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## Exploring Partnerships from the Perspective of HSO Beneficiaries: The Case of Corporate Volunteering

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### ABSTRACT

Despite numerous studies of cross-sector collaboration, little is known about the perceptions and involvement of beneficiaries in partnerships between HSOs and companies. This explorative, qualitative study addresses this gap by offering insight into the beneficiaries' perspectives with regard to a specific form of collaboration: corporate volunteering. Key findings suggest that beneficiaries' perceptions are influenced by involvement in the development of the projects, the perceived quality of interaction, and the sustainability. We conclude that beneficiaries are welcoming the change in their daily routines, while acknowledging the lack of reciprocity. We argue that corporate volunteering does not necessarily produce a win-win situation.

### KEYWORDS

Beneficiary; collaboration; corporate volunteering; cross-sector partnerships; human service organizations; nonprofit organizations; participation

Shifts in relationships between the market, the state, and civil society are increasing the importance of collaboration<sup>1</sup> between businesses and nonprofit organizations (NPOs), including human service organizations (HSOs) (Boehm, 2005). These cross-sector partnerships have been discussed with regard to their types, stages, management, and social impact (for an overview of the partnership literature, see Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b). Nevertheless, few of these studies have actually explored the perceptions of the HSO beneficiaries involved (see Harris, 2014).

To discuss the implications of HSOs beneficiaries' perceptions for partnerships, direct-service-based programs in HSOs such as corporate volunteering provide an interesting research context. Direct-service-based partnerships constitute some form of actual interaction between benefactor (corporate volunteers) and beneficiaries (clients and residents of HSOs), as opposed to indirect services, which are performed "for but not in direct contact with beneficiaries" (Meijs & Brudney, 2007, p. 73). Despite the many consequences of partnerships for HSOs, most actor-based research has addressed cross-sector collaborations solely from the corporate perspective (see Harris, 2012). Only recently have scholars begun to address the perspectives of other actors involved such as corporate volunteers (Bartsch, 2012; De Gilder, Schuyt, & Breedijk, 2005; Herzig, 2006) and NPOs, including HSOs (Lee, 2010; Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). To date, however, researchers have largely ignored the perception of HSO beneficiaries<sup>2</sup> with regard to partnerships.

Given this lacuna in the assessment of partnerships – and corporate volunteering more specifically – the assumption that such arrangements result in a win-win situation for all stakeholders of the collaboration might be too simplistic (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). An important dimension is missing—the perspective of the beneficiary. We address this gap by analyzing the results of group discussions with HSO beneficiaries who had been involved in various corporate volunteering

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<sup>1</sup>Collaboration and partnership are used interchangeably throughout this article.

<sup>2</sup>In the interest of clarity, we use the term "beneficiaries" to refer to residents living on the premises of the HSO, as well as to beneficiaries who are not permanent residents.

projects, with the goal of providing insight into the beneficiary perspective in cross-sector partnerships. Our primary research questions are as follows: (1) How do HSO beneficiaries perceive the benefits and challenges associated with their involvement in partnerships? (2) Which factors might affect the perceptions of HSO beneficiaries?

To develop a comprehensive answer to these questions, we begin our discussion with a literature review, framing corporate volunteering as an implementation of partnerships between for-profit organizations and HSOs. Within this framework, and acknowledging the benefits to HSOs and companies, we explain the relevance of considering the beneficiary perspective, given their active involvement and supposed status as the primary recipients of the involvement of companies with HSOs. We then explain our research methods and present our findings according to four themes: (1) the benefits and challenges of a partnership based on corporate volunteering, as perceived by HSO beneficiaries; (2) the involvement of HSO beneficiaries in the development of partnerships based on corporate volunteering; (3) the perceived quality of interaction between HSO beneficiaries and corporate volunteers within the partnership; and (4) the sustainability of the partnership based on corporate volunteering (or lack thereof), as perceived by HSO beneficiaries. In addition to suggesting avenues for future research, we conclude this article with theoretical and practical implications for HSO managers involved in corporate volunteering partnerships with for-profit enterprises.

### **Partnerships, corporate volunteering, and its implications: A theoretical overview**

Austin (2000) describes the 21st century as “the age of alliances,” with strategic partnerships between enterprises and HSOs likely to proliferate and increase in importance. The various types of collaboration can be regarded as lying along a “collaboration continuum” (Austin, 2000) marked by three stages of development, based on the form and degree of (i) the philanthropic stage: a pattern involving a charitable donor and a recipient; (ii) the transactional stage: an explicit resource exchange between both partners focused on specific activities; and (iii) the integrative stage: a process in which the missions, people, and activities of the partner organizations are merged to generate collective action and organizational integration (Austin, 2000, p. 71). In later work with Seitanidi (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b), Austin introduces a fourth stage of collaboration, the transformational stage, the goal of which is to cocreate transformative change at the societal level rather than at the organizational level.

The involvement of corporate employees in executing the partnership, particularly in direct-service-based activities, is also known as corporate volunteering. It offers an opportunity to implement and develop cross-sector partnerships at any of these stages (Austin, 2000). Meijs and Van der Voort (2004) describe corporate volunteering as involving a company offering the time and expertise of its employees to nonprofit organizations in the form of volunteering, either during or outside of working hours, directly or indirectly to beneficiaries. This particular form of implementing collaborative arrangements is regarded as one of the most intense forms of cross-sector partnerships, as both partners are expected to engage in a gradual process of sharing their social values and missions (Austin, 2000).

Partnerships can also be studied from a resource dependence or social issues’ point of view (Selsky & Parker, 2005). In terms of resource dependence, HSOs benefit from partnerships with for-profit companies, particularly those involving corporate volunteering, as they allow HSOs to build capacity and acquire resources that they need (for an overview, see Roza, Meijs, Hustinx, & Shachar, 2013). For example, involving volunteers from companies often deepens the relationship between the two organizations. As such, companies involved in corporate volunteering are often willing to provide additional resources (e.g., money or other means) to their partner organizations (Roza et al., 2013; Samuel et al., 2013). It also has the potential to increase organizational learning within HSOs (Roza et al., 2013). By facilitating corporate volunteers within their organizations, HSOs might influence the attitudes of corporate employees and companies with regard to social issues (Allen,

2003), thereby creating legitimacy for the HSOs and the social issues that they address among corporate employees, as well as within the broader community (Roza et al., 2013).

