Outreach Suggestions & Recognition Ideas
National Volunteer Week
April 23 – 29, 2017

Volunteers = Hope, Dignity and Love!

The U.S. hospice movement was founded by dedicated volunteers and there is continued commitment to volunteering among our nation’s hospices. Volunteers continue to be a foundation of hospice. Celebrating Volunteers is the focus of this year’s National Volunteer Week, April 23-29, 2017.

The primary goal of volunteer outreach is to spread the word about the many benefits of volunteering for your hospice, palliative care organization, or end-of-life coalition. Activities to recognize volunteers, such as awards ceremonies, celebrations, or other special events, make excellent community calendar items on local television and radio stations and in newspapers. Highlighting the contributions of an individual volunteer provides reporters with compelling human interest coverage, while raising awareness of both hospice and the important role of volunteers.

- Plan a public event or community activity. Coordinate a community fair; a walkathon, a volunteer awards ceremony, or a celebration like a community cookout for volunteers. Consider partnering with other community organizations, places of worship, or clubs on their events.

- Involve a local celebrity or government official – Invite someone with “name recognition” in your community to keynote or officiate during a volunteer recognition event. Create a “photo opportunity” for local press: perhaps the celebrity or official could volunteer for a day, visit with patients and family members, or tour a facility—creating positive press for both the dignitary and your organization.

- Involve the media – Invite a newspaper, television or radio reporter to participate in volunteer orientation and share their experiences as a volunteer.

- Develop your message/theme – Develop a set of key messages about your organization/coalition’s mission and the role volunteers play within this important work. Weave your key messages into the theme of your events and all of your program’s communications with the public – especially in the public statements of officials or program leaders.

- Put out some of your key messages via social media if your organization is using them. NHPCO offers some social media graphics for members to use. Additionally, consider sharing key messages with your volunteers and ask them to send out via their social media. You may also want to forward Tweets from @NHPCO_news or share posts from the NHPCO Facebook page; we encourage providers to share things we put out to help spread our messaging.

- Use the high-resolution PDF ad slicks that NHPCO has created for our members. They come in different sizes and there are versions with full text and versions with minimal text. Feel free to customize or utilize these ads in any manner that will be helpful to your outreach.
• Tell a story – Do you have an amazing volunteer? Share their story with your community. Why do they volunteer for hospice or your coalition? What do they get in return? Why should others join them? Even so-called “ordinary” volunteers are extraordinary and have a unique story to tell. Remember, social media is a great way to share a story.

• Create a media list – Identify local news outlets that would be interested in featuring a story on your volunteers, program or coalition. Call them and ask who covers health care, human interest, or community news. Keep them informed with regular e-mails, phone calls, or faxes.

• Prepare and distribute a news release – Give the press all the information they need in order to attend an event or report on your volunteer program – especially, why it’s important for them to be there or share this news with their audience. Remember to provide a specific contact person who can assist with additional requests for information.

• Follow up on the news release – Make calls to reinforce the information and messages. Be mindful of deadlines and ask, “When is the best time to call?” The press doesn’t have to “be there.” Sometimes a well-written press release makes all the difference.

• Use pictures or video to tell the story – Videotape or take photographs for use in further promotional materials such as orientation videos or brochures. Be sure to caption your photos.

• Send a letter to the editor – Write an open letter of thanks to your volunteers and send to your local newspaper—or ask your volunteers to write about why they volunteer and what they receive in return.

Recognition Ideas

Volunteer recognition comes in many forms – ranging from verbal praise to a formal event. Here are a few ways to show your volunteers they are appreciated:

• Hold a formal recognition event during Volunteer Week, such as a dinner, a reception or a dessert buffet.

• Select and honor a Volunteer of the Year during National Volunteer Week.

• Maintain a Volunteer of the Month program, highlighting the special accomplishments of outstanding volunteers each and every month of the year.

• Place articles in your organization’s newsletter or Web site showcasing the hard work of your volunteers. Share these articles with your local newspapers; they make excellent human interest stories.

• Send individual thank you cards to each one of your volunteers. Short, handwritten thank you notes from board members mean a great deal.

• Establish a volunteer bulletin board with volunteers’ photos and names. Highlight special projects and place the board in a prominent place to be viewed by everyone.

• Send letters of recognition to the volunteers’ workplaces. These letters reflect well on the employee. It also raises public awareness of your organization.
• Create a photo scrapbook or yearbook of your volunteers in action.
• Share outcome and evaluation results with volunteers showing their personal impact.
• Arrange discounts for your volunteers at local shops.
• Create a booklet containing comments and quotes from staff, patients and families demonstrating the difference volunteers make. Share it at a recognition event or have it mailed to your volunteers.
• Give verbal praise, thanking your volunteers publicly for their contributions.
• Provide certificates of accomplishment for completion of a project, length of service, or active participation in your volunteer program.

