The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reports that 63.4 million US adults volunteered in 2008-09. Volunteers are a critical resource in the operation of a wide variety of sport programs. Understanding the motivations of volunteers is critical to optimizing recruitment, the volunteer experience, and the development of sustainable programs. Volunteer motivation has been examined across a diverse set of contexts including: sport organisations (e.g., Strigas & Jackson, 2003), the arts (Edwards, 2005), and social services (Ferrari, Loftus, & Pesek, 1999). The current research investigates volunteer motivation in the context of a sport-based non-profit organization targeting the homeless population: Back on My Feet (BOMF).

BOMF is a non-profit organization that engages the homeless population through a structured running program. The objective of this running program is to build confidence and self-esteem among participants, and the program requires a minimum of three 5:00am runs per week. Once a participant has maintained 90 percent attendance at the morning runs, life skills and education training is implemented. To execute the running program, Back on My Feet relies on volunteers who are required to lead the early morning runs. Developing an understanding of why these individuals volunteer represents a new direction for academic research examining volunteerism, and is also imperative for BOMF.

Volunteering can be described as the planned helping of others in need sustained by an individual over time (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999). Such helping stems from motivation processes that arouse, energize, and direct purposeful behaviour and can be represented cognitively in terms of specific motives (Mowen & Minor, 1998). Research on volunteer motivation has uncovered a variety of motives related to broader categories such as community development; esteem and recognition; socialization; skill enhancement and career training; and relaxation (e.g., Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Cuskelly, McIntyre, & Boag, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1993). Across these broad categories, a number of motives have been tested and are appropriate. However, BOMF represents a unique volunteer context in that volunteers are not only helping others in need, but also helping through participation in recreational activity. Thus, motives for recreation participation (e.g., Beard & Ragheb, 1983) may also be relevant. This integration of recreation with traditional volunteering can be referred to as activity-contingent volunteerism (ACV).

This research examines ACV motives of BOMF volunteers. Specifically, the influence of volunteer motives, as well as recreation motives, on two important outcomes: volunteer satisfaction and involvement with the organization is examined. These outcome variables were selected because they align with volunteer recruitment and retention. Quantitative data were collected via an online questionnaire administered to BOMF volunteers (N = 405) in March 2010. The questionnaire included: 27 items to assess volunteer and recreation motivation (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Monga, 2006); eight items to assess volunteer satisfaction (Woods et al., 1986); and nine items to assess Involvement with BOMF (Beaton, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009). All items were assessed on 5-point Likert scales. BOMF staff sent a link to the online questionnaire to the volunteer database, and the questionnaire was made available to volunteers for two weeks. The sample of volunteers was 67% female. Eighty-nine percent of respondents were white, with half of the sample between the ages of 25-34. Sixty-nine percent of the sample was single, while 91% had obtained at least a college degree.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to develop a list of ACV motives that account for the integration of both traditional volunteer and recreation motives. A principal component procedure utilizing oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization was employed. Reduction techniques to eliminate low factor loadings and cross loadings were used to find the most appropriate model (Hair et al., 2010). The final model contained 21 items that loaded on six motives labelled as: Philanthropy, Helping, Esteem, Peers, Activity and Learning, and extracted 64.3% of the variance. The means scores for Helping (M = 4.46), Philanthropy (M = 4.36), Activity (M = 3.97), Learning (M = 3.94), and Esteem (M = 3.94) were significantly higher than the 3.0 midpoint of the scale, while Peers (M = 2.69) was significantly lower than the 3.0 midpoint. Results indicate respondents agreed that five of the six ACV motives were reasons for volunteering with BOMF. The relatively low mean score for Peers could be attributed to the independent nature of running.

The six ACV motives were next used in multiple regression analysis to determine their relative contribution to explaining Volunteer Satisfaction and BOMF Involvement. The regression analysis revealed that Philanthropy, (b = .46) Esteem (b = .13), and Activity (b = .16) explained 37% of the variance in Volunteer Satisfaction. Second, the regression analysis revealed that
Philanthropy (b = .47), Esteem (b = .13), Activity (b = .13), and Learning (b = .18) explained 52% of the variance in Involvement. These results indicate that volunteer satisfaction with BOMF increases when this type of experience is perceived as offering volunteers the opportunity to: support a quality charity; feel needed; and keep in shape. The results also suggest that volunteer perceptions of their engagement with volunteering for BOMF as viewed from an involvement perspective, increases when the experience is once again perceived as offering these opportunities. In addition, involvement increases when volunteering is perceived as a learning experience.

The contribution of Philanthropy and Esteem demonstrate that volunteering for BOMF aligns with volunteering for other charitable organizations (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Monga, 2006). Meanwhile, the contribution of Activity and Learning suggest that volunteering for Back on My Feet highlights the importance of the recreational component of this type of volunteerism (Beard & Ragheb, 1983). The contribution of both volunteer and recreation motives suggests ACV facilitates goal directed behavior by allowing these motives to be satisfied through volunteering. Notably, the relatively high beta weight for Philanthropy indicates that volunteers may be most concerned with supporting a quality charity that aligns with their values, while giving back to the community. Accordingly, Back on My Feet can emphasize their beliefs, values and mission throughout all marketing communication directed to volunteers.

Based upon these findings, a number of future studies can be conducted. Qualitative data can be collected to further investigate the volunteer experience. Focus groups can be conducted with volunteers to explore volunteer expectations, while interviews with participants can detail the relationship between participants and members. It is hoped that the current research serves as a starting point for the examination of the role of sport and recreation in engaging individuals in social change initiatives. Developing an understanding of these relationships will assist organizations such as BOMF in attracting and retaining volunteers, while striking a balance between emphasis on the sport and philanthropic aspects of the organization.