

Kentucky Derby Duds ♦ New Look at General Motors ♦ Uninsured Middle-Class Kids



Is Volunteering A WASTE OF TIME?

PLUS: HOW TO ENSURE YOU
REALLY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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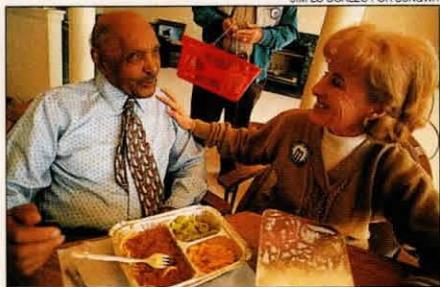
Two views of service

Next week, in Philadelphia, President Clinton will convene a "summit" on the role of volunteer service in meeting the nation's needs. This week, we offer critical appraisals of volunteerism from two writers with firsthand involvement in the politics and policy of the subject.

The lead article, "Do Do-Gooders Do Much Good?" (Page 26), is by Michael J. Gerson, who wrote it while on leave from his job as policy director for Republican

EDITOR'S NOTE

writers with firsthand involvement in the politics and policy of the subject.



JIM LO SCALZO FOR USNEWS

Do volunteers deliver what America needs?

Sen. Dan Coats of Indiana. As a congressional staff member, Gerson played a central role in developing the GOP's "Project for American Renewal," a set of proposals to encourage mentoring, adoption, charitable giving, and other steps to help the poor. Here he describes the conditions that make volunteer efforts most successful—or a waste of time.

The accompanying commentary is by Assistant Managing Editor Steven Waldman. In 1993, as a writer for *Newsweek*, Waldman reported on passage of the bill creating the national service program AmeriCorps. That work led in 1995 to a well-received book, *The Bill*, which was sympathetic to the idea of national service but critical of the law itself. The head of AmeriCorps, former Sen. Harris Wofford, offered Waldman a job as an in-house adviser and friendly critic. Waldman began work there in January 1996. "Given that Congress had just voted to eliminate the program, friends thought it an odd career move," Waldman says. But in his 13 months at AmeriCorps, before joining *U.S. News*, he had a chance to think about the value and pitfalls of national service. He shares some of his conclusions beginning on Page 36.

JAMES FALLOWS

Do you experience these symptoms of **Anxiety?**

- Excessive worrying
- Feeling keyed up
- Anxiety attacks
- Obsessions or compulsions
- Muscle tension
- Problems with concentration
- Unexplained heart palpitations
- Phobias
- Sleeplessness
- Uncomfortable in social situations

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NATIONAL ANXIETY DISORDERS SCREENING PROJECT

Do do-gooders do



Seven-year-old Craig of Philadelphia is waiting to get a "Big Brother." Across the country, 30,000 kids are on the waiting list of the demonstrably

much good?

Most volunteers aren't solving core problems

BY MICHAEL J. GERSON

If you think volunteerism is noncontroversial, listen to Pastor Eugene F. Rivers III of the Azusa Christian Community in Boston. He has undertaken what he calls a jihad to reclaim troubled kids from gangs and drugs. It has earned him bullets through his front window and a reputation for bluntness. It has not earned him much help from middle-class suburbanites. Such people, he says, are more interested in "recreational volunteerism," devoting their time and money to "MOMA [Museum of Modern Art], Mass General Hospital, or Lincoln Center, and saving whales with one fin."

When his anger subsides, Rivers asks a potent question: "If there are really 93 million volunteers in America then why are our cities worse than they have ever been?"

There is hardly a member of Congress

as tutors and just 1.2 percent as mentors or substance-abuse-prevention counselors—about half as many as help in theaters, music, and the arts. A separate estimate of volunteering through churches found the same pattern. Lester Salamon, director of the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University, says that roughly 7 percent to 15 percent of volunteering done through churches goes outside the walls of the sanctuary into the community. Most volunteers help the men's club and choir, not the downtown soup kitchen.

