

The LLLI Alumnae Association 2005 Report on Retired Leader Survey

Is there anything that would have kept you active as a Leader?

“Put more hours in the day!”

“I saw myself getting further and further behind in LLL. I needed to let go of something—this was one of the few things I could discontinue—the 4 kids had to stay.”

“I am very happy with all my experiences with LLL and will continue to support this wonderful organization as an Alumnae member.”

BACKGROUND

In 1995, the LLLI Alumnae Association designed a survey to send with a mailing to retiring Leaders in the United States, with a goal of understanding why Leaders were retiring and what types of continued involvement with LLL they might consider in the future. The survey is sent on an ongoing basis, as funds and permit. Two reports have been published, in 1998 (responses received 1995-97) and 2003 (responses received 1998-2002). This current report is a summary of 101 survey responses received by the Alumnae Association from 2003-04. The response rate for this report is 11%. Responses have been compiled by Kathy Parkes, Area Alumnae Representative for Texas.

KEY FINDINGS

- One out of five respondents (20%) retired within 5 years of becoming a Leader; more than one in three (33%) remained active for more than ten years.
- Most Leaders retire because their children are growing older, they turn to other interests, or they need more family time.
- Some Leaders are retiring because they no longer can or wish to fulfill the traditional role of the LLL Leader and see no other option.
- Several retiring Leaders felt a huge financial burden as an active Leader.
- More negativity was expressed in this group of surveys compared to the last report.

RETIREMENT STATISTICS

Of the 101 responding Leaders, 20 (20%) had been leading 5 years or less. Twenty-eight (28%) had been actively leading between 6 and 10 years, 18 (18%) led between 11 and 15 years, 6 (6%) led between 16 and 20 years, 4 (4%) had been leading between 21 and 25 years, and 5 (5%) had led between 26 and 41 years. The longest a Leader has been active was 41 years, and the shortest duration was 4 months. Dates of accreditation ranged from 1963 to 2002, suggestive of the many years of wisdom and experience. (See Figure 1)

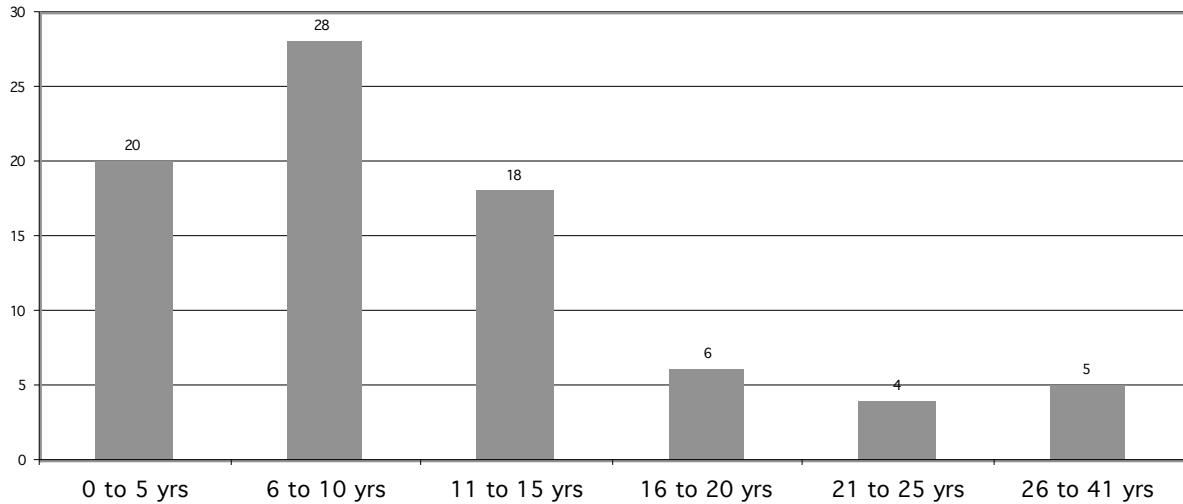


Figure 1

WHY DO LEADERS RETIRE?

