The Practice of Teaching Volunteers with Skills of Deaf Communication to Participate in the XVIII Deaflympics Winter Games: Research and Results

Natalia Ivanovna Gorlova¹, Zulfiya Alimzhanovna Troska¹*, Yelena Vasil’yevna Krutitskaya² and Gureyeva Yelena Aleksandrovna¹

¹Plekhanov Russian Economic University, Moscow, Russian Federation; Zulechk@gmail.com, gorlovanat@yandex.ru, Gureeva.EA@rea.ru
²Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russian Federation; elenkakrutitskaya@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives: 2015 XVIII Winter Deaflympics in Khanty-Mansiysk provided a unique opportunity to use the world’s leading experience in the integration of people with disabilities in the full life of Russian society through the implementation of a special program that teaches the deaf communication skills to volunteers. The following article is based on the practical experience of the Russian State Social University Volunteer Center which attracted volunteers to a variety of events and activities for people with disabilities and contains the results of the research of the Games personnel training using the examples from center activity. Methods/Statistical Analysis: The paper presents the modern methods of teaching volunteers the deaf communication skills, allowing us to obtain knowledge and practical experience of interaction with the target group of the Games; reveal the basic properties and principles of deaf commentary; gain practical experience through direct interaction and barrier-free communication. Findings: Additionally, this article analyzes the results of empirical studies of personal characteristics of volunteers with deaf communication skills as well practical recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency of the selection process in volunteer practice for this kind of major sports events. Such integrated approach to the training of deaf communication-skilled volunteers was used for the first time and it showed good results. Application/ Improvement: The practical significance of the study is displayed in the fact that its conclusions and recommendations can be successfully used in the organization of professional selection and psycho-pedagogical support for training, retraining, training and analyzing the activities of the deaf communication volunteers.

Keywords: Deaf Communication and Integration, Persons with Disabilities, Russian Sign Language, Sign language, Volunteer, Volunteering

1. Introduction

New social, economic and demographic development conditions, commercialization and professionalization processes occurring in the world, require a special system that is socially oriented training of personnel for service to the community, including the maintenance of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and other major sporting events.

Today, volunteers are involved in logistics and tracking of all mass demonstration activities; they take part in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, creation of a new atmosphere of openness and accessibility of cultural spaces; they contribute to the development of social sphere, helping public and private social services agencies in carrying out their responsibilities for citizens’ social security. A special place in the task of creating
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social solidarity and the humanizing the social communication belongs to the volunteers supporting people with disabilities.

Creating the conditions for the formation of the quality level of professional competences of volunteers in the implementation of possibilities for social and labor adaptation and socio-cultural integration of persons with disabilities in the society will build a new model of their training. In turn, the professional competence in interacting with people with disabilities will create conditions for a sustainable orientation of young specialists in socially important fields, their fast response to public requests and thus enhance their own relevance in a world where science, art and education are the key factors of international competitiveness.

In 2015, Russia was a first time host of the Winter Deaflympics, held in Magnitogorsk and Khanty-Mansiysk from 28 March to 5 April 2015. Deaflympics is an international sport event, which is held for athletes suffering from hearing impairment, previously called the International Deaf Games until 1967 and World Deaf Games from 1967 to 2001. Deaflympics, which along with the Olympic and Paralympic attract a huge number of participants and fans from around the world are held every four years, including 25 summer and 7 winter sport competitions using the rules of the relevant international sports federations (FIFA, FILA, FIVB, etc.) used for able-bodied athletes.

The Games have become a new challenge of our time, the correct answer to which should give hope to the whole society that everyone can have a future regardless of the health and development features. The volunteers here can make a significant contribution. Volunteering is traditionally based on the activity and enthusiasm of young people, allowing them to naturally find common ground with those who are in need of help.

Every modern Deaflympics have their own programs to work with volunteers. The purpose of these programs is the educational training of the volunteers, aimed at creating the necessary social and professional competencies related to the provision of high quality services related the organization of the Games. All these programs are based not only on the need to train qualified volunteers to form not only the organization of the upcoming event, but also on a need to prepare the base for the next. These programs also show that training of volunteers is becoming particularly important as the training modules are diverse and include all the necessary knowledge. Thus, volunteer training process can be considered a way to spread the Olympic values of volunteerism.

To help Deaflympists and fans in Khanty-Mansiysk, prepared 480 specially trained volunteers from all over Russia from the 14 regions (of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District, Altai Territory, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Belgorod and Tyumen regions, the Republic of Sakha-Yakutia, the Perm Territory and others). During the period of the Games volunteers greeted the athletes at the airport, provided necessary assistance in settling into the hotel and getting accreditation to accompany athletes during training and competitions.

Training of qualified volunteers with deaf communication skills was carried out with the use of best training practices used during the XI Paralympic Winter Games and called for the development of these techniques, which have been fully adapted and proven themselves to be effective for persons with hearing impairment, taking the peculiarities of their mental and physical development into account.