One on one. For years, conservatives have argued that volunteers should shoulder more of the social welfare burden, and government less. This notion has never been more widely accepted, as evidenced by the strong bipartisan support for the President's Summit for America's Future—also known as the volunteer summit. In a show of unity usually reserved for state funerals, every living ex-

Volunteers can work WONDERS. But to an extent rarely acknowledged, the volunteer sector is NOT READY for what is now being asked of it.

who hasn't used that 93 million number, which was generated by Independent Sector, a group that studies and represents nonprofit organizations. The survey estimated that those Americans contributed a stunning 20.3 billion hours of their time in 1995—218 hours per person. A closer look shows why Rivers's question is so penetrating. First, about 4.6 billion of those hours are informal volunteering, things like baby-sitting for a neighbor and baking cookies for a school fair. The 20 billion number also includes volunteers at theaters, museums, and other cultural institutions, plus serving on boards and commissions. Indeed, only 8.4 percent of those 93 million volunteers work in "human services," a broad category that includes aiding the homeless, family counseling, and helping the Red Cross. Fewer than 4 percent of volunteers work

president, with the exception of Ronald Reagan, who will be represented by his wife, will stand with President Clinton in Independence Hall in Philadelphia this Monday to salute mentors, tutors, and other involved citizens.

There are many acknowledged benefits of volunteering. It helps build a sense of community, breaks down barriers between people, and often raises the quality of life. Some types of volunteer activities seem consistently successful, the most obvious example being the outpouring of help that surrounds natural disasters like

Michael J. Gerson is the policy director for Sen. Dan Coats, a Republican from Indiana. He has written speeches for a variety of Republican leaders including Bob Dole and Jack Kemp. The views in this piece are his own.



successful Big Brothers/Big Sisters program.



John Rudd reads to kindergartner Audrianna Robles at the Taylor Elementary School in Philadelphia. Effective tutoring is intense and regular.

the floods currently hitting the upper Midwest. But policy makers are now relying on volunteers to do far more. "If all 200 million Americans gave three hours a month," Newt Gingrich has said, "there would be 600 million voluntary hours a month to find a child and teach it to read, a drug addict to get off drugs, or a poor person to teach how to be profitable." President Clinton has set similarly high expectations. "If every church in America

And viewed that way, it is an inefficient one. Most volunteers are not deployed effectively to solve the hardest, and most critical, problems. Management is often poor, and amazingly little is known about which volunteer programs really work. To an extent rarely acknowledged publicly, especially by many conservatives, the volunteer sector is not ready for the responsibilities now being thrust upon it.

Sometimes volunteers are in abun-

But the problems of troubled children, needy seniors, and the poor require a different type of volunteering: It must be performed one on one, over a long period of time, and, often, in low-income neighborhoods. And for this type of assistance, there is a shortage of volunteers. A telling case is that of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, a demonstrably successful volunteer effort. Among children who spent 18 months in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, initial drug use was cut 46 percent and initial alcohol use cut by 27 percent, according to a major 1995 study by Public/Private Ventures. Participating children skipped half as many days of school and were a third less likely to hit someone. All this in an organization with a universally recognized brand name and a notable absence of scandal. Yet Big Brothers currently has 30,000 children waiting to be matched with adults. And the group estimates that as many as 15 million children could benefit from having mentors.

Why are supply and demand so mismatched? The simplest explanation is that volunteers sign up for reasons other than the urgency of social problems. Volun-

ONE-ON-ONE volunteering can be extremely effective if it is intense and over long periods of time. Yet fewer than 5 percent of volunteers **TUTOR** or mentor.

hired just one family, the welfare problem would go way down."

It is one thing to celebrate volunteers. It is another thing to depend upon them to fill the gaps left by failures and cutbacks in welfare and other government programs. In this light, it is decidedly not the thought that counts. Volunteerism is often understood as a virtue, but now it should also be understood as a market.

dance. When disasters strike, there is never any shortage of volunteers to fill sandbags and comfort victims. Habitat for Humanity rarely has trouble attracting volunteers on weekends. One-time events like AIDS walkathons and "Net Days" to wire schools for computers can make an enormous difference in a short amount of time, and they usually draw a big crowd.

teers say they participate because a) they were asked by someone; b) they learned of an opportunity through an organization to which they belonged; or c) a family member or friend would benefit as a result. And these reasons tend to limit volunteering to a tight circle of familiar friends, places, and institutions. "There is very little commuting to do volunteer work," says Julian Wolpert, a professor at Princeton University who has written extensively on the nonprofit sector. While the Good Samaritan only had to cross the street, many volunteers must cross to the other side of the tracks.