As we have seen in previous surveys, many Leaders cited more than one reason for their retirement from LLL. Forty-six percent noted that their children were growing older and they were feeling out of touch. Other interests or commitments brought a response from 42%, and 41% needed more time with their families. Commitments outside of the home also elicited a large response, with 30% of women beginning or returning to an employment situation and 10% going back to school. Fourteen percent moved and decided to retire as a part of that move. Fourteen percent also indicated that LLL work was no longer rewarding, while 20% marked “other”—some with explanations, some without. (See Figure 2.)

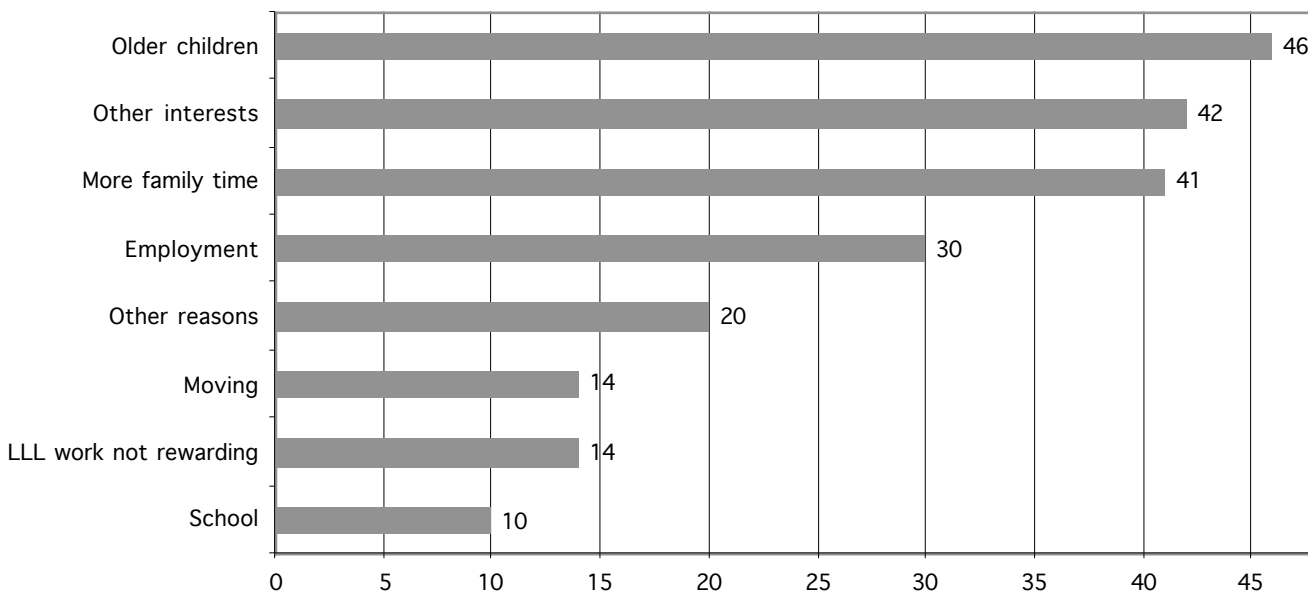


Figure 2

➤ 47 of the 101 surveys contained additional comments regarding why the Leader had chosen to retire. The following quotes are a sample of these additional comments by category.

Older children and the need for more time with family

The most common reason respondents retired was because their children were growing older, followed closely by the need for more family time. Typical comments:

“I just couldn’t balance 4 children ages newborn to 4 and give the appropriate attention and time to LLL calls and activities.”

“I love LLL, but with 3 children active in sports and other activities (aged 12, 15, and 17), my heart says, ‘family first’.”

“As my children have grown, I feel that I don’t ‘practice’ these (breastfeeding) skills, and the knowledge/experience that came easily to me is no longer as comfortably complete...I feel rusty.”

“I had my 4th child and no longer had the time to devote to LLL.”

Employment and schooling opportunities

Three in ten respondents cited employment as a reason to retire; one in ten marked a return to school.

“Employment plus back to school at (the) graduate level, plus young children leaves no time.”

“Probably won’t do anything (future involvement with LLL) actively until I finish college.”

“I returned to full-time work after my children went to college.”

“I’m a physician and remain active as a LLLI Medical Associate.”

