

SYSTEMATIC INVOLVEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS IN HUMAN SERVICES

"Systematic" was the key word under discussion at a recent conference on volunteerism and higher education, co-sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women and Adelphi University's Center on Volunteerism.

Representatives from human service faculties - education, health services, nursing, public administration and social work at nine universities in the New York metropolitan area met with volunteers and professionals from COV, NCJW and other voluntary agencies to examine issues of mutual concern. A more sophisticated, competent and motivated group of conferees would be difficult to assemble.

The National Council of Jewish Women, among the top voluntary organizations in the country, has accomplished miracles in the field of human services, both as advocates of social change and providers of direct services. Going far beyond the ever present and urgent needs of world Jewry, they have sponsored and served programs for children and youth - children in custody, day care, first offenders - the elderly, "Meals on Wheels," Retired Senior Volunteer Program - to name but a few. They have been deeply involved in the creation of many federal programs in human services. The organization's Resolutions 1979-1981 include Consumer Protection, Economic Policy, Energy and the Environment, Foreign Policy, Governmental Organization, Health and Human Services, Immigration and Naturalization, Individual Rights and Responsibilities, Israel, Jewish Concerns, Public Education, Voluntarism.

Adelphi University's Center on Volunteerism, co-sponsor of the conference, was funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to "provide a link between higher education and the volunteer community and to support volunteers and voluntary agencies -- and to upgrade the image of the volunteer." Specifically COV has accomplished the goals set forth in the grant by organizing and implementing

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training and consulting services to voluntary agencies and the line volunteer, publishing a calendar and newsletter, developing a research library and under the aegis of Adelphi's Graduate School of Art & Sciences instituting a graduate certificate program in Volunteer Management. Within its charge to "provide a link between higher education and the volunteer community" COV was a natural co-sponsor of this conference with the National Council of Jewish Women.

The dialogue was enhanced by the presence of several "directors of volunteers" from local agencies, a role that is rapidly increasing in professional self awareness and competency.

No one present questioned the importance of volunteers in all aspects of human services delivery - formulation of policy, supervision of administration, fund raising and direct services - however the questions of why, what and how obviously needed clarification and implementation.

Under the able direction of Sarah Jane Rehnberg, Director of Community & Staff Development at John J. Kane Hospital in Pittsburgh and President of the Association for Volunteer Administrators, issues were organically defined and solutions proposed.

Semantics was ever in the forefront of the discussions. What is the meaning of volunteer, noun and verb, volunteerism, voluntary and voluntarism? The academics in the human services, while vaguely aware that the product of their disciplines could not function without voluntary action, were at a loss to design curricula that would systematically train professionals to involve volunteers in their services. They were also only vaguely aware of themselves as "volunteers" in their roles as members of boards, advisory committees, and self help, social and political action groups and even as "Little League" coaches.

As the dialogue progressed through established group techniques, some

definitions and analyses were arrived at and tentatively accepted:

"A volunteer is one who chooses to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond what is necessary for one's physical well being." * The distinction between volunteer and professional was discarded. A "volunteer" is a person professional or amateur who serves without monetary profit. The functions of volunteers were analyzed as "direct service," "advocacy," "fund raising," "social action," and "self interest" but all volunteers are in a sense advocates and it was deemed vitally important that they be aware as individuals of what they are advocating.

Problems inherent in the systematic involvement of unpaid persons (volunteers) in the delivery of human services were identified and discussed throughout the sessions. Probably the most pervasive one is the relationship of the paid professional to the volunteer. First of all, do volunteers take jobs away from paid persons? Ideally they should supplement not replace paid personnel, however there are hurdles to surmount. What of the volunteer who can and does outperform staff? Who supervises whom? The director of volunteers screens, orients, supervises and evaluates the volunteer but the voluntary board has the ultimate authority to hire and fire the director! An economic crunch complicates these relationships.

Other problems discussed were the women's movement's resistance to work without pay which was largely diffused as these advocates of women's rights became aware they themselves were serving their own cause without pay; resistance by unions in the human services who should be involved in dialogues about volunteerism and made aware that volunteers are present to make the task of serving the community easier and more effective. It was agreed that a program similar to the corporate volunteer movement might be

* "By the People" - Susan Ellis

developed with the unions.