Volunteers sometimes fear that if they visit neighborhoods with high crime rates they may suffer violence, or at least antagonism. Robert Todd, a white businessman who tutors at a largely Hispanic school in Dallas, tells of arriving on the day that a major fire consumed a car dealership down the street. Finding the children excited, he asked one of them why and was told, "Because the white man's business is burning down."

"**Horror stories.**" Economic realities shape the choices volunteers can make. The backbone of volunteer involvement in the past was stay-at-home mothers with flexible schedules. Now, with both parents working, whatever spare time is left over must go to the kids. "I don't think it is a question of people not wanting to volunteer; it is a question of how, where, and can I do it in a way that fits into my schedule," says Kathy Behrens, vice chairwoman of City Cares of America, a group that hooks up busy people with appropriate volunteer opportunities. City Cares now has chapters in a number of cities, including Atlanta, Washington, and Philadelphia, and puts 75,000 volunteers to work. Behrens estimates that about half those people do just a single day of work during the year.

Such once-a-year volunteers can be usefully deployed at routine tasks, like dishing out food in a soup kitchen or removing graffiti, but do not help with more complicated human interventions. And that's a significant loss. Research has shown that mentoring and tutoring depend for their success on the duration and consistency of personal involvement. In tutoring, for example, the six or eight hours of school each day is al-

ready a huge part of a child's life. "If it is already failing to teach at that level of intensity, it won't be helped by another 15 minutes with a tutor," says Lance Potter, director of evaluation at the Corporation for National Service. Potter estimates that the lowest level of tutoring that is still effective is somewhere between 30 and 60 minutes per session, at least two or three times a week. "Much below that," he says, "you are not really helping, and

lyzed every known study of tutoring programs and concluded that only two could, using rigorous evaluation techniques, prove efficacy. One of them was the Good News After School Reading Program in Chicago. Volunteers come two days a week, for an hour and a half each day, often from affluent suburbs nearby. They are carefully trained and use materials prepared by professional staff, one of whom is always there during the tutoring

Management of volunteers is often poor. And, given the emphasis now placed on volunteering, **AMAZINGLY LITTLE** is known about which programs really work.

you may be hurting." That's because ineffective tutoring can actually harm self-esteem. Children who have inconsistent or unreliable tutors will view it as further evidence of the unreliability of adults. But few tutoring programs consistently attract volunteers for long periods of time.

While we know the general characteristics of what makes successful volunteering, we know little about what programs pull it off. "Most of the information is anecdotal," says William Niederloh, chief executive officer of the National Results Council, a new research group that studies social programs. Barbara Wasik of Johns Hopkins University recently ana-

lyzed every known study of tutoring programs and concluded that only two could, using rigorous evaluation techniques, prove efficacy. One of them was the Good News After School Reading Program in Chicago. Volunteers come two days a week, for an hour and a half each day, often from affluent suburbs nearby. They are carefully trained and use materials prepared by professional staff, one of whom is always there during the tutoring

sessions. "Our tutors aren't floundering around," says Betty Boyd, a cosupervisor of the program. A few other studies raise questions about volunteer effectiveness. One recent analysis found that Neighborhood Watch programs, in which residents help patrol a community, have little measurable effect on crime. People in high-crime areas were reluctant to organize, often distrusting their neighbors and refusing to attend or host community meetings. Wealthier areas, in which trust was higher, generally had little crime to begin with. And one 1990 study of Neighborhood Watch argued that the program, in some cases, in-

KENNETH JARECKE—CONTACT FOR US&WR



Lee Pease plays with Matthew Oswalt at a center for kids in crisis run by Mission Arlington in Texas.

creased the fear of crime rather than relieving it.

In a commercial marketplace, consumers help ensure quality by rewarding the good and punishing the bad. But people who would never buy a CD player without reading *Consumer Reports* join volunteer efforts without a way of knowing what impact they'll have. Indeed, the very quality that makes volunteering so noble—the selflessness—undermines the efficiency of the market. “It is not outcomes that matter to me,” says Sara Mann, a student at Southern Methodist University who regularly volunteers. “It’s more

personal than that. It’s the encouragement you get out of it.”