Conflict, cost, lack of support, frustration

Among the 47 written comments, 27 could be classified as negative reasons for retirement. There were ten mentions of conflict with other Leaders or with LLL itself, six references to the high cost of being a volunteer Leader, and eleven comments about feeling unsupported in their Leader position. Here's what they had to say:

“For all the ‘volunteering’ I did, I ended up paying more than members—I paid my dues, part of the Group dues (since membership didn’t cover costs), and dues to my local Area.”

“I find myself giving more than I’m getting in support.”

“Please don’t rely so heavily on Leaders to fund LLLI. I got tired of having to buy new WABs, new BABs, etc. every time I turned around. Plus conferences—all out of my own pocket. Too expensive.”

“As a volunteer, having to pay for membership was frustrating. Here I am giving so much of my time, money, and energy.”

“If I had been treated as if I were valuable rather than disposable I would still be very actively involved.”

“(I retired due to) the Board’s decision to pursue the Chaordic Initiative.”

“Politics were allowed to override the purpose of Leadership.”

Leader role and burnout

Six statements reflected a belief that there were no other Leader options for retiring Leaders to choose and still remain active. Five responses spoke of being burned out or too stressed to continue as a Leader. Examples:

“If I could’ve stayed a Leader and just been (one) who takes phone calls, I would have done this.”

“I didn’t want to be a lone Leader anymore. Too difficult.”

“I wanted to just lead meetings and do occasional community service, and not do phone calls. I was told I had to do it all or nothing. So I retired.”

“Received conflicting info from other Leaders concerning responsibility of Leaders...was immediately overwhelmed by difficult helping calls.”

LLL work no longer rewarding

Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that LLL work was no longer rewarding and several made comments. Besides the negative responses previously addressed, we heard the following:

“Very few helping calls”

“Not many moms attending meetings”

“Poor local (LLL) network”

“No Group in my area.”

“Didn’t ‘fit’ with League in this area.”

“I felt out of touch with new moms and lost empathy with new mother problems.”

“I moved to a new area and wasn’t comfortable with the new Group.”

Other

A variety of reasons were listed in this category, such as:

“Couldn’t afford to keep the Group going.”

“Could not pay the dues.”

“Being a lone Leader and no one in the Group wanting to be a Leader.”

“Baby weaned”

“Local Group folded; (it) would have needed more energy than I had to keep it going.”

“Some health problems made it harder for me to ‘do it all’ as I used to. I had to let something go.”

“(I) realized I enjoyed being with Leaders more than helping new moms.”

“Unsupportive husband”

“I’m retiring from the whole field of infant feeding, not just LLL. ...Seeing all the wonderful breastfeeding advocates and counselors there are now throughout the world, I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished for breastfeeding mothers. Now I’m turning to other interests...”

COULD LLL HAVE DONE ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY?

When asked if there was anything LLL could have done differently that would have kept them active as a Leader, 72 out of 101 respondents said “no,” “probably not,” or gave no answer.

- Many respondents retired with fond memories of leadership:

“I am very happy with all my experiences with LLL and will continue to support this wonderful organization as an Alumnae member.”

“La Leche League was a life-saver for me, and I became a Leader to continue that tradition. I loved being a Leader and helping people.”

“I was active for years and years, despite our differences. When I had a problem with LLL, for instance when it first took advertising, I wrote. My views never changed anything, but I stayed with LLL for the mothers and kids.”

“I passionately love La Leche League but my new community needs my energy at this point.”

- Twenty-seven percent shared suggestions for change, including:

“Less formalities, record-keeping, or more help and support to get it done.”

“I needed support more for the older kids—LLL doesn’t offer that.”

“(I) needed a longer time as an inactive Leader. I’d love to answer calls about twins and balancing preschooler/toddler needs while nursing. There wasn’t an option to be inactive.”

“Possibly offer (an) application to waive dues or make smaller payments, sliding scale fees, or whatever. Something for extreme hardships. I would have only gone on reserve if this were available. I have missed my time in LLL greatly.”

“Paid more attention to my personal needs for support—it was all give and little get. I began to communicate less and less.”

“Stricter guidelines for acceptable meeting location requirements.”

“Give new Groups \$200 in supplies—not the \$200 line of credit, although I know that would be financially difficult.”

“Respect my views, respond to my letters, and abandon the Chaordic Process...”