Because of this, foreign studies concerning the contribution of volunteers in the organization of major sporting events, organization of their training and education on the example of the Olympic Games in Athens, Vancouver, Beijing and London are becoming relevant again. These research results are typical and similar - the volunteers are a strong factor in the state saving money on organization of the Olympic Games and the contribution of volunteers is vast.

2. Methods

The unique deaf communication skill training for volunteers (50 people) participating in the XVIII Winter Deaflympics 2015 (Khanty-Mansiysk and Magnitogorsk) was organized on the base of the Russian State Social University Volunteer Center. A volunteer with the deaf communication skill is a person with the knowledge of the sign language and ability to translate from any national language to sign language and vice versa. This category of volunteers, in addition to their functional duties could be used for the organization of barrier-free communication with people with total or partial hearing impairment.

The selection of volunteers with deaf communication skills included the following process:

- Registration and filling in the questionnaire on the website of volunteers.
- Passage of ability tests and questionnaires.
- Tests on knowledge of Russian sign language, international sign language and English.
• Competency Interview. This type of the interview is a structured series of questions designed to obtain information on the same criteria relating to the content of the work that allows you to compare candidates with each other. The main topics of conversations with the volunteer candidates are the experience of volunteering; history of Deaflympics and candidate behavior in different situations; approach to problem solving, stress tolerance, a willingness to help other people; teamwork skills.

When determining the format of the evaluation activities, center administration sought to minimize transportation costs and other expenditures for the volunteering candidates. To achieve this, the event which required the personal presence of the candidate, whose living area differs from the Centre region was replaced by remote interviews, which followed the same rules that apply for a personal meeting, but there are some nuances. A Skype interview is an intermediate between a telephone interview and personal interview. More than 480 candidates were considered during the selection process.

The interviewers were employees of the Russian Sign Language Laboratory (RSSU) and the Faculty of Social Work, Education and Juvenology (RSSU). Interviewers should be: Friendly, sociable, not imposing their own views, be neutral in the survey and have good adaptive abilities that are needed to communicate with any respondent. Also important are the competence and education, discipline, accuracy in record keeping and filling out the questionnaire.

After the end of assessment activities, Center employees formed an assessment summary for each candidate. The candidate that has successfully passed all the stages of selection received an invitation to be a volunteer from the Center. In case of the candidate's consent of the candidate he signed an agreement that gave him the right to participate in volunteer activities and take part in training in designated educational modules. The staff of the Centre shall forward proposals for participation in the Games to volunteers from the final list, which include the direction of volunteer activities and specific position of their work. The mailing took place no later than ten working days from the date of approval of the list by Organizing Committees of Games. The proposed position may be further adjusted within the established activities of volunteers of the Games. Volunteers who have been recommended by the Centre to participate in the Games, but not included in the list approved by the Organizing Committee, form the personnel reserve of the Centre, which was used at the time of receipt from the Organizing Committee of additional quotas to attract volunteers for the Games.

Administration of the volunteer center together with specialists of the Russian Sign Language Lab (RSSU) composed an adapted “Russian sign language” program fit for massive sports and entertainment events that includes must-visit classroom training. Full length of the program was 72 hours.

The program materials are sequenced as following which enables students to study the individual parts of the program more, fully understand the basic sign vocabulary of and learn the skills of finger spelling-sign translation. The program included a study of the two forms of speech, deaf finger spelling and sign language - and included:

- Learning the theory of finger spelling and sign language;
- Studying the finger spelling alphabet;
- Mastering the technique and reading the finger spelling with hands;
- The study and learning of gestures;
- Improving the translation technique;
- Knowledge of the theory of translation;
- Application of knowledge and skills;
- Learning the skill of express translation of verbal speech to signs and gestural to verbal.

Each class consisted of two parts - theoretical and practical. In addition to the training sessions provided extracurricular work: Individual and group counseling, conducting (various workshops and meetings under the leadership of the program organizers) in accordance with the objectives of the program. Volunteers studied theory on individual lessons and mastered the practical skills by participating in competitions, festivals, gatherings and sporting events, which were held by the All-Russian Society of the Deaf.

As a result of the studying, volunteers had to demonstrate the concrete results of education - knowing the goals and objectives of the science of sign language, have an understanding of the place of language in a number of culturally significant means of communication and the special features of verbal communication for the hearing impaired; goals and objectives of using gestural language and finger spelling, knowing how to pick overall communication strategy consistent with its objective;
use dictionaries, directories, databases and other sources of additional information; learn elementary specifics of communication with people with hearing impairment at the level of “come into contact” skills and appropriate use of language means.