And perhaps it is unrealistic to expect each volunteer to conduct personalized cost-benefit analyses. Volunteers don’t think in those terms, nor should they. Some actions are taken out of simple decency. “I know the [children] face hardships,” says Lee Pease, who volunteers at the Alpha Child Care Center for children in crisis run by Mission Arlington, a

Christian social-service group in Arlington, Texas. “But I don’t have the power to change that, other than the one moment I am holding that child. I am in charge of that one moment. And it keeps you coming back.”

For more occasional volunteers, however, ineffectiveness can be a real disincentive to come back. According to a new *U.S. News* poll*, 20 percent of those who had volunteered in the past year said they weren’t sure if their work was helping solve a problem.

If volunteers can’t always assess outcomes, who should?

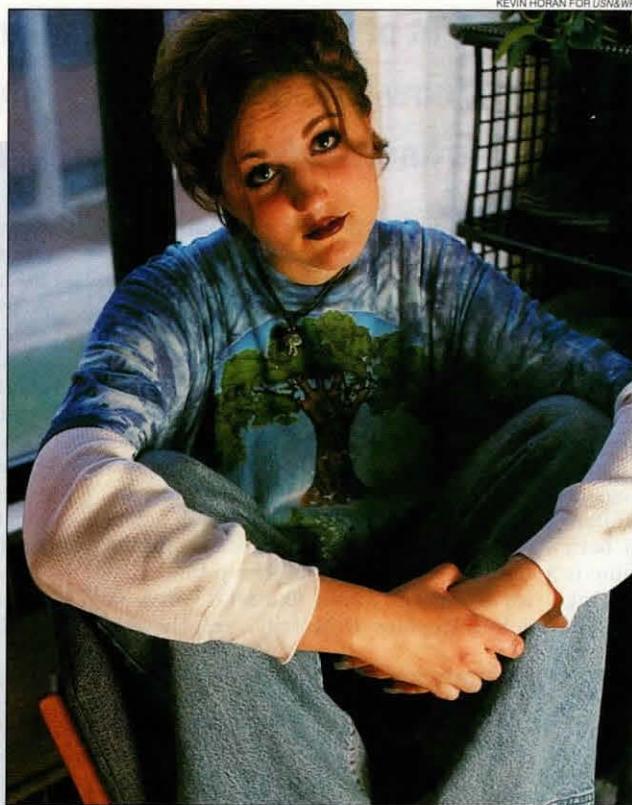
ONE VOLUNTEER

‘Dear Diary, I detest being near them.’

Jennifer Brophy, now a 19-year-old sophomore at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., kept a diary while serving as a volunteer tutor for a ninth-grade “directed” (remedial) science class at Middletown High School near Frederick, Md. The names of the children have been changed. This excerpt is from a forthcoming anthology on volunteer service compiled by Suzanne Goldsmith, the editor of *Dig*, a Des Moines-based newsletter about community building.

Feb. 21, 1994: Today was my first day of tutoring and what a day it was! I like Mrs. Oakes a lot. She is sweet and understanding and seems to love what she does. The students are a different story. They obviously resent Laurie’s and my presence. They probably feel they don’t need our help and by our being there, they are in some way stupid. We are definitely very unwelcome.

Feb. 24, 1994: I finally feel somewhat useful. The class did a lab on friction, and I



Jennifer Brophy was a volunteer tutor during high school.

20 PERCENT of volunteers say they have CUT BACK because they weren’t sure their work helped.

was able to help Josh with his calculations. He was impressed by my calculator.

March 4, 1994: Overall, tutoring is not what I expected. I thought the students would look up to me because I was older and could help them get through this course with a passing grade. This could not have been further from

the truth. They are disrespectful, loud, annoying, and I detest being near them. . . . The students push us away. I’m almost scared to help because the kids are so rude. . . . If I were the teacher of this class, a large majority of the students would be in the office with referrals. I can’t help feeling so frustrated. . . . I will not give up!!

March 23, 1994: The only thing that gets me through the period is the response I get from Alan and David. They now listen to me, show occasional respect, and converse with me regarding outside activities. They have accepted me and because of this acceptance, I can at times effectively tutor them.

