Targeted recruitment yields volunteers appropriate to very specific tasks. This helps identify people with the appropriate skills, available time, and level of interest in the job or program area.⁴⁹ The HEV Program had specific selection criteria that were developed when volunteers were recruited for the training program. However, the researcher was unable to determine how these criteria were applied to the prospective volunteers. The recruitment plan for the HEV Program was not targeted but was rather more general in nature.¹ The plan to recruit HEVs did not target specific individuals with specific skills and it did not target specific age groups. The volunteer recruitment attracted individuals from different age groups and with different sets of skills.

Another important element for a successful program is that the peers or volunteers receive standardized training.^{23,38,47,49} After the training, nutrition-based programs need to provide volunteers with the support of nutrition professionals.^{22,26} All the HEVs completed a standardized training program and once in the program, they were provided with access to nutrition professionals through contact with the NRVC staff.

Successful peer education programs need to know who their audiences are to be able to target the marketing of their services.^{29,48} While a needs assessment of the HEV Program was undertaken prior to the development of its training program, this did not include any consultation with potential target audience members. The HEV Program was created without a clear definition of what community it was going to serve. The NRVC Director also had made a conscious decision not to undertake a large scale marketing of the HEV Program. These factors, compounded by a shift in the program's focus, a lag in the start-up of the program and delayed projects, affected the number of presentations completed by the HEVs.

It is important for volunteer and peer education programs to identify the interests and skills of the peer educator and direct them towards tasks that are best suited to their skills.²⁴ Successful programs help volunteers determine their individual goals and develop strategies to help them attain these goals. They identify activities for the volunteers and look for a good fit between the interests and skills of the volunteer and the activities available for them to do.^{35,39,43} In order to do this matching, it is also important to understand the motivations of the volunteer and their reasons for getting involved, to help determine individual goals.³⁶ While the HEV Program did collect some information on why the individuals wanted to become HEVs, it did not use this information to determine the motivations of the HEVs. It did try to match the interests and skills of the HEVs to activities but this was inconsistent. The HEVs who had completed the planning form had a greater chance of having their interests met by activities they were assigned to or were approached to do.

Peer education programs appear to be characterized by a prolonged engagement of the peers with members of the target audience. The opportunity for regular or frequent interaction between the peer educators and target audience members appears to be central to the concept of peer education.^{9,11,15,16,18,20,24,30} The ability to have regular interaction with the peers fosters the likelihood that the target audience of the education will not only acquire new knowledge but also put this into practice. In effect, peer educators use role modeling as a means of facilitating change. For the most part, the activities the HEVs were involved with could not be described as 'peer education activities' as they were a single interaction with a group, the completion of resources, or doing clerical functions in the NRVC.

Many peer education programs let the peer educator choose the type of activity(s) to do with the target audience members. The program often provides resource materials or manuals or kits for different types of activities or presentations. Then it is up to the peer educators to select and individualize the activities for implementation.^{7,11,26,28,46} For external requests, the HEV program did offer a choice of different activities that could be done for or with the requesting group. However, it was the HEV Coordinator who worked with the requesting organizations to determine what the activity(s) would be.

Activities undertaken by peer educators can be a combination of formal and informal communication with the members of the target audience. While some peer education programs have defined activities for peers to undertake, others have relied solely on the use of informal information spread. Rose²² and Pluska et al¹⁷ describe programs that relied on the informal spread of information amongst the target

audiences. Through discussions with their peers, the educators were able to communicate health information informally to a wide group of people. An attempt was made to capture the extent to which HEVs informally passed on their nutrition knowledge to family members, friends, or co-workers. The results were ambiguous but some peer education or role modeling may have occurred between the HEVs and their immediate family members.

Peer education programs need to recognize how the needs of its volunteers change over time. They need to be flexible to meet these changing needs.³⁵ Flexibility in the HEV Program was evident by the methods and approaches used by the HEV Coordinator in recruiting and assigning HEVs to projects.

Successful volunteer programs integrate their volunteers into their programs by: involving them in decision-making about the program; providing formal feedback to the volunteers; and holding regular staff-volunteer meetings.^{26,37,49} Formal feedback was not provided to the HEVs during the year. Because this was the first year of the HEV Program, the program staff decided not to make any decisions during this time about its operations and management. Program staff also made the decision not to hold any staff-volunteer meetings during the year.

