

## ADMINISTRATION OF VOLUNTARY SERVICE AS PROFESSIONAL WORK

Volunteering is not unique to the USA, nor is volunteer leadership, but it is distinctive of democratic societies to have directors or coordinators paid to develop volunteering. Authoritarian societies have lots of people giving orders to other people, but you have to have faith in individual dignity and rights to enlist and trust people who want to do good things. A great deal of our New Federalism legislation is based on faith in people to know what they need, so it mandates citizen participation in decision-making for health, education and welfare, juvenile justice, housing, employment, and recreational services, even the Federal Budget. Citizen participation is on the rise, and community development is "in." Who will make local and project decisions? Those with self interest as consumers, and those who have jobs at stake as providers of services, are mandated. Neutral interpreters between the two are needed, people who are perceived as altruistic even as they are learning a lot from the experience. Many volunteers don't realize the importance of what they learn from first hand observation and experience. They don't know how influential they could be, as their earlier counterparts were in creating many human services and the helping professions! No wonder the Census Bureau in 1970 called ours "clerical work."

Administration of Voluntary Services (direct or indirect, leadership or supportive work without payment for services rendered) is emerging as a very important new profession. Our Department of Labor, with work classification authority over all other federal offices, including the Census Bureau, agreed to a career lattice concept in principle,

and published in in the 1977 Dictionary of Occupational Titles in a professional classification.

Working on upgrading this classification was a thought provoking experience for me, as I expect it will be for us all to take the DOT definitions to agency personnel administrators and Civil Service to translate the definitions into operational structure and salary schedules, so that people will be accepted as professionals on such jobs.

A clear distinction is important between professional and non-professional occupations: in a profession the work requires a high level of wisdom and complex decisions which cannot be standardized. In other words, there is no one single right answer, but professionals weigh various dynamic factors and apply knowledge which has been accumulated from experience as well as from education. Since there are very few graduates of formal education in our field, people have entered from almost every conceivable former occupation. Most recently a striking number of persons come from religious occupations, which is consistent with the 1974 ACTION census study findings that 50% of all volunteering is under religious auspices. The roster of volunteer administrators includes teachers, social workers, public relations experts, salesmen, nurses, public administration experts, rehabilitation counsellors, recreation people. Each contributes a valuable discipline, philosophy and special perspective to a new technology which is becoming a profession: the accurate matching of people needs to people resources, in order to realize the fullest human potential of all the humans involved.

Professional responsibilities in volunteer administration include giving volunteers chances to progress with growth in capacities, and organizing a way for these dedicated individuals to influence the goal setting, planning and delivery systems of program services. In short, organizing a volunteer feedback structure through which volunteers can be heard in evaluation and planning. The more people involved in planning, the more people take on an individual personal objective to make that plan work. Volunteer directors have strong feelings themselves about not being included in staff planning groups. How much more remote from the locus of decision-making is the volunteer? How long do persons continue to serve? Drop out studies show that some volunteers join the staff in order to get in on the information they feel staff gets and they are blocked from! Building a true partnership means much more and better communication between volunteers and staff, particularly to and from top administration. The Volunteer Director is the gatekeeper, link and facilitator for volunteers and line staff to improve services and implement new ones.

Our function, as professional volunteer administrators, is to build volunteer confidence through valid learning opportunities on the job, in the community in cooperative events, and under accredited college or university auspices. We owe a great deal of attention to continuing education for staff, whether paid or not, to keep up with technical, legal, economic and community developments.

Our profession not only links the public to our organizations, but we also control the mobility of the public among agencies. Often the volunteer has the only continuous relationship to a service recipient when he moves from one specialized service to another. Board members seldom serve in just one organization since rotation is required by most by-laws today, and wisdom from one agency is valuable to others. We have found a great many policy-relevant decision-making opportunities for consumers of services, and now must open these to the free volunteer who often holds the balance of power between conflicting self-interests of providers and consumers.

Volunteer Directors and Coordinators are entrusted with several precious human commodities, or values. Volunteering is one acceptable way to express compassion and the common human need to be needed. Where one gives one's time and effort is important, and the decisions sometimes require a weighing of conflicting values, and making difficult choices. Our decisions rest on alertness to conflicting values and some firm convictions which will sustain us if our decisions are called into question. One reason for a professional association is to have some agreed upon ethics and values which are known to the public and accepted and believed in by the members. We then can support one another in what are often lonely jobs as the only person among other staff in different disciplines. Some occupations are formed around a science - even librarians speak of theirs. Conflicts between people needs and tangibles are involved. We have all known some library scientists who are happier when their

resources are neatly organized than when they are being used! It is only human for us to escape into the techniques of our work, which we are sure of, when we are indecisive or our emotions are likely to become too involved. We do use the so-called "soft" sciences in analyzing people and their motivations. We use the art of persuasion, sometimes, always with the danger of short circuiting the freedom of choice which is the essence of voluntarism. The right of choice should be preserved for the volunteer and for "the voluntee" as Cynthia Nathan used to say, and for the paid staff partner where there is one. Like all rights to freedom, it carries responsibilities with it, which means the obligation to take orientation to the setting and supplementary skill training as needed. Life long learning is part of volunteering as it is to all people who want to grow as long as they live.