Companies have many reasons for collaborating with HSOs, including the desire to reap benefits related to marketing (see e.g., Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000) and HRM (see e.g., Caligiuri, Mencia, & Jiang, 2013). For these companies, partnerships are thus likely to benefit the financial bottom line (Porter & Kramer, 2002). In addition, for-profit businesses are increasingly facing social pressure to do more than simply generate dividends for their shareholders, instead also accepting responsibility for the broader communities in which they operate (Carroll, 1991; Windsor, 2001). At the micro level, corporate employees are increasingly demanding that their employers provide opportunities to add meaning to their work (Raeder & Grote, 2005). Employee involvement in partnerships—for example, by sharing their time and expertise with the broader community such as through corporate volunteering—is gaining importance as a means of responding to the desire of employees to combine their ordinary jobs with other meaningful experiences and can lead to higher personal satisfaction (Lee & Higgins, 2000). As such, reviewing existing literature on partnerships and corporate volunteering as a particular form of partnerships reveals an overall win-win assumption (see among others Bartsch, 2012; Herzig, 2006; Lee, 2010; Quirk, 1998).

However, this type of partnership also wields potential disadvantages (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). Examples include dependency or imbalance of power (Allen, 2003; Haski-Leventhal, Meijs, & Hustinx, 2010; Liu & Ko, 2011; Poncelet, 2003; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007), reputational risk, and transaction and opportunity costs (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010; Poncelet, 2003; Roza et al., 2013). Particularly those partnerships based on corporate volunteering might lead to involvement of volunteers who lack the qualifications needed for certain volunteer projects, especially if they are asked to perform tasks other than those corresponding to their professional expertise (e.g., assigning a lawyer to perform maintenance activities) (Samuel et al., 2013). Other corporate volunteers are likely to be so focused on extrinsic incentives that they have little motivation to perform the activities expected of them in partnerships (Cheung, Lo, & Liu, 2012; Meijs, 2004; Samuel et al., 2013; Sundeen, Raskoff, & Garcia, 2007). The involvement of corporate volunteers in partnerships can also raise challenges related to differences in culture, organization, vision, and particularly expectations (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Meijs & van der Voort, 2004; Reilly, 2001; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007; Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Within the context of this study, at least five actors are involved in partnerships based on corporate volunteering: the company, the corporate volunteer, the HSO, the employees of the HSO, and the beneficiary. Most research about this type of cross-sector partnerships focuses on the organizational level, analyzing the perspectives of companies and HSOs, sometimes touching upon the perceptions of corporate volunteers as well. However, academic research has thus far tended to neglect the role of beneficiaries when investigating partnerships, corporate volunteering, or even volunteering in general (albeit to a lesser extent) (Harris, 2012; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). A few studies on traditional volunteering and youth-development interventions have attempted to describe the effects of volunteers on the beneficiaries of HSOs. The effects identified include improved service delivery, due to improvements in the ratio of beneficiaries to caregivers (Vandell & Shumow, 1999), and the fulfillment of specific needs that would otherwise have been left unaddressed (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Haski-Leventhal, Hustinx, & Handy, 2011; McGonigle, 2002; Ronel, 2006). For example, resource constraints are likely to make it difficult for HSOs to organize outings for their beneficiaries. Volunteers (including corporate volunteers) can offer a solution by supplementing either the paid staff (all volunteers) or the current volunteer pool (corporate volunteers). In addition, the relationship between volunteers and their beneficiaries can support and strengthen ties between beneficiaries and their communities by increasing their interaction with people from the community (Boehm, 2005; Ronel, Haski-Leventhal, Ben-David, & York, 2009). As indicated by detailed ethnographic studies, however, HSO beneficiaries sometimes express less appreciation for the involvement of volunteers than they do for the work of staff members (Eliasoph, 2011). Other studies have highlighted the difficulties experienced by HSOs (or more specifically, their beneficiaries) when

working with volunteers (either corporate or regular) who are unqualified, unmotivated, or both (Cheung et al., 2012; Meijs, 2004; Samuel et al., 2013; Sundeen et al., 2007). In general, the role of beneficiaries in HSOs seems to pose a challenge. HSO beneficiaries are to a certain extent (either mildly or strongly) dependent of the HSO. In this imbalanced relationship, they may be patronized in many aspects and for many different reasons (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Kneubühler & Estermann, 2008). For example, beneficiaries are rarely involved in the decision-making processes of the HSOs that serve them (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Beresford, 2004; Castelloe, Watson, & White, 2002; Hardina, 2011). The diverse life worlds of beneficiaries in addition to their particularities adds on the difficulty to find a best solution for cross-sector partnerships. Some scholars and professionals advocate the systematic involvement of beneficiaries in these processes, as such involvement can provide HSOs with greater insight into the needs of those they serve (Adams & Nelson, 1997; Itzhaky & Bustin, 2005; Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2005). Given their dependence, beneficiaries are also at risk of being regarded as objects rather than as inquiring subjects and actors (Adams & Nelson, 1997; Hanssen, Markertl, Petersenl, & Wagenblaus, 2008; McDaid, 2009). As noted by McDaid (2009), however, the involvement of beneficiaries in mental health services is often considered difficult, due to possible limitations on their skills and capacity for participation.

These studies on the general involvement of beneficiaries in HSOs have yet to clarify how beneficiaries respond to services provided when their HSO is involved in a partnership that includes corporate volunteers. In this study, we investigate the perceptions of HSO beneficiaries with regard to the benefits and challenges associated with the partnership in which they are directly involved, as well as factors that are likely to affect their experiences. In the following sections, we provide a brief description of the method we applied, followed by a description and discussion of our findings relative to our research questions and several recommendations for practice and avenues for future research.

## Method

Given the lack of empirical evidence on the beneficiary perspective on partnerships, we adopt an exploratory, qualitative approach (Flick, 2009), gathering data through group discussion (Konradicki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). We selected the five Swiss HSOs included in this study through a snowball sampling approach, with assistance from a foundation that matches HSOs with for-profit companies interested in collaboration. The five HSOs are presented in Table 1.