Integration of the peer education program into a community can be an important step to guarantee its success, facilitated by the peer educators taking ownership of the program and providing direction for it.^{24,28} Community integration is also facilitated by the presence of a steering committee, which can then foster links to targeted community groups and potential participants.²⁴ The HEV Program does not have a steering committee; instead, as part of the NRVC, it has an advisory committee. The role of this

advisory committee is to give advice and suggestions that the NRVC staff could consider in their planning efforts. All of the members of the advisory committee are either nutritionists or dietitians. The opportunity for community integration and any ownership of the program by the HEVs is minimal with this structure.

Many studies using peer educators talk about the success of the program in terms of the number of interventions or number of hours volunteered without looking at the actual behaviour change of the audience. It has been suggested that evaluating the effectiveness of a peer education program must look at the degree to which the program effected behavior change in its participants.⁹ Measuring the number of interventions or number of volunteer hours does not evaluate how effective it was to actually influence a particular behaviour change in its intended audience members. This relates directly to the first goal of the HEV program, which is “to improve nutrition food selection behaviors of Saskatoon residents”. However, program goals are usually intended to be long-term in nature and given the scope and timing of this evaluation, it would be premature to comment on the HEV Program’s ability to affect behaviour change of Saskatoon residents.

There is a wealth of information on peer education programs using seniors and college/university students. Peer education programs using students provide an opportunity to empower peers to help one another in informed, health-enhancing ways.⁶ Students rely on their peers as their most important source of information; peers serve as counselors, teachers, role models, and enablers. By educating the peers, there is a greater chance that the students will increase their knowledge, and perhaps eventually change their behaviour.⁶ Peer education programs using seniors have found that they

are often more highly motivated and are often available to contribute volunteer time without competing factors such as family and job or work pressures.⁵ It has been demonstrated that peer educators can influence and increase awareness of good nutrition by role modeling.²⁴ The significant amount of literature on the use of peer educators with college or university students and seniors suggests that these are two age groups that can be effectively reached through well planned, targeted peer education programs.

In summary, the HEV Program evolved away from being a peer education program to become a program that provided volunteer opportunities for individuals who had been trained in the basic concepts of healthy eating. The program did have a standardized training program, but lacked many of the other structured components of successful peer education programs. As well, the target audience was not well defined.

While the HEV Program evolved away from a peer education program, some peer education still may have occurred, to a limited extent. Some of the HEVs appeared to become informal peer educators to their families, as evidenced by some of their comments on the behavior changes seen in their families.

5.2 Healthy Eating Volunteer Program Operations and Management

This section discusses the last 3 objectives of the HEV Program which deal with the operation and management of the HEV Program.

Objective 7 stated:

16 of 20 HEVs have participated in at least half of the planned Centre workshops for HEVs for that year.

Objective 8 stated:

16 of 20 HEVs have contributed at least 20 hours to Centre activities.

Objective 9 stated:

The HEV Program runs efficiently and smoothly as part of the NRVC.

These three objectives relate to how the program managed its operations. The HEV Program held two workshops for HEVs during the year. Only 11 out of 18 HEVs attended at least one workshop during the year; 7 HEVs did not attend either workshop. Only 6 volunteers came close to meeting their time commitment to the program; that is, 6 of 18 volunteers contributed at least 17 hours to the program in its first year. Neither objective 7 or 8 was met. During the evaluation period, there were no problems encountered with the HEV Program operating as part of the NRVC, so objective 9 was met.

Peer education programs need to provide their volunteers with the opportunity for continued growth and educational upgrading.⁵³ The HEV Program staff were committed to this principle and attempted to do this by organizing two workshops for HEVs during the year. However, they did not get the response they would have liked from the HEVs. The HEVs, on the other hand, felt that the workshops were useful, even if they didn't attend, and wanted them to continue. The HEV Program staff were not sure how successful the workshops were, as a way of providing additional education to the HEVs. They were uncertain if this format was the means they would use to do this for the HEVs in the future.

Flexibility in a program to meet the needs of its volunteers is important³⁵ and the HEV Program did this rather well. However, this flexibility likely contributed to