During the selection of candidates wishing to be deaf communication volunteers with skills a “volunteer profile” was created, which can be defined as a combination of social and integrative competences of volunteers participating in the organization of professional and volunteer activities to assist those in need. Profile of volunteer competences (volunteer professional competence) is a description of the model of competence (personal characteristics and skills), personal data and formal characteristics required for the execution of the volunteer work considering the corporate culture of the Organizing Committee of the Games, the personnel policy and the features of the proposed workplace.

Working positions profile - the procedure is quite complicated, time-consuming and requires certain knowledge. Profile helps to identify the required knowledge, skills and properties of the candidates for the volunteer position that are needed for the effective performance in this position.

During this activity core values and competencies were identified and pointed out, which allowed a more high-quality and targeted selection of the Games volunteers.

Profile of competencies of volunteers with deaf communication consists of the following sections:

- Place of the volunteer position in the overall organizational structure and communication with the other positions.
- Functions of the volunteer - a clear and unambiguous responsibility for a particular position.
- System of competence - the requirement of knowledge and skills.
- Necessary individual personal characteristics of potential volunteers, especially their character and behavior in different situations.
- Sex, age, education, experience requirements.

By analyzing the ratio of the activities and the requirements for deaf communication volunteers with it can be concluded that one of the main requirements necessary for Deaflympics volunteers is the knowledge of Russian Sign Language, as well diligence, the ability to provide support to those in need and knowledge of the international sign language. Volunteer must be patient, kind and able to inspire confidence, because deaf people are often introverted. There should be a well-developed visual, auditory, motor memory; therefore, for deaf communication volunteers it is important to have good mobility and plasticity of hands, the ability to express feelings through eyes and facial expressions. Defects of speech are unacceptable, since clear articulation helps to read lips. Visual, auditory and most importantly, motor memory will be useful to remember the many gestures of the deaf language.

RSSU Volunteer Center compiled a list of the main responsibilities of the deaf communication volunteers:

- Ensuring that people with hearing impairment get the necessary information through sign language;
- Provide the necessary assistance or advice;
- Organization of social communication for the deaf;
- Improving the communication skills of people with hearing impairment;
- Organizing and coordinating the work with people with impaired hearing;
- Providing sign language translation for groups or individuals.

One of the requirements was related to the individual characteristics of the individual candidates in volunteers, including requirements for certain behaviors, response and level of development of the complex knowledge abilities and higher mental functions: Emotional and psychological stability overall; organization; physical endurance; self-control of behavior and emotions; good distribution and switching of attention; large vocabulary; tact; pronounced cognitive interest.

The training included the formation of the necessary professional sign language interpreter qualities: Communication skills (the ability to get in touch, build relationships, etc.); oratorical skills; listening skills; development of verbal-logical and shape memory; developed mnemonic abilities (long-term and short-term memory, verbal memory); facial expressions, hand motor skills, articulation.

These qualities are aimed at forming the volunteer work, which has specific features and is different from other types of professional activities.

The system of control of knowledge and skills of the listener includes a mid-term examination after the finishing the separate topics. Upon completion of training...
the volunteers have passed final certification in the form of an exam without a grade. First, examinee volunteer had to answer the questions about sign language interpreter ethics, then: Simultaneously from sign language into Russian, from Russian to finger spelling. Volunteers should also be able to translate from the screen - it is much more difficult than a direct conversation, but this skill is also required.

3. Results and Discussion

Training results:

- Obtained the knowledge and practical experience of interaction with the target group, which are aimed at by deaf communication skills acquired by volunteer candidates;
- Revealed the core technologies and principles of deaf communication;
- Observed, learned and perfected the deaf communication skills in practice through participation in a number of integration events: The annual “World of Deaf” festival; International Film Festival for people with disabilities “Cinema without Borders” etc.
- Modeled the situations that are close to real work of volunteers with deaf communication skills

As part of the selection of candidates to the Games volunteers, considerable attention was paid to the unique context of the activities in which people with disabilities participate as athletes, spectators and therefore one of the key requirements for volunteers was the knowledge and observance of ethical interactions with disabled people.

Employees of the RSSU Volunteer Center developed and presented an innovative method of staff selection for the Deaflympics, particularly the competence profile of the work of volunteers; tests for evaluation of the potential candidates; assessment interview methodology; educational technology assessment and interviews for the employees volunteer center; quality control system for the selection and research.

During this process, it was possible to identify the core values and competencies which allowed a high-quality and precise selection of Games volunteers.

Upon completion of training, each student prepared personal reference materials that have been successfully applied in practice during the participation in the XVIII Winter Deaflympics.

4. Conclusion

Thus, according to the results of study course, students have acquired the necessary skills of deaf communication; got acquainted with the basic requirements and ethics of communication for the Games personnel. Volunteers and teachers—led by the team leader Kamneva Valentina Petrovna developed new, modern teaching methods of audio description skills to volunteers that allow us to talk about the professionalization of volunteer corps in the context of various international sports competitions and events.

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6. References