

GETTING AS MUCH AS YOU GIVE

*New volunteer jobs that
get you professional experience as
well as personal satisfaction*

BY NANCY LOVE

Forget the stereotypes of the exploited suburban volunteer who stuffs envelopes or Lady Bountiful with her Thanksgiving baskets. Today's volunteer is usually already working at a paid job, and volunteers for a challenging array of jobs that can give her professional points as well as the personal satisfaction of helping her community. For the volunteer of the '80s the good news is that volunteer work is a two-way street on which she is served who also serves others.

Volunteering is one of the cornerstones of America, which was built by neighbor helping neighbor to raise barns and put out fires, to press for a living wage and for conservation of waterways, to elect political candidates and to monitor the schools. Volunteers have always been on the leading edge of social reform and providing life-sustaining services. As current federal budgetary and tax cuts throw more of the burden for supporting social welfare, arts and education programs back on the private sector, individuals will feel mounting pressure to help maintain the quality of life to which they are accustomed.

As Betty Friedan points out, "The women's movement itself is one of the greatest expressions of volunteerism. And it was the women's movement that helped transform the role of women in volunteer work."

In response to the needs of

the woman of the '80s, the volunteer world has taken giant strides toward training and using volunteer workers more efficiently, recognizing their professional contributions, offering more flexible schedules and hours, and stepping up the variety of possibilities for both service and self-fulfillment.

A volunteer team in Bozeman, Montana, staffs a battered-wives center, and in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1,200 volunteers at The Arkansas Arts Center do everything from work in the restaurant to raise funds to keep the center in business. Volunteers are lobbying Congress for funds for child welfare programs and state legislatures for pro- and anti-abortion bills. Across the country, volunteers are operating drug-counseling centers and conservation programs, fighting for the preservation of historic landmarks and to improve television programming for children.

Margaret Graham, president of the Association of Junior Leagues, says, "Volunteers are still volunteering for much the same reasons they always did—because of a

commitment to the community and to the people around them—but what the volunteer is now saying is, 'While I am giving, I would also like to be learning skills in return.'"

Barbara Johnson Bonnell, director of information for the Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management in Baltimore, credits her job as a former president of the Association of Junior Leagues with giving her the best business training she could have gotten. Sandra Probert, a Brooklyn elementary school teacher who's considering a job change, learned how to use videotape recording equipment as a volunteer for a "little theater" group. "Now that I have experience," she says, "prospective employers, like the television networks, look at me in a different way."

Private charities and public-service organizations expect to lose as much as \$27 billion over the next four years through federal budget cuts and another \$18 billion because tax cuts will give people in the upper brackets less incentive to make contributions,

according to INDEPENDENT SECTOR, a national coalition of voluntary organizations. Corporations are being flooded with pleas for money, but big business cannot singlehandedly bridge the dollar gap. One positive step corporations are taking is to support volunteerism.

Shirley Keller, director of corporate services for VOLUNTEER: The National Center for Citizen Involvement, says, "It used to be that top management was given time and encouraged to raise funds and sit on boards of charitable organizations, but now corporations are realizing the volunteer potential of their entire employee population." More and more corporations now actively recruit and educate their employees about volunteer needs, and many now credit volunteer service for hiring and promotion. Others are initiating job-release programs—matching time donated by the employee for a volunteer job, or creating opportunities for on-site work like typing for the blind on braille typewriters during downtime, even lending an employee for anywhere from one day a month to a year to give technical assistance to a nonprofit agency. This is a plus for those who work for companies they can count on for cooperation or partnership in their volunteering. It's getting to be good business for everyone to pitch in.

The government's own volunteer agency, ACTION, is going to have *(Continued)*

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to function on a reduced budget, along with everyone else, but its director, Tom Pauken, announced that he is expanding ACTION's programs anyhow because of the great need. Pauken says that as the private sector moves back toward assuming responsibility for our fellow man, each individual must have a renewed sense of that responsibility.

THE RIGHT MATCH: WHICH VOLUNTEER JOB FOR YOU?

What are my motives for volunteering?

- To improve or learn new job skills: Evaluate a volunteer job the way you would a paid one. Does it fit in with your career goals? Will you make contacts that will be helpful? Will you be given enough responsibility or training to grow?
- To help other people, perform your civic duty or effect change: Look for an organization and dedicated people on

the same wavelength as you. Is the project worthwhile? Does the paid staff really care? Are you comfortable with the policy? Will you be given the opportunity to see results?