Amica is a branch of a Swiss relief organization. Their focus lies on families affected by poverty. Among other services the HSO offers a mentoring program for migrated youth in distress in partnership with different companies. Three young women of the mentoring program who took part in the same workshop with one company were included in our study. These three

**Table 1.** Sample overview.

HSO	Beneficiaries	Activities	Employees	Regular volunteers
Amica	Young adults	Regional branch of a Swiss relief organization; supports people with different needs; services include mentoring programs	70	≈400
Transit	Asylum seekers	Private organization partially sponsored by the government; offers temporary housing, as well as social, educational, and integration courses for immigrants	9	0
Mills	People with blindness and visual impairments	Institution for people in need of support; offers housing, primarily to elderly people, in addition to music and reading classes and other enrichment services	110	≈60
Bridge	People with drug addictions	Temporary residence offering stationary therapy; residents participate in cooking and gardening, as well as counseling	11	0
Woodwork	People with mental impairments	Residential facility offering sheltered employment for people with mental impairments; residents share apartments and work for different companies	54	0

young women with a migration background were in the last year of the mandatory school year. They were supported finding an apprenticeship by the HSO. The second organization is Transit, which offers 100 temporary spots for asylum seekers. The HSO provides a corporate volunteering project in partnership with a company. The partnership project consists of pairing one asylum seeker with one corporate volunteer. These pairs would spend half a day with local sightseeing before meeting again with the entire group for lunch. Within this organization, we discussed the project implications with five male asylum seekers. The beneficiaries are living internally at the HSO premises. Their contact to the outside world is usually limited to the HSO employees and authorities. Due to many different cultural backgrounds and high uncertainty about future events, the HSO atmosphere was described as tense by the beneficiaries. The third organization, Mills offers housing to people with blindness and visual impairments. Most residents are elderly that receive more specialized support compared to an average retirement home. The HSO has 110 employees and 60 volunteers that support the beneficiaries. A partnership based on corporate volunteering is described as an experiment by its HSO manager. We were able to include three women in a group discussion. All three women seemed satisfied with their living circumstances and service provision by the HSO. Despite their visual impairments, they appeared very independent and observant. The fifth, Bridge is a temporary home for people with drug addictions. The HSO offers a stationary therapy. Its residents participate in cooking and gardening. The management of the HSO was approached by a company if they were interested in a partnership. Three residents were willing to share their experience with us. The beneficiaries had different life stories that had led them to drug addiction. All described the service of the HSO as the last chance to recover from their addiction. Despite their past, the three residents were currently clean. They were quick in answering questions and praised their self-assessment. The sixth HSO, Woodwork provides people with mental impairments sheltered employment and housing. Its residents work in different departments that are responsible for tasks such as boxing letters, preparing printing materials, and textile or landscape work. At Woodwork we were able to include eight residents in our study. The life worlds of the beneficiaries at Woodwork were very diverse. Some suffered from depression, some had bipolar disorder, and others were schizophrenic or suffered from a mixture of several mental impairments. Some beneficiaries lived several years in the HSO, while others were newer residents. All of them were capable of expressing themselves. We present the HSOs' individual corporate volunteering projects in [Table 2](#)

We conducted one focus group discussion in each HSO, for a total of five focus groups, involving 22 beneficiaries whose voluntary participation was requested by the managers of the HSO. Two

**Table 2.** Corporate volunteering projects overview.

HSO	Corporate volunteering projects	Corporate volunteering partners	Project length
Amica	Offers workshops for young adults aimed at enhancing self-esteem. Corporate volunteers applied facial makeup to the beneficiaries and took pictures of them. After sharing lunch, they visited a museum together.	Cosmetics producer	1 day
Transit	Corporate volunteers received an introduction to the HSO and the situations of its residents. Afterwards, individual corporate volunteers were assigned to individual residents, with whom they went to visit various places in the city. Afterwards, they shared lunch and told about their cultural backgrounds.	Audit and consulting company	1 day
Mills	Residents and corporate volunteers went sightseeing and shared lunch together.	Telecommunication company	1/2 day
Bridge	Corporate volunteers helped residents perform their daily tasks (e.g., cutting wood, cooking lunch). They shared lunch together, and the corporate volunteers received information about the work of the HSO.	Audit and consulting company	1/2 day
Woodwork	Residents showed corporate volunteers how they work. Afterwards, corporate volunteers were asked to perform the residents' work for a short period.	Commodity enterprise	1/2 day

researchers were present at each group discussion: one to conduct the discussions and the other to act as an observer. The latter took notes of the conversations and added observational comments. The discussions lasted between 20 and 80 minutes and were tape-recorded (for a total of 212.6 minutes). The sessions were conducted in either German or English, depending upon the composition of the group. All of the discussions were held at the respective HSOs.

Before each group discussion, the two researchers were informed by each HSO about the health condition of the participants. All participants were capable of expressing themselves freely. It was noticeable that a few beneficiaries were under the influence of medicaments (Woodwork, Bridge). A majority of the participants was not able to speak in complex sentences, either due to language issues (Transit), due to particularities (Woodwork), or due to the mentioned influence of medicaments. Group discussions were led accordingly by allowing generous time to reflect on opinions and to discuss perceptions. Only participants who had an active remembrance of the passed partnership project in their HSO and were willing and able to share their view took part in the group discussions. At the beginning of each group discussion the two researchers were introduced by an HSO manager or group leader as researchers who were interested in the participants' experiences and opinions concerning that "day with the people of the enterprises" or in two cases (Mills and Bridge) with "corporate volunteers." Since there is no German equivalent to the words "corporate volunteering" and "corporate volunteer," the active researcher ensured at the beginning of each group discussion that all participants understood the subject by asking and if necessary by referring to the project as reported by the HSO managers. The researchers tried to limit explanations in order to allow the participants as much room as possible to express themselves in their own words.

The group discussions were held in an informal atmosphere, in an effort to create a comfortable setting in which beneficiaries (e.g., people with mental disabilities; see Kitzinger, 1995) would feel free to express themselves. The managers of the HSOs neither participated in nor were present during the discussions.

A guideline was developed in order to ensure consistency across all group discussions and the inclusion of all research questions (Schnell, Hill, & Esser, 1998). The guideline included an introductory section clarifying the conditions (e.g., anonymity, code of conduct), followed by key questions (e.g., "Explain your experience with corporate volunteers") and optional questions. We present the guideline in Appendix 1. In all cases the time between the corporate volunteering projects and the group discussions was less than 4 months. In order to limit the influence of the elapsed time we applied a funnel approach, starting with general questions to bring back recollection followed by more specific questions. Digital audio recordings were made of all group discussions. In addition to the topics addressed in the guideline, we collected demographic data (e.g., gender, age), as well as the number and duration of corporate volunteering projects in which the participants had been involved.