April 19, 1994: Today’s class was very disturbing because I saw three students purposely fail their tests. Linda, Ashley and Ann filled in any answer in order to finish quickly.

April 26, 1994: I’m ecstatic! I can’t get over how well Alan is responding to me. I look back and remember thinking he was hopeless. He is nice to me and shows me respect in his own way. I almost enjoy tutoring now. I feel that I’m starting to make a difference.

June 6, 1994: David decided to cooperate with me, and we got further than anybody else. He’s bossy—and I shouldn’t put up with him telling me what to do. But he probably needs somebody to listen to him. I’m certain he will do well on the final if he applies himself, and decides to care. I would like to learn more about motivating students to want to succeed and to stay in school. I want to be able to serve the students next year so much better!



Cynthia Nachmani trains new volunteers at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Rev. Eugene Rivers calls them "recreational volunteers."

Charities themselves don't do rigorous self-analysis for understandable reasons. Sometimes effectiveness is inherently difficult to measure. What is the measurable outcome of working in a hospice? Many nonprofits are cash-strapped and struggling to perform basic services and can't afford to spend time or money on

ured it was the "input" (how many hours did the tutor work?) not the "outcome" (did he or she raise the reading scores of the child?). So far, however, only 200 of the 1,200 United Way programs are fully participating.

Foundations, which would seem to have an interest in tracking the sound-

good volunteer management is one of the consistent topics of self-criticism in the nonprofit world. One Independent Sector survey found that in 1,300 nonprofits, fewer than half of their chief executives could say how many volunteers worked at their organizations or how many hours' worth of time they donated.

This neglect often limits the contributions of volunteers and the quality of their experiences. "I got on board with a local home care organization and had no guidance or training," says Nan Hawthorne, a volunteer in Seattle. "I found myself in a very emotional situation without any tools

Rev. Eugene Rivers criticizes "RECREATIONAL VOLUNTEERISM" geared toward museums, theaters, and "saving WHALES with one fin."

evaluation. Others avoid assessment simply because they can. "People can get away with all sorts of things sending out pictures of starving kids," says Charles W. Colson, chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries.

In a significant shift, United Way has begun a massive effort to get its member charities to measure outcomes. In the past, to the extent anything was meas-

ness of their investments, have done little study because they focus more on stimulating innovative ideas than on assessing old ones. "The normal practice," says Princeton Prof. John DiIulio, "has been to give money to people you've never met, in places you've never been, with results you've never tried to measure."

The efficiency of a market also depends on effective management, and the lack of

or guidance. I went over to this man's house five days a week. No one told me that one day a week is the norm. I burned out quickly and left the group." Hawthorne heard so many other "horror stories" about people's volunteer experiences that she formed Sound Volunteer Management to train volunteer coordinators.

When Lisa Rapaszky, 24, volunteered at an Oakland, Calif., emergency shelter

for women and children, she discovered that her overworked supervisor had no time to train her. Yet after three weeks, Rapaszky was virtually running the place. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, she was left almost alone in the shelter to do everything from answering the phones to helping drug addicts. "You had the least-qualified person during the most intense part of the day," she says. "These were women twice my age, twice my size, some of them just out of jail, and I'm telling them what to do."

Insatiable appetite. But good training can be expensive. In Big Brother/Big Sisters, the process of screening, training, matching, and supervising volunteers costs about \$1,000 per match. If Big Brothers were to get all the volunteers it could handle to cover the 30,000 children waiting for matches, the bill would be \$30 million.

In other cases, nonprofit managers really don't want to give volunteers meaningful work. Jeanne Bradner, a nonprofit consultant in Chicago, concludes that

many organizations have "staff infection," which she defines as an insatiable appetite for more paid staff. "Their attitude toward volunteers is often that anything which is free can't be valuable." In one survey, 80 percent of nonprofit managers said they didn't believe volunteers could be substituted extensively for paid professionals in nonprofit organizations

hire credentialed counselors or face fines and imprisonment. (The decision was later overturned by Gov. George W. Bush.)

These nagging management concerns gain an added degree of urgency in light of the summit. "The real question," says Rebecca Rimel of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which is helping to finance the summit, "is if the nonprofit community is

Volunteerism can be unfocused or **POWERFUL**, oversold or indispensable. Can Americans be motivated not just to volunteer but to **SACRIFICE**?

without a significant decline in quality.