Participants concluded that the role of government in the human services should not be abrogated but rather supplemented by voluntary agencies. As government funding for needed human service programs shrinks the need for unpaid services increases, but this should not provide a cop out for the public sector.

The place of self help, political and social action groups and students in the voluntary sector was discussed. Since the goals of these people are basically self serving it is a question whether the gains they receive, though not monetary, preclude their membership in the voluntary sector.

The demography of volunteerism was analyzed and changing trends noted. The "lady bountiful" image is dead. More than half of all persons who volunteer are also employed. More young persons, men and retired persons volunteer. Volunteers are more aware of their catalytic role, are often task and problem oriented and are considered by some as "the cutting edge of social change." Volunteering is more often used as a stepping stone to paid employment. Many voluntary organizations function effectively without any paid professional supervision.

A study done by "Action," in 1974 suggested that $\frac{1}{2}$ of the population over the age of thirteen was involved in some kind of volunteer work, at least 37 million people. 40% of the volunteers were men; volunteers came from every socio-economic bracket and every race, color and creed; 50% were involved in religious work of some kind or another. If paid volunteer services would be worth the equivalent of $3\frac{1}{2}$ million persons employed in full time jobs each year in service providing institutions, equalling 245 million man hours of service per week.

The dollar value of the volunteer contribution in 1974 was estimated

to be 33.9 billion dollars, approximately 6% of the social service sector's gross national product.

Not only do volunteers give time; they are also involved in fund raising, and they provide funds. In 1974, again, 79% of the contributions to philanthropies came from individual contributions. That is about 25 or 26 billion dollars.

As the sessions progressed it became clear to the representatives from the academic world that there is indeed a job to be done in developing curricula setting out means of systematically involving volunteers in the delivery of human services.

Among the solutions that evolved during the latter portion of the conference "team work" seemed to be the key concept to the challenge of "systematic involvement." Curricula must be developed to instruct students about the "voluntarism" defined as "acts freely performed, encompassing the philosophy of that kind of activity, and often accompanying the institutional perspective," and "volunteerism" "the experience of persons giving freely of their time," and the potential role of the individual volunteer in their particular service. Persons planning a paid professional role should learn to relate to volunteers as members of a team effort and not as rivals or threats in terms of performance and effectiveness or as "cheap labor." They should be aware that volunteers can "enrich" their professional function not replace it. Very often volunteer activity creates needs for additional professional slots.

To begin at the beginning, participants concluded that our present "ME" generation need "education for giving" beginning, of course, at home but continued formally through volunteer activities in the elementary school curriculum supervised by elementary classroom teachers. Students need to grow up valuing volunteering, as individuals as well as future paid professionals.

On the university level, it was recommended that in-service training in the concepts of voluntarism, volunteerism and the role of volunteering in the total community be mandated for department heads in the helping professions; that a statement on volunteering be drafted for the edification of higher education administrators at all levels. It was felt that human services faculty should be made aware of their own roles as volunteers and that voluntary activity be a factor in their selection and retention. Students should be encouraged to volunteer, if possible, in addition to their in-service credit activities; to give of themselves.

Volunteerism should be part of all course content in the helping professions but, in addition, specific lectures, courses and certificate programs should be designed around the topic. The political structure and economic status of the university must be considered during the promotion of such an innovative curriculum.

In the social work area it was recommended that course content on volunteerism be included throughout the curriculum; that field work supervision be oriented toward productive cooperation with volunteers, including an understanding of the volunteers role as free advocates and social problem solvers. Everyone involved in social change as professionals, teachers, social workers, medically and legally trained personnel must be aware of the vast, and potentially productive "people power" of volunteers and harness it for the good of the social order.

It was agreed that future dialogues with higher education faculty and administration include representatives from schools of law, library, criminal justice, and cultural institution administrations.

The conference concluded on a stirring note when a nationally known director of a voluntary action center stated conclusively that our very

"national survival" depends on volunteerism..."we the people..."

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