We subjected the data to a process of inductive content analysis involving the identification of categories and their repeated adjustment through multiple processing of the material (Kondracki et al., 2002; Mayring, 2010; Tesch, 1990). Interpretation was conducted in four rounds. In the first round, the two researchers wrote notes after each group discussion. In the second round, the researchers independently listened to the audio recordings twice, each time noting "highlights." In the third round, the researchers compared their tentative findings with each other and listened to the audio recordings together in order to condense their findings. In the final round, the researchers discussed their findings and categorized them into four final thematic groups: benefits and challenges, involvement, perceived quality of interaction, and sustainability

The discussions were lively, and the participants appeared to appreciate our interest in their experiences with the partnership in which they were involved. With the exception of the interviewees from Amica ( $n = 3$ ), all of the participants were permanent residents of their respective HSOs at the time of the group discussions. Women were underrepresented in the discussions groups, accounting for 41% of all participants. The mean age of the participants was 43 years, ranging from 16 to 93 (see Table 3). The average duration of the partnership projects in which the beneficiaries were directly

**Table 3.** Overview of group discussion participants.

HSO	Beneficiaries	No. of beneficiaries interviewed	Age range	Gender
Amica	Young adults	3	16–18	All women
Transit	Asylum seekers	5	24–40	All men
Mills	People with blindness and visual impairments	3	87–93	All women
Bridge	People with drug addictions	3	28–48	2 men 1 woman
Woodwork	People with mental impairments	8	43–61	6 men 2 women

involved ranged between 4 and 8 hours during a single day. All of the participants had participated in at least one partnership activity involving corporate volunteers. One participant from Mills had participated in two projects conducted by two different companies.

The partnerships were initiated by the companies. Its employees in the direct interaction with the beneficiaries were all self-selected. All partnerships were part of corporate community programs in which employees were free to participate.

In the following section, we present our findings, illustrated by direct quotations (HSO name followed by HSO beneficiary) from the participants (quotations in German translated by the first author).

## Findings

In the course of our inductive analysis, we identified the following principal themes emerging from the data: (1) the benefits and challenges of a partnership based on corporate volunteering, as perceived by HSO beneficiaries; (2) the involvement of HSO beneficiaries in the development of partnerships based on corporate volunteering; (3) the perceived quality of interaction between HSO beneficiaries and corporate volunteers within the partnership; and (4) the sustainability of the partnership based on corporate volunteering (or lack thereof), as perceived by HSO beneficiaries. Perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with the partnership based on corporate volunteering are to some extent conditioned by the three explanatory factors (i.e., involvement in the development of corporate volunteering projects, perceived quality of interaction, and sustainability of corporate volunteering).

## Benefits and challenges

The perceptions expressed by the participants with regard to the benefits offered by partnerships in form of corporate volunteering were mixed. Benefits perceived by the participants included the general interest that corporate volunteers had demonstrated in the individual beneficiaries and their respective HSOs. As stated by one participant (Mills01), “It’s a welcome change . . . you know, if you can’t leave the house anymore then it’s a great variety to us.” This statement is representative of a desire expressed by many beneficiaries for corporate volunteering to contribute primarily to their own (the beneficiaries’) personal development and interests. Respondents from Transit, Mills, and Bridge were very pleased with the attentive behavior of the corporate volunteers, as the partnership projects had taken place within an open-minded atmosphere. The participants told us that they had enjoyed telling the corporate volunteers about their personal lives at the HSO, suggesting that beneficiaries enjoy interacting with people beyond their current network. The beneficiaries were apparently not bothered by the fact that the corporate volunteers did not reciprocate this trust by sharing details about their own personal lives. As noted by one participant (Bridge02), “They did it in a very good way. It did not feel as if they were up there and I was down here.” The participants from Transit also noted that the corporate volunteers with whom they had worked had shown no sign of feeling superior to the beneficiaries. According to one participant (Transit02), “Although she [the corporate volunteer] is an educated person, she knows the problems of my country.” Another participant (Mills02) emphasized the importance of this form of exchange because, “Sometimes,

people have no idea,” going on to explain that some corporate volunteers had never considered how life with a visual impairment or blindness might feel. The participants regarded partnerships as an opportunity for people to become familiar with both the institution and its beneficiaries.

As identified by the participants in our study, another benefit of corporate volunteering has to do with the possibility of involving new types of volunteers. One participant (Mills03) noted that he had been aware that the HSO had been having difficulty finding regular volunteers and that it had therefore welcomed the participation of corporate volunteers. The interaction with other people was appreciated, regardless of whether they came on their own initiative or whether they had been sent by a company. For this reason, the participants assumed that corporate volunteering was also beneficial to their HSOs.

The beneficiaries from some of the HSOs participating in our study were pleased with the change in their daily routines provided by corporate volunteering programs, with many expressing particular appreciation for the contact with the “outside world” and the variation in their normal routines. The respondents from Transit were particularly glad to have any distraction from their “boring life.” They appreciated the contact with people other than the staff of the HSO or the authorities associated with it. The partnership project allowed the beneficiaries (in the case of Transit, asylum seekers) to become acquainted with their new (albeit temporary) surroundings, while providing them with additional insight into the local way of life. It also allowed them to undertake projects outside the confines of the center in which they lived. Several participants expressed explicit appreciation for the contact that they had experienced with the corporate volunteers: “I find it very nice when they come” (Mills03); “I’m always happy to see new people” (Bridge02).

The beneficiaries expressed hardly any concerns about the ability of the corporate volunteers. One beneficiary at Mills did note initially fearing that the employee from the telecommunications company would try to sell her a new phone contract. With the exception of participants from Transit, none of the participants had been afraid to travel with people that they did not know: “We expect that our house [the HSO] will make sure that we’re not going with just anybody” (Mills02).

Next to the benefits that they perceived for themselves and for their HSOs, the beneficiaries perceived benefits for the corporate volunteers. According to our interviewees, the cross-sector partnership provides enrichment to corporate volunteers, as illustrated by the comment of one participant (Bridge01): “I noticed that they had great fun doing something different than usual.” Respondents from Woodwork, who shared their tasks with corporate volunteers for 1 day, also reported that, before the project, the corporate volunteers had not been aware of the high degree of concentration required to complete even a simple activity.

