

The New Volunteer

Getting Ahead While You Give to Others.
By Mary Scott Welch

She's ambitious, determined and now she's even confident. She's helping the world and learning to help herself. Here's what you need to know about making volunteering work for you... "Sometimes I can't believe this has happened," says Lois R., leaning back in her

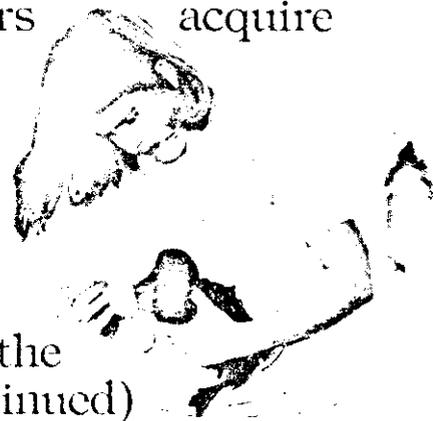


into the suburbs. Two years ago she made the switch to paid work—as fund-raiser for a college—but at minimal salary. Today she's in charge of an advertising agency's biggest accounts, and she can't believe her pay. As she keeps saying, "I was just a volunteer."



leather chair, a view of Manhattan's spires serving as the backdrop to her spacious office.

Like most of us, Lois underestimated the training, experience and self-confidence that volunteers acquire when serving their communities. But the phrase, "just a volunteer," may soon disappear from the language. (continued)



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teer force. But surprise . . . the largest proportion of volunteers also hold full-time jobs.

In Peoria, Illinois, Margaret Sutherland puts in a full work-week as the paid project director of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP); on the weekend she volunteers at Wildlife Prairie, a new natural park being developed on land reclaimed from strip mining. . . . In Los Angeles, Dina Beaumont has a demanding career as International Vice President (District 11) of her union, the Communications Workers of America, but she puts in at least ten hours a week on volunteer activities, including a local effort to solve the city's court congestion problem. . . . In Fort Worth, Texas, Alann Sampson's salaried job is at the community affairs office of the First National Bank; her extensive volunteer commitments include chairing the foundation that sponsors the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, held in Fort Worth every four years. . . . When management consultant Dr. Lucille A. Maddalena locks up her office in Chester, New Jersey, it's to volunteer as part of the crew on *Cleanwater*, the replica of an old cargo sloop that sails the Hudson River and the waters of Long Island Sound, teaching thousands of children each year about the environment. She's also program chairman for her chapter of the American Association of University Women.

For working people all over America, closing the office or factory door each day means that they're free to work for free, opening new doors for retarded children, teenage mothers, the elderly, their neighbors—whomever needs them.

According to Winifred L. Brown, administrator-director of the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center in New York City, fully 70 percent of the women and men who seek volunteer jobs are in the labor market. "Some may be living on unemployment insurance," she says, "using volunteer work to keep their spirits up and widen their contacts as they (continued)

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For a fresh breeze is blowing through the volunteer world, clearing the air of old-fashioned attitudes, outdated methods. It rises straight out of women's heightened self-image, our better sense of who we are and what we can accomplish. When the dust settles, volunteer jobs will be more exciting, more personally rewarding than ever before. And the whole nation will sit up and take notice, at long last valuing not only the estimated 68 billion dollars worth of services that volunteers provide every year but also the professional experience that the individual volunteer gains through unpaid work.

That's the hopeful prediction I bring back from a four-month survey of the volunteer scene. The *Journal* asked me to find out what's happening to volunteers now that 43 million women are working for pay. Were they abandoning the hospitals, the settlement houses, the museums and the community centers that had for so long relied on their free labor to keep going? After talking to volunteers and to professionals all over the country, I can report that the answer is a definite *no*. Rita Lambek, director of the volunteer bureau of the Federation of Protestant Welfare, a non-sectarian placement agency in New York City, expressed the consensus when she said, "We're experiencing a real resurgence of volunteerism."

But here and there pockets of what we might call mythology persist, holding volunteerism back.

MYTH #1: *Most volunteers are housewives, otherwise unemployed.* Yes, homemakers are still a large part of the volun-

Princess Gardner
When it comes to leather goods,
they get carried away.

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continued

look for new jobs. But most have regular, full-time jobs."

In some corporations, they may work on their chosen volunteer assignment partly on company time, getting paid as usual while off at the playground or the drug-counseling center. Recognizing that employee volunteers are good for their image in the community, many businesses now appoint or hire volunteer coordinators who help employees find such assignments. Some lend their executives to charities for as long as eight to ten weeks, full-time, full pay. United Way of America, particularly, has benefited from this arrangement.