The impulse to emphasize credentialed professionals over volunteers can undermine innovative community efforts. In Texas in 1995, Teen Challenge, a religiously oriented drug treatment program with strong outcomes since 1969, was informed by the Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse that it would need to

prepared for the influx of volunteers." Summit organizers are emphasizing not vague volunteerism but increased adult involvement in children's lives. This is a good sign. Says Princeton's DiIulio: "When you boil down the last 50 years of empirical research on what works to improve the lives of children, there is one conclusion: No program, public or pri-

JIM LO SCALZO FOR US&WR



An AmeriCorps member at the YouthBuild program in Philadelphia cuts lumber to help rebuild a row house in the south side of the city.

vate, that fails to build meaningful relationships between responsible adults and young people works.”

Can this type of hands-on volunteer involvement be expanded to cope with the enormous need? That is the vital question, says Gary Walker of Public/Private Ventures: “Whenever you have time-limited disasters, volunteers turn out to be amazingly efficient. When you convert that into social problems—not two days on a levee but six months with a youth—can you go to a

big enough scale? I just don’t know.”

Volunteerism can be unfocused or powerful, oversold or indispensable, “recreational” or transformational. There is a wide gap between the emotional investment required for a day of cleaning a park and years of working with another human being. Yet the latter is the form of volunteering most likely to get at society’s

core problems. These approaches have not been tried and found wanting; they have been tried and found difficult. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the Philadelphia summit—and the volunteer sector as a whole—is whether Americans can be motivated not just to volunteer but to sacrifice. ■

With Paul Glastris, Josh Chetwynd, and Susannah Fox in Washington, Eric Ransdell in San Francisco, and Warren Cohen in Chicago

A GUIDE

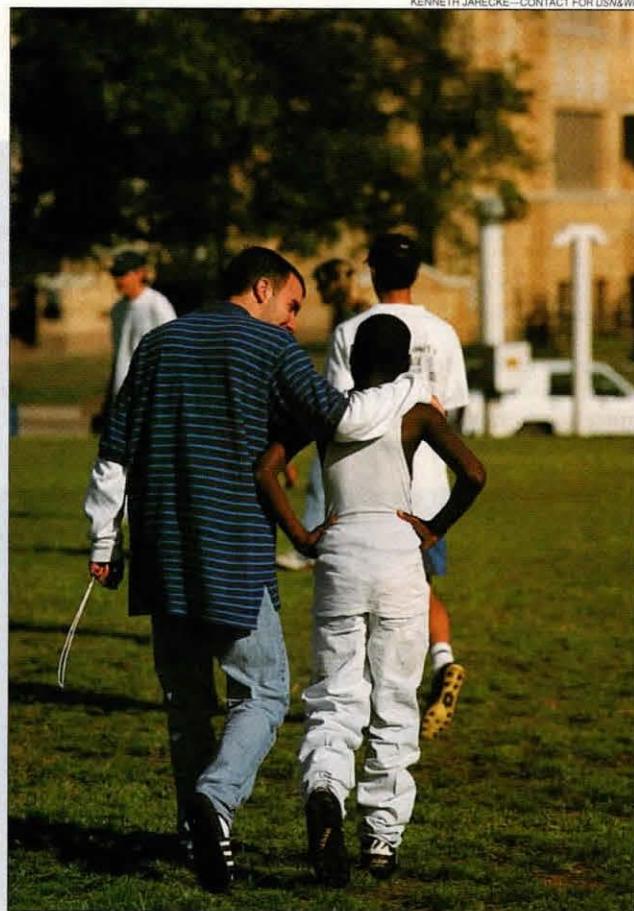
How to be a successful volunteer

The road to volunteer hell is paved with good intentions. Ask any kind soul who has shown up for a stint to save the world and instead found chaos—no training, no agenda, no thanks for coming. Here are five guidelines toward an effective volunteer experience, gleaned from academics who study volunteerism, volunteer coordinators, and vexed volunteers.