When we asked participants about reasons that companies might have for participating in corporate volunteering, they provided a broad range of feedback. Some beneficiaries were convinced that the companies were receiving something in return (although it remained unclear what): “They certainly do not do that for nothing” (Mills03); “It is quite clear, it ran under the slogan ‘Make a Difference Day.’ This is actually less for us . . . it was actually a ‘Difference Day’ for people in for-profit business. For once, they had the chance to work hand-in-hand with people who do not have such normal life careers” (Bridge01). In addition to their positive perceptions with regard to value creation, participants also referred to negative aspects of partnership initiatives. For example, participants from Bridge and Woodwork noted that the projects had disrupted their daily schedules and that, on the day of the project, the beneficiaries had to exert considerable effort (e.g., they had to cook for more people). Most likely, this can be explained by contextual factors relating to the background of these beneficiaries, who were accustomed to regulated daily schedules. Although they perceived the corporate volunteers as “nice people,” they complained that there had been no time for private discussions and that the experience had simply been too limited for the corporate volunteers to understand life in a home for people with mental impairments.

The duration of the partnership projects also raised critical comments. Our participants told us that they would have preferred projects lasting for a week or an entire month instead of only a few

hours. One participant (Woodwork03) evaluated projects of such duration as merely “a drop in the ocean.” Respondents argued that, if the companies had truly been interested in their lives, they would have taken more time and that only then would any true exchange have taken place. Furthermore, the participants from Woodwork felt that reciprocity (e.g., the opportunity for beneficiaries to experience the work of the corporate volunteers on the company’s premises) would be needed in order for a project to be meaningful. One participant (Woodwork05) was of the opinion that corporate volunteering projects were “ridiculous” and “voyeuristic,” as they were not based on reciprocity. Because the beneficiaries had no opportunity to visit the company involved, they felt as if they were “in a zoo” (Woodwork05). In [Table 4](#), we present an overview of exemplary quotes of the theme benefits and challenges:

### **Involvement in developing corporate volunteering projects**

Respondents had not given much thought to their expectations regarding partnerships in the form of corporate volunteering. In general, they looked forward to meeting corporate volunteers, whom they expected to bring a change to their routine lives in their HSOs. One participant (Transit02) emphasized the importance of such variation: “We [HSO beneficiaries] are now in there [HSO], always among us [HSO beneficiaries].” None of the HSOs had asked the beneficiaries about the extent to which they wished to participate in the projects, regarding the activities instead as supplementary activities. They had also not asked beneficiaries about their perceptions regarding the concept of corporate volunteering, nor had they been involved in the preparations for the projects, which had been presented as a fait accompli.

Three of the five participating HSOs do not usually have volunteers working with their beneficiaries. For these organizations, corporate volunteering partnerships were a new experience for both the beneficiaries and the organization. Participants from Transit criticized the organization for failing to ask for their opinions regarding the planned program and for not asking whether they wished to spend the day with the corporate volunteers: “I had to follow a person I didn’t know. And I had to take the bus, although I would have preferred to walk” (Transit01). One participant (Woodwork01) reported that his team leader had not informed him until the morning of the activity that he would be responsible for representing the HSO and explaining his daily duties to corporate volunteers later in the day. In summary, the willingness of beneficiaries to participate was never a topic of discussion but an implicit assumption of the HSOs. In [Table 5](#) we present further exemplary quotes.

### **Perceived quality of interaction between HSO beneficiaries and corporate volunteers**

Many of the participants in this study regarded the collaboration with corporate volunteers as an opportunity to ease stereotypes. As observed by one participant (Bridge01), “They [corporate volunteers] imagine it [the HSO and its beneficiaries] differently.” In addition, half of the participants from Woodwork told us that they were glad when outsiders came to their HSO and formed their own impressions of people with mental impairments. Another participant (Woodwork02) observed that corporate volunteers would see “that we do things differently than they thought. Maybe a little bit slower, but still, we could use them too.” Other respondents expressed that they had hoped that the corporate volunteering projects would allow them to work for the partner companies in the near future. It was commonly believed that companies wanted to support the HSOs and that corporate volunteering would eventually be followed by donations. Taken together, the beneficiaries had limited expectations of partnerships in the form of corporate volunteering. Most participants further noted that they had enjoyed the additional attention that volunteers provided, regardless of whether they were regular or corporate volunteers. Further exemplary quotes are listed in [Table 6](#).

**Table 4.** Data supporting the theme benefits and challenges.*Benefits*

- For me it was an interesting variety. I have to say, it was good for me. [...] people can form their own opinions of how it works in here. (Bridge03)
- They expected something else. That is ... if you don't reflect on that [...] I had a good day. I like to answer questions. (Bridge01)
- We talked to some. The people were very open and interested doing something else. That was notable. I talked with a woman for a long time [...] everyone worked. [...] They were really easy going. They did it in a very good way. It did not feel as if they were up there and I was down here. (Bridge02)
- I guess it also supports our HSO. Maybe with donations? (Bridge02)
- One person went with another person to the city to see some historical places. In my opinion it was very interesting. It was the first time here. I liked to get that chance ... It was a unforgettable day. (Transit01)
- It was a good program. We thanked the people who organized it. It was a good day. ... We are asylum seekers here. It helped our morality. (Transit01)
- Usually I'm only among my countries people. I don't mix with others. But that day I had the chance to meet Swiss people. That was very interesting. (Transit03)
- Everyday is normal. It's a boring life. That day felt very different ... we should do that again (Transit05)
- They experienced the discrepancy between the social and economic reality. (Woodwork04)
- Many have a wrong impression. That's why I agree, if people are coming in. They see that we do things differently than they thought. Maybe a little bit slower, but still, we could use them too. (Woodwork02)
- I experienced that their focus also faded ... that was interesting (Woodwork04)
- If somebody comes and afterwards brings in additional jobs, then it's good [...] if it has such a background then it's good. If the people have an interest. (Woodwork03)
- That's what I mean. Outside, they have a perception, those who don't know this [...] they think it is crazy. That's why I think it's good. If more people come they see that it is differently from what they had imagined. Not everyone is crazy. (Woodwork06)
- If this generates more jobs it would be positive [...] It's certainly good that they come to see ... maybe then they know to where they give their assignments. (Woodwork08)
- We talked with each other ... I remember that they were Americans ... they told me they previously never thought about blind people ... they never talked about it. They were very interested. (Mills02)
- I thought it was nice ... for once different people. (Mills03)
- It's a welcome change ... you know, if you can't leave the house anymore then it's a great variety to us. (Mills01)
- They get to know people. Our HSO ... these persons have sometimes no clue that people like us exist. They are not in contact with blind or visually impaired persons ... with that they get that contact. They get to know people of whose existence they had no clue. (Mills02)