Having disagreed with her about professionalizing volunteers because we professionals haven't made it yet, and I believe volunteer spontaneity and common sense must be preserved, I agree heartily with Ellen Straus on contracts. Preferably written, contracts with volunteers insure that all the persons involved have agreed on mutual expectations, with everyone involved participating, and freely entering into the relationships described. Job descriptions are fine for beginners, but are soon out-grown. Therefore, contracts imply a systematic review in a regular cyclical pattern, so they may be adjusted to match growth and changing conditions. The Volunteer Director may conduct this process, or delegate it, but must insure that it happens. Then training, recognition, horizontal or upward mobility are based on demonstrable

accomplishments and abilities signifying readiness for further training and a change of assignment.

There are two key concepts in professionalizing which are up to the individual to balance: "self-discipline" and "enthusiasm." If a practitioner goes overboard either way, there is danger to the other people involved, and loss of the trust and respect which is essential to good working relationships and credibility in the eyes of other staff and the public. Enthusiasm sometimes desensitizes us and overwhelms reservations other people should be free to express.

Volunteer administrators who want a profession have an obligation to build a body of knowledge through research based on much more detailed and precise recording. A profession can not depend only on intuition and parochial experience. Volunteers may not anticipate the need to document their experience, but we must foresee the increasing need for solid documentation of our assertions and experience. We need common categories of functions for volunteers which are transferable to work applications and records and understandable to people outside our own field of activity. I recommend building on Francine Sobey's taxonomy for mental health service responsibilities:

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| Caretaking<br>(but I would<br>call it<br>caregiving) | - including escort services, transportation,<br>nutrition, group leadership, making secure<br>the vulnerable or frail, home repair services,<br>etc. |
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- Staff Assistance - including case or classroom aides, clerical work, recreation assistants, etc., under direct supervision of paid workers.
- Social Support (Dr. Sobey calls it "sustenance") - the friendly visitor, telephone reassurer, Big Brothers and Sisters, etc..
- Bridging - the linking or outreach volunteer who interprets agency services, represents the community to the institutionalized, acts as ombudsman or sponsor for individuals and their families to agencies. There is increasing concern to implement a continuum of care to prevent gaps in services or fragmentation by narrow categories and restrictive or exclusionary policies.
- Advocate - the person in touch with who speaks for them as a "class" in mobilizing community or legislative support, etc.
- Special Skill - discussion leader, artist, musician, writer, athlete, trainer, recruiter, discussion leader, officer, professional person, expert doing his own thing!

Board of Committee Membership - the local resident who knows resources, what's going on and what's happened; often the "gatekeeper" for delivery of services and interpreter of local history and experience to newcomers, the community leader who influences others.

The first four are Ms. Sobey's, and relate to service roles. The last three are more likely to be in indirect supportive services or administrative leadership roles. If schools, welfare offices, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities all used similar categories, we could have more confidence in our statistics and reports. If assessment of community resources and needs could be framed in a similar family of volunteer words, we would be better able to communicate between fields and with potential volunteers.

Responsible recording and reporting illustrate some of the disciplines required. We also need more attention to a general philosophical base. What do we consider really important? Why do we do what we do? Some traditional professions are having a hard time after years of status, because they contain an unethical minority who have destroyed public confidence in lawyers to work for justice and doctors for health above self interest. Max Lerner says that not only is there still a "Shame of the Cities" as described by Lincoln Steffens which the lawyers and doctors have not corrected, but that Steffens today would probe the shame of the professions, for putting self-interest above service goals. The providers seem to be more likely to cheat than the recipients, although the reverse myth persists.

Educators and social workers are having a particularly hard time convincing people about their professional expertise, perhaps because they took public support for granted for a generation or two. I believe volunteers bring out the best in paid staff, and then become their most effective advocates. Improving our capacities through continuous learning from every volunteer, every opportunity offered us will make us professional persons in the best sense of the word.

To the Greeks, caritas meant love, charity and caring. As caring persons, working with caring staff and caring individuals from the community, we will earn professional status in our own right because our responsibility is essential to people as individuals and as a society. We have organizing power to create meaningful work for everyone, to foster unity out of diversity, to channel compassion in each person toward humane goals. We must recognize our importance as guardians of democratic rights, and of the service and relationships volunteers offer, as well as the dedication and fulfillment of the volunteers themselves. That's professional volunteer administration!

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