Alternatively, the company may develop a project of its own, which employees join as they wish. In Portland, Oregon, the U.S. National Bank of Oregon sponsors Homebound Opportunities for Programming Education (Project Hope). The bank's employee volunteers teach cerebral palsy victims, in their homes, how to program computers. After completing the program, the trainees can work for local companies on a contractual basis.

Homemakers, however, are still essential to volunteer corps. They're the backbone of religious sisterhoods, sodalities and women's auxiliaries; they're the force behind local United Fund and Red Cross drives. Their service is especially important where daytime work is needed. Take, for example, the Denver Art Museum. Most of its 800 volunteers are married women whose hours at the museum can be juggled to fit in with their busy domestic and community service schedules. After training for their particular assignments, volunteers work on everything from guiding tours to raising money. Their volunteer president, Molly Kay Singer, spends three days a week at the museum, but she, too, is a "housewife, otherwise unemployed."

MYTH #2: Volunteers work in hospitals, mainly holding patients' hands.

If your image of the volunteer begins and ends with the "Gray Lady," you haven't kept up with the true range and variety of volunteer activity in this country. Contemporary volunteers meet every imaginable challenge, from A to Z. Literally from A . . . as in Adopt-a-Tree, the name of a program in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan, where 450 trees, struggling to grow out of concrete sidewalks, are watered, ivy-ringed and watched over by volunteers . . . to Z, as in Zapping an oil refinery that threatened the New England coast. In Durham, New Hampshire, Nancy Sandberg and other

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HOW TO GET A JOB THROUGH VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteer work can prepare you for paid work in very basic ways—building your self-confidence, expanding your skills, giving you practical experience in everything from motivating other people to keeping books—but specific knowledge will impress a potential employer more. Here's how to map out a volunteer program that will give you direct experience in the kind of work you want, and a pertinent "success story" for your résumé. This system has worked for countless women—including Janice La Rouche, now a nationally known career counselor who recommends it to her clients.

1) Decide what kind of a paying job you want, in what field. If you don't already know what you can or want to do, look into the Volunteer Career Development program (VCD) originated by the Association of Junior Leagues. VCD leads participants through increasingly challenging experiences to help them identify their abilities, determine their goals and develop action plans to reach them. For information, call your local Junior League, or write the national headquarters at 825 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

2) Compare the requisites of the job you want with your present qualifications, then look for volunteer work that will help fill in the blanks. What specific skills do you lack? Experience with budgets? Long-range planning? Handling groups? Speaking? Writing? If you volunteer with a clear statement of your skills and goals, not just a vague offer to "help out," a local Voluntary Action Center can match you up with an assignment that meets your needs.

3) Interview several volunteer groups before signing on. This is a switch from *being* interviewed. Ask: May you have a written job description of whatever assignment you accept? Will you be able to work up through the organization? What training, supervision and evaluation can you count on? Is there a policy against putting volunteers on the payroll if openings occur? (Often-times the latter is the most direct route to a paying job.) Check into their national reputation: the National Information Bureau's free booklet, "Wise Giving Guide," rates nonprofit organizations. Write: 419 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016. Or, if it's a local group, check out its board members.

4) Once you've chosen the organization, try to: a) work for someone whose job you can later fill, or b) develop your own project, one in

which you'll get start-to-finish credit. You want your ultimate résumé to state precise accomplishment, using business terms, such as: "handled entire financial operations for school fair that netted 90 percent of the \$16,480 gross."

5) Commit yourself to your volunteer job as earnestly as though it were a paid one—that is, work regular hours, preferably at least 15-20 hours a week; show consistency for a minimum of six months.

6) Document your work as you go, collecting anything that attests to your competence: awards, copies of speeches, reports, newspaper write-ups. When you're praised, don't be too proud to ask for it in writing.

The National Council of Jewish Women has produced a 28-page "Personal Career Portfolio," with sample forms for recording experience derived from volunteer work. (Send \$1 to the Council at 15 E. 26th St., New York, N.Y. 10010.) Also a book called "I Can—a Tool for Assessing Skills Acquired Through Volunteer Service," developed by the Council of National Organizations for Adult Education, has a valuable section on documentation. (Available from Ramco Printing, 228 East 45th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017; \$4.75 or ask about bulk rates.)

7) To prepare for that ubiquitous question of the job interview, "What was your last salary?" estimate the dollar value of your volunteer services. Here is a guideline: Dr. Judith Hybels, at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, assigned hourly market values according to the type of work volunteers performed, from \$10 an hour for leaders and managers down to \$3.50 for clerical workers. Such figures are low and, as you might humorously point out to a job interviewer, volunteers are underpaid, but your cause will be helped if you can say, "I was earning at the rate of \$15,000 a year," or "A paid person with my responsibilities would earn \$20,000."

8) Keep track of the contacts you make in the course of your volunteer work. Don't be afraid to ask them for leads and help in your job hunt.