NHPCO’s Marketplace carries a range of merchandise that can be used as special gifts for your volunteers; available items include tote bags, mugs, bookmarks, and recognition pins. NHPCO’s Marketplace has a variety of low-cost items. For more information, please visit www.nhpco.org/marketplace or call 1-800-646-6460.

Here are some examples of recognition events and ideas from colleagues across the country that we have shared in the past. We share them once again and hope that these ideas may provide some inspiration.

Home & Hospice Care of Rhode Island (Pawtucket) is thanking its 200 volunteers during a luncheon with a very creative — and fitting — theme: “Volunteers Wear Many Hats.” Chocolate hat candies are being given out as favors while hats filled with flowers will dress up the tables! The organization is also giving out baseball hats as gifts that feature a special logo to round out the theme — a logo that was designed by one of its volunteer coordinators who is also a professional artist. Talk about wearing many hats!

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Providence Hospice & Home Care of Snohomish County (Everett, WA) pays tribute to its volunteers in June, by holding a wonderful dinner and awards presentation that coincide with its annual meeting. The organization also sponsors an annual volunteer retreat in February and, as of this year, will be giving out “years of service” pins. In the past, the organization has also had staff send thank you cards to volunteers during National Volunteer Week — as well as in November for Thanksgiving.

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The 200 volunteers of VITAS Innovative Hospice Care-Dade Program (Miramar, FL) have been thanked over the years in a variety of festive ways. For example, the organization has held theme-lunches, from a “fiesta” at a favorite Mexican restaurant, replete with mariachi’s… to an “Elvis-theme” meal punctuated with rock and roll, shakes, and photos of the “King”… to a “Vegas party” held at the program site, with game tables set for roulette, bingo, cards and, of course, slot machines! (Organizers even convinced some managers and volunteers to dress as croupiers! A sign, we think, of true dedication.) VITAS has also sponsored theme-day trips, such as a Day at the Zoo, the Good Ole Days — where everyone brought some of their favorite old photos and, taking full advantage of its balmy location, A Day Cruise to No Where.

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Parkview Home Health & Hospice (Fort Wayne, IN) offers two celebrations to recognize its 60 volunteers, one being held during National Volunteer Week. In past years, evening celebrations were held at each of the organization’s five sites and volunteers were allowed to attend whichever was most convenient. Last year, the organization hosted one celebration at an upscale, chocolate store that serves drinks, an array of desserts and, of course, chocolates! In addition, Mauna Cowan often mails the volunteers a small gift with the organization’s April newsletter, such as a bookmark or a key chain. One year, she mailed volunteers “$1 million” bogus bills with a copy of the newsletter — that featured the headline “You’re Worth a Million, No Fooling.”
Because so many of the 3,000 volunteers at Suncoast Hospice / Empath Health (Largo) are seasonal — and return to their northern homes by the end of March — the organization hosts its volunteer appreciation luncheon during February. However, to make sure National Volunteer Week doesn’t pass by without an additional “thank you,” the organization has a volunteer recognition and incentive program this year — which features a gift that ties together the February luncheon and National Volunteer Week perfectly! Staff designed a unique lapel pin, with a bar to which charms can be attached as volunteers complete specialized training or, in the case of vigil volunteers (11th-hour volunteers), once they complete their first assignment. The lapel pins were given out during the February luncheon while the charms are being awarded during National Volunteer Week!

Hospice of Northwest Ohio (Perrysburg) conducts its annual recertification in March and recognizes each of its 350 volunteers individually at that time — and has done so in some very entertaining ways! One year, all of the staff wore stickers for the entire week that said “we Love our Volunteers” which both volunteers and families loved! Another time, the organization hung a BIG banner in its lobby that featured handwritten notes of thanks and encouragement from staff. And in the year of the organization’s 25th anniversary, the hospice planned to present service awards to both staff and volunteers.

The Center for Hospice Care, Inc. (South Bend, IN) hosts a volunteer recognition dinner and annual meeting for its 450 volunteers, its staff, and their guests. In addition to great food and drinks, president/CEO, Mark Murray (who also serves on NHPCO’s board), presides over the annual meeting — which includes an overview of the volunteer work accomplished during the previous year. Each year, one volunteer is also awarded the John E. Krueger, MD Hospice Caring Award. Dr. Krueger was one of the grassroots organizers of The Center for Hospice and Palliative Care and the award is given to a volunteer who exemplifies his commitment.

Hospice of the Western Reserve holds an annual appreciation dinner each April for its 950 volunteers. It features a national speaker, a sit-down meal, and a small gift of appreciation for each volunteer. In addition, Hospice of the Western Reserve holds more than 30 volunteer support gatherings year-round. Gatherings range from “Coffee and Conversations,” where volunteers visit with other volunteers over coffee... to group events like attending a minor-league baseball game together. Volunteers receive information about these complimentary gatherings at the beginning of each year, so they have plenty of time to plan ahead.

Celebrating Volunteers!