- To meet people: What are your specific needs? Are you new in a community or stuck in a solitary job? Do you want to be exposed to people who are like or different from you? Do you want access to an insider group? To become part of a team? Do you want to meet eligible men?
- Just for fun: Ask yourself what you like that you don't seem to get the time or chance to do—outdoor activities? creative expression? What's missing in your life—children? music? What are your fantasies—getting into show biz? Becoming an activist for a cause?

What are my capabilities?

- Inventory the expertise you've acquired in all your jobs.

The volunteer world of the 80s has taken giant strides in providing an array of challenging jobs that give volunteers professional points

- Consider the untapped resources you could harness—horticultural know-how, a way with animals, speaking ability, financial smarts.

How much time should I plan on giving?

Authorities agree that it isn't the amount of time that counts so much as the regularity with which you give it. The day of the 9-to-5 volunteer is past, and agencies are trying to come up with flexible schedules and to stay open evenings to accommodate working people. Have an idea of whether you want to work weekends, evenings or daytimes and whether you want to give structured time or to be on call.

What should I find out about the job in advance?

Social-service professionals and agencies are often not prepared to cope with unpaid workers, whether they are board members or service volunteers, according to Florence S. Schwartz, Ed.D., associate professor at Hunter College School of Social Work. Dr. Schwartz says, "Volunteers have to realize that in order for their work to be successful, there has to be a commitment on the part of the agency that is hiring them." Here is her advice on points that may be important to explore in your interviews (check out several agencies if you're not sure):

- Do they keep records of the work you do and the skills

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you acquire? Documentation is necessary to apply your volunteer-work experience for credit for civil service or other jobs or for school admission.

- What kind of training, supervision and evaluation will you receive? Is there significant paid staff involvement? Will you be able to have conferences with your supervisor to get feedback?
- Find out exactly what is required of you—duties, hours, responsibilities.
- Will you have input, if you want to, at some staff meetings? What kind of impact will your job have?
- You should learn something about the climate of the agency and the attitudes of the staff you will be assigned to. Be aware that the paid professionals you will work with have their own pressures and may consider a volunteer a threat to their own job security.

If you discover you are in the wrong spot, discuss it with your supervisor and feel free to ask for a transfer or look for another job. Don't view volunteering as a failure if you don't succeed on your first try.

EXCITING NEW AREAS FOR VOLUNTEERS

What new volunteer jobs will be opening up?

Susan Ellis, volunteerism consultant, says to watch for:

- *Legislative advocacy*—More funding for the nonprofit sector will need to come from local government, so volunteers are going to be able to talk to their city council or local legislative body and have an impact.
- *Medical opportunities*—Growing cost of health care will lead to a demand for more education on how to use hospitals, preventive-medicine programs, etc. New developments, such as the hospice movement, which provides services to the dying and their families, will generate pioneering opportunities.
- *Computer control*—New advocacy groups are tackling the problems of how to prevent computer crime and protect individual privacy.
- *Space exploration*—Not a

government priority anymore, so private citizens are taking up the cause.

• *Consumer advocacy*—With the government de-emphasizing consumer protection and with money getting tighter, groups that specialize in helping people to spend their money wisely are enjoying a renaissance.

What volunteers will be in demand? Answers from experts:

- David Tobin, staff member of VOLUNTEER: The nonprofit sector appears more eager than before to use unpaid help to do the technical jobs it used to be able to pay for (legal, accounting, management, etc.). Many Voluntary Action Centers across the country are already developing "skills banks" so they will be ready with the trained professionals when requests come in from organizations.
- Dorothy Denny, executive vice president of VOLUNTEER: Organizations will be anxious to identify talented new board members who can redirect policy and raise funds.

• Susan Ellis, volunteerism consultant:

Agencies traditionally have recruited individuals; now they are starting to look for family sets—husbands and wives, parents and children. Volunteering can be a form of recreation and is a way families can spend time together doing something they enjoy. One example is a parent bringing a small child to a care facility for the elderly, for an across-the-generations visit that gives old and young ways of relating they wouldn't otherwise have.

HOW TO VOLUNTEER

Look in the phone book for a nonprofit volunteer referral service in your community, either a Voluntary Action Center or an independent volunteer bureau. If none is nearby, try a local government volunteer office or private charity, although they usually do not offer as wide a range of jobs. □

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