9) Once you've landed that job you set your sights on, keep up with your volunteer work as well. It will give you greater visibility in your community and company, it might very well offer personal challenges not found in many paying jobs, and—not least—it will provide the chance to do "good" for your cause, just as your cause helped your job hunt.

Cher

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have expensive, lavish tastes. "We live a very extravagant lifestyle," she admits. Having grown up poor and then acquired money, she now enjoys what it can purchase, and doesn't want to lose it. It shows in the extraordinary clothes she buys, out of her own money, for her shows. "I've paid up to \$5,000 for a dress," she says. It shows in the exotic Egyptian-style home she is building (begun by her and Gregg) in Benedict Canyon. The one-story house will surround a central courtyard with a lotus pool in the middle and will be topped with a glass roof that will completely open up. Cher is fascinated by Egypt. She and Gene plan to visit the area some day.

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Of those, only seven and a half percent volunteer in the health fields, and only a fraction of those in actual hospitals. Even hospital volunteers are different from the Gray Lady image these days. They're apt to create their own jobs, as Carol Clement did at Lutheran General Hospital, in Park Ridge, Illinois. She suggested that yoga might help the convalescents; eight years later, even though she has moved away from the area, she's still teaching yoga to patients twice a week.

And at Bellevue Hospital Center, New York City, one of the largest municipal hospitals in the country, volunteers put on a private little puppet show for each child about to undergo surgery. A hand puppet bearing the child's name acts out the whole "adventure" ahead, from the elevator ride on a moving table to lying under a big white light to waking up with a bandage.

Church work is another traditional volunteer area undergoing exciting change. In addition to helping members of their own congregation, church organizations support a myriad of community activities. For example, *Akwasne Notes*, a newspaper published by and for the Mohawk Indians in upstate New York, is aided by the United Methodist Voluntary Service; while members of the United Presbyterian Church work with young people in Alaska, counsel ex-prisoners in New Jersey and run a medical clinic in rural Ohio. Church Women United, the National Council of Catholic Women and the National Council of Jewish Women also reflect the new scope of religious service, as

The spa itself is a pretty extravagant way to lose a few pounds. But Cher is not excessive on all fronts. Reports that she spends \$500 a month on her long nails "just aren't true," she says. "I don't spend that much on my fingernails."

But the nails, the clothes, the house, are just the flamboyant shell of Cher. The electricity that lights her up—her work, her mothering, her exercise, her relationships—is made of stronger stuff. It's that strength that enabled her to climb out of the depression she suffered after her breakup with Gregg and her own career doldrums. "I don't give up—that's my greatest strength," she acknowledges. "I am very optimistic and happy to be alive. I'm having a wonderful time—even on bad days, and that's what they are, just bad days."

To get out of bad days, Cher, as often as not, returns to her body. "I woke up the other morning and was so depressed I couldn't believe it. So I went running

they reach out to refugees, single parents, widows, children, shut-ins, families in trouble. A local chapter may lobby for legislative reform in Washington, D.C., or keep an eye on the courts back home. Religious groups—the historic heart of volunteering—are indeed keeping up with changing times.

MYTH #3: *Volunteering is a luxury of the upper class, a case of the over-privileged helping the underprivileged in a form of "noblesse oblige."*

No more! Lady Bountiful is long gone, and the Junior League, once the epitome of the elitism that Myth #3 represents, is in the vanguard of the new egalitarian spirit of volunteerism. In fact, its project, Volunteers Intervening for Equity (V.I.E.), exemplifies the single most important change volunteer work has undergone in recent years: it helps the volunteers themselves, as much as it helps the community. The thousand or so V.I.E. volunteers, for example, are older people who might otherwise sink into the lonely inactivity of retirement. Participating in V.I.E., they enhance their own lives even as they monitor home health-care problems in Grand Rapids, Michigan; check into juvenile justice in Orlando, Florida; and help other senior citizens get the benefits they're entitled to in Omaha, Nebraska, and Seattle, Washington.

If upper middle-class white matrons once dominated the volunteer scene, they are now outnumbered. The 600 participants in San Francisco's fund-raising Walkathon, for example, included young professionals, minorities, students, grandparents, ex-prisoners, executives, the handicapped.

Celebrities and political figures are volunteers—Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward for nuclear disarmament, Jerry Lewis for muscular dystrophy, Rosalynn Carter for mental health, Joan

and I exercised real hard, and by the time I was finished, I didn't feel so bad. I've learned how to get my mind off what brings me down.

"I had been pitying myself because things weren't going exactly the way I wanted—which is really stupid. Because if you're always comparing yourself to the ideal you think you should be, then you won't ever be happy, you won't be open to anyone because you'll always be angry.

"Anyway, it's stupid for me because my life is going so well. I've got so many things to be thankful for that I really don't have room to complain. My life is perfect."