*Challenges*

- It was boring for me. We also had to go to a museum. That was boring. But it was also part of the project. (Amica03)
- Basically I liked it, but our entire work is disturbed with such evens. We had to organize additional things ... that was an additional workload. There were shortfalls. (Bridge01)
- It's also difficult. Sometimes we have problems in our house. And then we have a scheduled event. If there are fights, it's difficult. (Bridge02)
- Why? It is quite clear; it ran under the slogan "Make a Difference Day." This is actually less for us ... it was actually a "Difference Day" for people in for-profit business. For once, they had the chance to work hand-in-hand with people who do not have such normal life careers. (Bridge01)
- First, the situation is different. We are afraid. We think something is maybe ... the first new person you don't know and you go one place. You maybe feel ... you make a mistake. She asks question and you think how to answer that. That is difficult. (Transit02)
- Let me say, we are cheap labour forces and our HSO is a non-profit ... maybe if they like the product or maybe they don't want it [...] If it interrupts the operation it's difficult. (Woodwork03)
- I think before they get in external persons in order to see what we do here, we should make an internal change first ... I want to see what you do ... or you ... before it goes externally. (Woodwork07)
- I believe it should be a must. They come here and we go there ... then that voyeuristic moment would be equalized [...] These three hours are ridiculous ... we are not in a zoo ... coming here for three hours, one-sided, that is a zoo ... with the monkeys [...] It's an alibi exercise. (Woodwork05)
- What is the background of the company? Why are they even coming? [...] Then it would make sense, but if it's only curiosity. (Woodwork02)
- One has to ask why they do it. Do they hope for publicity? Marketing? ... that something happens from it? They certainly do not do that for nothing. I'm sorry to say that. (Mills03)
- I didn't want to. I didn't want to meet any people [...] the first few months here I spent in my room ... we don't see very well ... we need longer to see and to understand. (Mills02)
- As soon as I had enrolled I was scared that they wanted to sell us something ... but during our conversation I just told them that I have a contract with their competitor. (Mills02)

**Table 5.** Data supporting the theme involvement in developing corporate volunteering projects.

- 
- The HSO called and asked us to participate in workshop. [...] We didn't have any demands. We just let things happen. (Amica01)
  - We were semi-informed about what we would do. (Amica02)
  - Everything was organized. Who is working where and so on. They just informed us. If somebody wouldn't have been willing to participate...no, we had to participate. I didn't know what I had to do. (Bridge01)
  - I just let things happen...see what happens. (Bridge02)
  - They said some people will come here and visit you. They like to interview you in your situation and how you are. ... I don't see anything wrong there. (Transit02)
  - I would change many [things]...I would first ask what he likes. That is a far place by foot...we take the bus. I would ask would you like to go by foot, by bus...that was...She asked I had to follow a person I didn't know. And I had to take the bus, although I would have preferred to walk. (Transit01)
  - The group instructor came to me and told me they want to see the factory and to work for a short while with us. They came and looked at it...[...] I had no opportunity to talk with those people. (Woodwork03)
  - Are we asked at all if we want that and if we agree?...could we even join this conversation?...for me it would be important if we had a real exchange. (Woodwork05)
  - I was told that some people would come...maybe they just forgot to inform us? (Woodwork02)
  - I'm sure there is an idea behind it...in order to appear normal to outsiders...although we're not. I'm pretty sure that they really want this. (Woodwork06)
  - They told me it would include a nice restaurant...and that we would have a carriage ride. I like that. ...We could enroll. (Mills02)
  - We knew that each one of us would have somebody on her side that would take care of us. (Mills01)
  - In Switzerland...we knew of the company... We expect that our house [the HSO] will make sure that we're not going with just anybody. (Mills02)
  - The HSO management has to say if we should accept that. (Mills02)
  - No, no. They invite us and ask if we want to participate. It's individual. You can say yes or no. (Mills01)
- 

**Table 6.** Data supporting the theme perceived quality of interaction between HSO beneficiaries and corporate volunteers.

- 
- They helped us and explained everything [how to apply make-up]. (Amica02)
  - I liked it very much. They were friendly. And they took care of us [...] They felt comfortable. They were very friendly. They liked what they did. I felt comfortable. One could feel that. (Amica01)
  - They were nice. They always talked to us. (Amica03)
  - They made an effort. They talked to us and about our plans for the future [...] They asked questions. We had fun. (Bridge01)
  - She was very kind. I'm not feeling that she is new. ... She was a simple person. She asked many questions, about my nationality, about my situation. ... We exchanged opinions she asked me all these question ... I don't see that there is something wrong. (Transit02)
  - It was the first time that I ate with other people and I ate new food. I liked that. I was only two months here ... they were joking ...These people came here to relax. They want to learn something from different countries. (Transit03)
  - I don't know how much interest those people have. They come. Watch ... I don't know. (Transit04)
  - She said one had to focus on it ... she was impressed. That was my opinion. (Woodwork03)
  - Those were nice person ... [...] sure it was good, but just not enough. (Woodwork07)
  - It was sad ... we didn't know their motivation. (Woodwork05)
  - There was music. We could talk to each other. I liked it. They tried very hard. Each one of us had a caregiver. (Mills01)
  - I had a great experience with four men of company X ... it was great ... everything was decorated and it was nice ... I showed them the entire house. (Mills02)
  - I liked it ... we have so much time in here. I think it's nice when these people come ... just ... you know, having someone here. (Mills03)
  - If someone like that comes here ... I'm sure they think they will make us happy ... and not for showing off ... thus, they are expected and welcome. (Mills01)
- 

## Sustainability

To the regret of the interviewees, none of the corporate volunteers returned to the HSO a second time. The respondents would have welcomed a regular exchange with corporate volunteers beyond the limits of the partnership project. Although the participants from Mills had been promised that

the corporate volunteers would return, “They were never seen again” (Mills02). While the respondents indicated that they understood the limited time budgets of the corporate volunteers, they pointed out that the corporate volunteers could have returned to volunteer on their own initiative. The participants from Transit would also have liked to have had regular visits, as they brought variety into their daily lives. One participant (Transit03) mentioned that he has trouble with administrative matters and that he would have liked for “his” volunteer to have supported him. Beyond the day that they spent with corporate volunteers, the participants from Bridge had no further contact with any of these volunteers. As noted by one interviewee (Bridge01), “It was not a day for finding friends.”