■ **Shop around.** Experts endorse the weed-whacker method for finding a well-run volunteer agency: Just as you’d chat with friends about their weed whackers before buying one, talk to acquaintances about their volunteer experiences. The local United Way, the mayor’s office, or a neighborhood school also might point to outstanding agencies. Or try Web sites with volunteer opportunities, like SERVENet (<http://www.servenet.org/>) and IdeaLIST (<http://www.contact.org/>); U.S. News Online (<http://www.usnews.com>)

has links to other such sites. Once you’ve picked a group, ask a volunteer: “What bugs you—and what gives you pleasure—in your work?”

■ **Know thy skills and schedule.**



Robert Cochran volunteered at Southern Methodist University

In a U.S. News poll, 56 PERCENT said it is important that their service have a SPIRITUAL basis.

Obvious, essential, and often overlooked advice. Do you have abilities you’d like to use in a volunteer setting? Do you hate fund-raising? Are you better suited to a one-shot gig, like a walkathon for the hungry? Or are you seeking an intense challenge, like teaching a child

to read—and if so, do you really have the time? (Veteran volunteers advise starting small and working up to a more time-consuming commitment.) At the same time, don’t be guided only by what you want to do, counsels Paul Schervish, director of Boston College’s Social Welfare Re-

search Institute. “The question is what is needed by those you serve.”

■ **Be prepared.** Or as the Sufis say, “Trust in God but tie up your camel.” A first-rate agency will provide training to help you succeed as a volunteer, from a 15-minute lecture on soup-kitchen etiquette to a series of seminars for a prospective mentor. The volunteer, meanwhile, should pursue the practical side of service. What is the job description? And how should you handle difficult situations—say, if a child you are tutoring asks for money?

■ **Expect respect.** “I believe in altruism, but it fades quickly,” says Ram Cnaan, an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. Volunteers won’t stick around if staffers talk down to them (“Oh, they’re just the volunteers”) or fail to thank them. The beleaguered volunteer should complain to someone in authority, he says. If the gripe is ignored, “then you walk.”

■ **Be sure you make a difference.** Ask the group for its mission statement, then ask how the volunteer work fulfills the mission, says Nan Hawthorne, managing director of Sound Volunteer Management in Seattle. If volunteers are truly to make a difference, the agency should regularly meet with them—and listen when they have something to say. —Marc Silver

The case for paid 'volunteering'

A new role for charity needs a dramatic new role for government

BY STEVEN WALDMAN

The president's response to "my" memo on national service was enthusiastic. "This is *full of great ideas*," he wrote to top advisers. "Could really give a *lift* to first year, St. of Union, getting GOP involved—pls read carefully and let's discuss."

After 11 years in journalism, I was working as a senior adviser to Harris Wofford, the CEO of the Corporation for National Service. I had written many harsh words about Clinton in my previous job, yet I couldn't deny the thrill of presidential validation, even coming from a president notorious for agreeing with almost everyone's ideas. I'd arrived in this odd spot because I had written a somewhat critical book on the passage of the law that created Wofford's organization and AmeriCorps, the program under which some 25,000 people perform public service in exchange for education aid. Wofford had the sense of humor to want a friendly critic in house, and, during 1996, I signed on.

The memo that Clinton liked—drafted by Wofford and me, signed by Wofford—was grand in its recommendations. It argued that on the subject of national service and volunteering, Clinton should think far bigger. Until now, we argued, the president had conceived of national service on the Peace Corps model. The Peace Corps is small, it changes its volunteers' view of the world, but it does not make a fundamental difference in the countries where volunteers work. AmeriCorps operates on the same scale.

Political hazards. Wofford and I argued that Clinton should have a different model for national service: less like the Peace Corps, more like the GI Bill. By subsidizing tuition for veterans, the GI Bill transformed the country and helped create a well-educated middle class. We proposed that the president think of national service as something that virtually all young people could engage in. To do so, he would have to change the program by driving down costs, making it more appealing to conservatives, and vastly expanding the numbers enrolled.

OK, so I was naive to think a mere memo could alter the course of a presidency. Clinton has stuck with the Peace Corps model. It is easy to think of the political hazards that made him duck this fight. Still, it's a shame. My brief insider experience convinced me that despite AmeriCorps's problems, national service has powerful potential to enhance pure volunteering—

JEFFREY MARKOWITZ—SYGMA



I was NAIVE to think a memo could alter the course of the presidency. But NATIONAL SERVICE can vastly expand the potential of occasional volunteering.

and replace the clumsiness of government bureaucracy.