Perfect? With barely a pause, she answers. "Well, I'm not sick. I've got money. I've got children that are absolutely the best thing in the world. And I've got a really nice job. Everything is going my way. Everything is available to me. There's nothing I can't do." **End**

Mondale for the arts, etc. The poor and the obscure are volunteers as well. And even children make enthusiastic, effective volunteers. In Houston, Texas, ten-year-old Louis Appel organized his playmates into a clean-up crew that keeps after empty bottles and gum wrappers in his neighborhood park. "For the first time," says Mary E. King, deputy director of ACTION, the federal agency for volunteerism, "volunteers are coming from all segments of our society."

New funding methods

This refreshing diversity among volunteers is partly thanks to new methods of funding volunteer projects. People who couldn't afford to volunteer before are now being reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses—carfare, uniforms, sometimes baby-sitters. In certain circumstances, they are even minimally paid: Ralph Nader interns get \$50-\$60 a week for their full-time investigative work; Foster Grandparents, participants in a national program run by ACTION, get \$1.60 an hour. Grants also have entered the picture: The Association of Junior League's Volunteer Career Development Program (see page 32) received a \$95,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan. Baltimore New Directions for Women, in Maryland, won \$100,000 in ACTION funds to set up a women's resource and advisory center that helps battered women, displaced homemakers and other volunteers gain job experience through nonprofit work.

The socially prominent may still head up certain charity balls and theater benefits, but for every Crystal Ball in Dallas, say, there are hundreds, no, thousands, of fund-raisers put on by and for the very people they benefit—block parties to raise money for (continued)

The luxury of a American tradition



Top to bottom: Aquarius Centerpiece, \$56. The Patriots Bowl, \$125. Lido Salt & Pepper Mill Set, \$56. Monticello Server, \$36. Small Swan, 4" tall, \$15. All except the swan are trimmed in 24-karat gold.

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The prices shown are suggested retail prices only.

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reseeded the local park, rummage sales for the benefit of crime victims, raffles for the boys' club. "It's no longer that 'we' help them," as Winifred Brown says. "It's that we help ourselves."

MYTH #4: To be a good volunteer, you have to be self-sacrificing.

"Nonsense!" says Herta Loeser, author of *Women, Work & Volunteering*. "Some of the best volunteers now at work are frankly expecting to get back as much as they give."

"What's in it for me?" has become a

very legitimate question for anyone to ask before donating time and talent to a volunteer project. To answer that question enticingly, nonprofit organizations have had to shake up their methods of dealing with volunteers. The savvy ones now offer training, intelligent placement, creative supervision, performance evaluation—in short, professional steps to make volunteer service a "growth experience" for the volunteer.

Here are some of the "selfish" motives that volunteers freely acknowledge:

Emmy T. used her work at a battered women's center to help her decide whether to go back to school for a degree in social work. She found her emotional involvement with the women undermined her performance as a coun-

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- The Voluntary Action Center in your community can help you locate a volunteer assignment. Check your phone book for the local listing, or write the National Center for Voluntary Action, 1214 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, for the address of a placement/referral center near you. Over 36,000 agencies are in the ACTION network.

- Want to learn more? The National Information Center on Volunteerism, a private, nonprofit organization, will send you a free catalog, "53 Books to Better Volunteering." Write: Volunteer Readership, P.O. Box 1807, Boulder, Colorado 80306.

selor. But when she switched to running the business end of the center, she discovered in herself a never-tapped management ability. She's aiming now at a degree in business administration.

Julie O. used volunteering as a means of getting ahead in her company. "I was very political about it," she says. "I worked for the American Cancer Society because I knew our chief executive officer was on the board. I wanted him to notice me, and he did." Formerly an underling in the communications department, she's now on the executive's personal staff for public relations. (Both still work for the American Cancer Society.)

Harriet K. volunteered at her local library to see if she could get her household on an even enough keel to enable her to spend regular hours away from home and children. "It was a way of getting my feet wet, in case I decide to go back to work when the children are older," she says. "I increased my volunteer time gradually, so nobody would feel neglected (and I wouldn't feel over-extended). Now I know I can handle a paying job when the time comes."

Rebecca S. used volunteer work to make friends. When her husband's company transferred them to a new city she felt lost, thoroughly uprooted. "I didn't know a single soul." But she signed up at the local arts and crafts center, and now she feels very much "at home."

For others, volunteer work has served as a kind of half-way house—a recovery stop between a nervous breakdown or alcoholism or, simply, divorce and the making of a new life. Such cases further illustrate that the best way to help oneself is often to help others.

In short, altruism is certainly an important, continuing motive for most volunteers, but no one need hold back if she also has more immediate personal reasons for offering her services.

Sometimes those personal reasons are very close to home, as when parents work long and hard to improve their children's schools through *(continued)*