The participants from Woodwork were particularly critical with regard to the lack of sustainability. According to one (Woodwork03), corporate volunteering projects were “simply not enough.” Only one of the 22 respondents had stayed in touch with a corporate volunteer, and that was only for a brief period. The beneficiaries were unhappy with the fact that the partnership projects they had experienced did not encourage recurring assignments or interpersonal relationships between corporate volunteers and their beneficiaries. In Table 7 we present exemplary quotes for the theme sustainability.

### Putting it in perspective: The win-win-win of partnerships

Our analysis suggests that the perspectives of HSO beneficiaries with regard to the benefits and challenges associated with partnerships in the form of corporate volunteering can be explained by three conditions: the involvement of beneficiaries in the development of partnership projects, the perceived quality of interactions between beneficiaries and corporate volunteers, and the sustainability of partnerships. Table 8 illustrates the relationship between these conditions, and more importantly, demonstrates how these conditions influence the perceived benefits and challenges associated with corporate volunteering for HSO beneficiaries. The matrix contains propositions explaining the relationship between conditions, benefits, and challenges, thereby suggesting reasons why HSO beneficiaries might perceive partnerships as offering either benefits or challenges.

**Table 7.** Data supporting the theme sustainability of corporate volunteering.

- 
- Until now communication is not really working. We spoke once by e-mail. But it doesn't work. She doesn't want me to call her during the day. I hope it will work eventually. (Amica02)
  - I would like to repeat that. (Amica01)
  - They came here. It lasted one day. It was not a day for finding friends. [...] Many ask themselves how it will continue ... maybe one gets a phone call? (Bridge01)
  - If they could gain more insights, it would be different. (Bridge02)
  - We would like to go to a company. To see how it is there. But I don't mind that they are coming to us. (Bridge02)
  - Conclusion of the meeting of that day. We have taken contact numbers. Sometimes. Even then, the place she works ... I cannot go to that place. We have taken different numbers. It's a big problem. Although we have no chance. In the morning we have language courses. In the afternoon we have to do homework. But we have telephone number. We would like to see ... to visit one day. (Transit02)
  - I think that was a drop in the ocean. They came in for two to three hours and afterwards they disappeared. I thought that was a strange situation. If they are interested in our situation, they would have to spend more time. (Woodwork03)
  - I also don't know what happened afterwards. They were a few hours ... what happens afterward? We don't know that [...] we don't know how it continues ... we have to be able to related to that ... we can't classify that. (Woodwork06)
  - The wife of one of the men came twice to see me. That was nice...but they have family ... it's understandable ... I would have liked it very much if she would have come again. (Mills01)
  - No. They promised ... but somehow it wasn't possible [...] They also promised to come again from company X ... but they were never seen again. (Mills02)
-

**Table 8.** Factors influencing perceived benefits and challenges.

	Benefits	Challenges
Involvement in developing partnership projects	Involving HSO beneficiaries in the planning of partnership projects has a positive effect on their attitudes toward the partnership.	When they are not involved, HSO beneficiaries tend to experience social anxiety or skeptical perceptions of partnerships.
Perceived quality of interaction between HSO beneficiaries and corporate volunteers	The beneficiaries of HSOs respond positively to genuine interest on the part of corporate volunteers, thereby, increasing the perceived benefits of partnerships.	Less reciprocity in the relationship between corporate volunteers and HSO beneficiaries leads beneficiaries to be more critical of and resistant to partnerships.
Sustainability	HSO beneficiaries prefer long-term partnership projects, which are likely to be perceived as structural additions to daily routines.	HSO beneficiaries tend to have a negative perception of short-term partnership projects, which are likely to be perceived as one-time encounters.

## Conclusions, discussion, and practical implications

In the current literature, collaborations between HSOs and for-profit companies have been investigated primarily from the perspective of for-profit companies (Harris, 2012; Kolk, Van Dolen, & Vock, 2010; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013), with some exceptions on the HSO (or nonprofit) perspective (e.g., Roza et al., 2013; Samuel et al., 2013; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). As mentioned in the introduction, collaboration between HSOs and companies is oftentimes assumed to offer benefits to all parties involved. Indeed, research has identified multiple benefits for companies and HSOs. Nevertheless, recent studies have taken a more critical view of these partnerships, offering a more balanced perspective by addressing the challenges associated with such initiatives as well (Liu & Ko, 2011; Selsky & Parker, 2005). This exploratory study contributes to this balanced view of corporate involvement in HSOs. The contribution is particularly important, as it focuses on the underinvestigated but crucial perspective of the beneficiary; HSO beneficiaries play a crucial role in partnerships as they are one of the most important stakeholders of the HSO (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005).

Our analysis yields several key findings in answer to our two main research questions: (1) How do HSO beneficiaries perceive the benefits and challenges associated with their involvement in partnerships? (2) Which factors might affect the perceptions of HSO beneficiaries?

### Perceptions of benefits and challenges

Our data clearly suggest partnership initiatives including corporate volunteers do not necessarily constitute a win-win situation. For example, during the activities, there was no time for private discussions, and long-lasting relationships between corporate volunteers and beneficiaries were not molded, although this apparently was of importance to the beneficiaries. Despite the criticisms, the beneficiaries participating in this study did appreciate corporate volunteering in general. For example, most were very positive about the opportunity to have contact with people outside their own networks.

Contrary to findings reported in previous studies that showed that HSO managers were careful or even hesitant in allowing interaction between beneficiaries and corporate volunteers due to their lack of ability to work with people with specific needs (see Roza et al., 2013), in this study the beneficiaries themselves expressed hardly any concerns about the ability of the corporate volunteers in this partnership. Indeed, beneficiaries were pleased by the interest that corporate volunteers demonstrated in the beneficiaries' lives and situations, and some welcomed the projects as a change to their daily routines. Such perceptions are obviously influenced by contextual background factors, as illustrated by the comments of participants who were disturbed by the "disruption" of their accustomed routines. In addition, beneficiaries expressed the impression that these types of partnerships help corporate employees to understand the lives of HSO beneficiaries and that it can help to reduce prejudice.

### ***Factors affecting beneficiaries' perceptions***

We identified several conditions that can influence the perceptions of HSO beneficiaries with regard to the partnership. For example, despite the theoretical desirability of having beneficiaries participate in the entire process (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2005), none of the HSOs addressed in our study had asked its beneficiaries to participate in any of the preparations for their partnership activities and none of the interviewees had been asked to contribute ideas to these projects. On the contrary, the respondents had received only scarce information about the projects. Moreover, none of the beneficiaries was asked to provide feedback after the conclusion of the projects. Many of the beneficiaries told us that they would have been willing to participate in the preparation of and decision-making processes concerning the organization of activities with corporate volunteers.