I came to think that "national service" means something deeply different from either volunteer projects or normal government programs. The key is the impact of having people give one or two *years* of intense, full-time service. Compared with part-time volunteers, people in national service tend to be more reliable and have more time. But compared with government employees, they are not too "committed." They have no plans to stay in this job forever.

Time and again, I saw that the very fact that AmeriCorps members were in it for the short run—though an intense short run—gave them a completely different mindset. They were never satisfied just to tutor; they wanted to set up tutoring programs that would survive after they left. To our surprise,

we discovered that the average AmeriCorps member organized, recruited, or trained 12 unpaid volunteers.

The founder of Habitat for Humanity, Millard Fuller, had initially been wary of any involvement in AmeriCorps, for fear that entanglement with a government program would distort the religious mission of his program. But when his board of directors decided to take some AmeriCorps members, Fuller used the intense-but-limited nature of AmeriCorps's commitment to solve a particular problem. Habitat was flooded with well-meaning people who wanted to build houses on weekends; what it lacked was full-time crew leaders to organize the volunteers. AmeriCorps members helped organize the volunteers. In Miami, two dozen Habitat-AmeriCorps members coordinated and trained 5,000 unpaid volunteers.

This interaction—between pure volunteers and those working in government-subsidized service—is worth remembering as the discussions at next week's summit begin. Traditional government approaches are particularly bad at solving problems rooted in human behavior such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and violence. But we should be honest about the limits of pure volunteering, too. If many new people volunteer only to discover they are not being put to good use, the result will be not a civic awakening but a new wave of disillusionment.

Mammoth scale. National service participants can help provide the infrastructure for harnessing the energy of millions of new volunteers. The more serious the commitment to volunteering becomes, the more valuable full-time national service becomes too.

Full-time, paid national service has another advantage over occasional volunteering: It's a way for people of different classes and races to mix. From what I have seen, national service could be more effective than affirmative action in breaking down racial and economic walls. Instead of having whites serving blacks or vice versa, you have whites and blacks serving alongside each other, becoming mutually dependent. It is much more like the military—the most integrated part of American life—than is, say, a typical college.

But to realize its full potential, national service has to become bigger—mainstream, like the GI Bill, rather than exceptional, like the Peace Corps. Doing this would mean taking steps that are awkward politically but make enormous practical sense.

The first might be called the “national service buy-down.” The Republicans in Congress should offer Clinton a deal: “Well, Mr. National Service. You have so much faith in the ability of AmeriCorps to get things done. For every dollar you agree to cut from domestic spending, we'll put 50 cents of it to national service and 50 cents to deficit reduction.” The practi-

cal appeal is that national service participants, working with unpaid volunteers, could do—better—much of what government now does. For instance, it would take just \$15 million—five one-hundredths of 1 percent of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget—to place an AmeriCorps member at every Habitat site in the country to help organize volunteers.

Second, Clinton should make AmeriCorps more like the GI Bill. Under the GI Bill, the government played no direct role in how colleges operated. It simply gave veterans educational vouchers, and it let schools figure out how to accommodate them. AmeriCorps now provides support to nonprofit groups that bring on AmeriCorps members. Cut much of this out and simply give scholarships and a small living allowance to those willing to serve full time for a year solving real social problems. Instead of costing \$18,000 per member per year, as the current



Clinton has modeled national service on the PEACE CORPS. An approach based on the GI Bill would have a far greater chance of TRANSFORMING the country.

system does, this might cost the government \$5,000-\$10,000.

Finally, national service could tap an awesome resource for solving the nation's problems: senior citizens. Millions of healthy older Americans have time on their hands, a stable source of income, a great deal of experience—but not enough real purpose in their lives. Clinton and Congress ought to launch a Senior Corps on a mammoth scale.

These three ideas together would mean an army of citizens committed to significant service—20, 40, 60 hours a week—helping organize an even larger force of occasional volunteers. It would be a second GI Bill revolution, with as much potential for changing America for the good. ■

Steven Waldman is assistant managing editor for U.S. News.