“I don’t know how lone Leaders can be supported more, but it is so easy to burn out.”

“I (held an Area position) for several years before retiring. That was part of my burnout. I recommended breaking down the job into 3 areas for 3 different people. The area has done some of that but we are short of woman-power.”

“The last mom I worked with and got accredited turned around and retired just before me, when she realized the enormity of what she had undertaken.”

“I didn’t feel I had the energy to keep up with all the new exciting changes in the latest Answer Book, like asymmetric latch.”

“Not softening the mother-baby togetherness philosophy and changing the purpose...”

WHERE DID LEADERS LEAD?

Small towns dominated in locations where Leaders led Groups, at 48%. Urban settings came in second with 42% of meetings in those locations. And 10% of Leaders led in a rural setting. Seventeen percent of respondents were lone Leaders; 36% had led meetings in more than one location or setting.

WHAT DID LEADERS DO IN THE PAST YEAR?

Retiring Leaders were asked what activities they had participated in during the year prior to their retirement. Thirty-seven percent of respondents had answered less than one

helping call, 18% had taken 1 to 2 calls, and 10% had answered 3 or more calls. Only nine out of the 101 responding Leaders had led 4 or more meetings in the past year, and 7 had worked with a Leader Applicant. Six percent had performed some type of outreach and 16% had other LLL participation in the previous year. Ten had taken on Area responsibilities and 1 a Division-level position. No one served at the International level.

HOW DO RETIRED LEADERS SEE THEIR FUTURE INVOLVEMENT WITH LLL?

The largest response to the question for future involvement with LLL was as a community breastfeeding advocate, with 36% of retired Leaders responding as such. Twenty-three percent saw themselves as future financial supporters and 20% as Alumnae members. Another 17% marked the response that they would participate in local or Area alumnae groups. Twelve out of the 101 respondents would mentor newer Leaders or a local LLL Group, and another 3% said they would participate in special LLL projects within their areas of expertise. The category "other" was marked by 18% of respondents, with comments such as "personal and phone help as a LLL Leader/IBCLC," "PR whenever the opportunity arises," and "supply LLL materials and contact info to local hospitals." Twenty-nine percent saw no further future LLL involvement.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Outgoing surveys serve to educate us on what we are doing right and what needs improvement.

Communications

When compared to the 2003 report, a larger percentage of this survey's retiring Leaders were unhappy with LLL and voiced their concerns in writing. As in the 2003 survey results, many of these reasons appear to be preventable or correctable, as evidenced by the sample of comments below. Some specific areas that may warrant further consideration include better Leader/Administrator understanding of the Leader role and responsibilities and greater access to or improved communications about financial assistance for Leaders and Groups.

"Communication with Headquarters has always been bad"

"None of the materials I received gave me the opportunity to join the Alumnae Association"

"(I) was pretty much told to retire because of lack of opportunities"

"(I had) predominantly very little contact with (my) DA and other key positions, no motivation from chapter, district to stay involved."

"The Board's failure to respond to my 5 letters expressing my views"

"I am completely turned off of this organization"

"I'm tired of paying to help others"

"I am too emotionally drained right now"

Potential long term impact of negativity

This report contains a higher percentage of negative responses than the 2003 report. Perhaps that helps explain why 29% of respondents stated they would have no further involvement with LLL, compared with 20% in the 2003 report. This negativity also appears to impact the LLLI Alumnae Association. In this report, 20% of respondents indicated that they will continue to be involved in LLL through the Alumnae Association, lower than the 30% who gave this response in the 2003 report.

Maintaining connections

Among the 101 respondents, there were 129 check marks on ways these retired Leaders plan to remain in contact with La Leche League, many in multiple roles. For LLL to benefit from the collective wisdom, experience, and education of these women, it is vital to maintain contact with them. The Alumnae Association, with a limited budget, attempts to do this on the Area and International levels. However, to best serve LLL, as well as our still-giving retired Leaders, more recognition and inclusion at the local, Area, Division, and International levels by all sections of the organization seems warranted. Let's all continue to honor these retired Leaders for their collective 952 years of working with mothers and babies, giving of their time, energy, money, and selves to our volunteer organization. And let's all continue to engage them in our shared mission.