Another highly problematic aspect mentioned by our interviewees had to do with the lack of reciprocity. Some participants were critical of the one-sided exchange involved in the corporate volunteer projects that they had experienced. Despite the fact that they enjoyed the contact with corporate volunteers, none of the encounters had led to any sustainable exchange between beneficiaries and corporate volunteers, much to the regret of beneficiaries. This is in line with research on the challenges that nonprofit HSOs face when involving corporate volunteers (see Roza et al., 2013; Samuel et al., 2013), including the lack of sustainable interaction between corporate volunteers and beneficiaries. Our analysis has also generated new insights. First, beneficiaries appear to have few specific expectations with regard to partnerships with companies. They highly trust their HSOs, expecting them to act in their best interest. As suggested by our data, beneficiaries assume that the HSOs will select adequate partners and corporate volunteers alike and that these volunteers will receive appropriate instructions. This is quite interesting in light of the observation reported in other studies that corporate volunteers are rarely chosen by the HSOs: they are more likely to apply personally to participate in specific corporate volunteering projects (Pajo & Lee, 2011). Second, our results indicate that the manner in which HSOs manage corporate volunteering can differ from their regular volunteer management practices. The prospect of collaboration with companies can apparently affect the decisions that HSOs make with regard to the ways in which they will open their premises to the public and individuals. Three of the HSOs in this study offered corporate volunteering projects to companies, even though they had no previous experience working with volunteers and even though their beneficiaries had not had any previous contact with any type of volunteers. A very skeptical interpretation of this finding is that these organizations were using their beneficiaries in order to gain expected organizational benefits (Samuel et al., 2013) without considering the direct effects of such projects on their beneficiaries. Another explanation could be that these organizations had opted for short-term corporate volunteering activities as an experiment aimed at testing how their beneficiaries would react to the involvement of volunteers. If this is the case, our findings could indicate that HSOs use corporate volunteering as a way of introducing volunteers into organizations that have traditionally depended entirely on the efforts of paid staff members. It might also be a way of introducing paid staff members to volunteers, as research indicates that the introduction of volunteers in employee-run organizations can be quite complicated and that it can raise resistance (Netting, Nelson Jr., Borders, & Huber, 2004).

Due to the exploratory character of this study, there are several limitations to the findings in our manuscript. First, despite numerous efforts to include more organizations and their respective beneficiaries in this study, only five organizations and 22 beneficiaries were interested in participating in our research, and we were able to conduct only one group discussion in each organization. We were not able to arrange any follow-up sessions, probe for further details, or conduct follow-up interviews with beneficiaries. Second, the beneficiaries from two of the organizations (Woodwork and Bridge) were under the influence of medications due to health conditions. However, this aspect reflects the reality within which beneficiaries encounter corporate volunteers and in which they experience corporate volunteering partnerships. Additionally, the diverse beneficiaries' life worlds

and realities of this study need to be taken into account. Although our research only dealt with the limited diversity of five beneficiary groups, the multiplicity of beneficiaries' needs and lifeworlds in social work make it even more important that beneficiaries also have a voice in cross-sector partnerships. Their particularities should provide a basis and shape the ideal form of collaboration. A third limitation concerns the tendency of group discussions to under-represent the voices of timid or less articulate participants. Group discussions may also inhibit participants from sharing personal information (Gibbs, 1997). It could be that the views of less active participants differed considerably from those expressed by their more vocal counterparts. Additionally, the research contexts of the five HSOs are only to a certain degree comparable. Despite the fact that partnerships with companies and particularly including corporate volunteers was considered as new to all five HSOs and none of them had any previous experience with corporate volunteering, the results of this study need to be understood as an explorative insight.

Indeed, the results of this explorative study suggest several interesting avenues for future research on partnerships, particularly with regard to corporate volunteering. One line of questioning could address the influence of different types of HSOs (e.g., sectors), as well as personal (e.g., disposition, mental or physical state) and contextual (e.g., field of service, type of setting). Yet another line of inquiry could focus on different sorts of partnership projects based on corporate volunteering; for example, research could examine whether corporate volunteering projects are more effective for HSOs and their beneficiaries when they are integrated into the daily activities of HSO beneficiaries or when they are newly invented and supplementary to their usual routines. In other words, researchers could investigate the types of activities or engagement in corporate volunteering partnerships that are most likely to yield the greatest benefits in particular settings. Finally, future studies could involve closer examination of the partnership process, taking into account the different cultural, social, and economic realities of all participants.

## Practical implications

The findings of this explorative study lead to several practical implications, which need to be developed in further studies. First, HSO managers responsible for the overall partnerships with companies should consider their beneficiaries as important players when involving corporate volunteers in direct service delivery (see also Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). Although the beneficiaries in many HSOs are less able to express their needs and interests, those in our sample were quite capable of expressing such feelings. Our results suggest that HSOs lack processes for including beneficiaries in the planning and organization of partnerships in which they are actively involved. The involvement of beneficiaries (to the extent that they are capable of such involvement) is desirable for at least two reasons. For one, it could help beneficiaries to feel included and to understand the motives that their institutions have for cross-sector partnerships in form of corporate volunteering. Another reason for involving beneficiaries in the preparations for corporate volunteer projects is that such involvement is likely to encourage additional reflection concerning the idea of corporate volunteering, thereby improving subsequent projects. One major point of criticism mentioned by our participants was the absence of reciprocity. The beneficiaries would have appreciated the opportunity to visit the corporate volunteers in the companies in which they worked. Some corporate volunteering projects thus resemble one-way partnerships, in which HSOs open themselves and their beneficiaries to corporate volunteers, but in which the companies do not open themselves to HSOs, let alone to their beneficiaries.

The lack of sustainability appears to contradict the generally accepted perception of corporate volunteering as a win-win situation for cross-sector partnerships. As suggested by our results, the ability of beneficiaries to realize long-term benefits from corporate volunteering depends upon contact between beneficiaries and corporate volunteers beyond the limited framework and objectives of corporate volunteering projects (which, in this case, were of very short duration). This might have far-reaching implications for both research and practice, as the accumulation of value creation is

fundamentally oriented toward the long term (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). Our results offer no evidence of such sustainability. We advise HSO managers to reconsider the current corporate volunteer activities within their partnership strategies and to ensure that their partnerships with companies actually serve the missions of their organizations in the longer term.

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