

MANAGEMENT ISSUES in the YOUTH SERVICE



A contribution to the Youth Service Review

From: The Management and Resources Project Support Group
(Young Volunteer Resources Unit)
National Youth Bureau
17-23 Albion Street
Leicester LE1 6GD.

Contribution to the Youth Service Review

PROFILE: MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN THE YOUTH SERVICE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The concern of this paper is to raise management issues for the Youth Service field. There is no attempt to provide 'answers' to the questions posed. Though there are principles of 'good practice' which apply to each of the areas covered, so little consideration has been given to this field that there is room for new, creative responses.
- 1.2 The four issues raised, though they refer to internal management issues are actually principles for intervention in the community by Youth Work agencies. It is argued, therefore, that those principles should be applied to the workings of home base - the agency's management.
- 1.3 There is little use in placing resources in new exciting innovative programmes if the foundations of agencies are either unable to cope or ill-equipped to cope. Due attention and resources must be given to the development of the agencies themselves.
- 1.4 Similarly resources must be made available, upon which agencies can draw for advice. There are few specialised voluntary agency management consultancy services available. Yet many field or development officers of national support agencies spend a large amount of time on management issues.

2. The Management and Resources Project

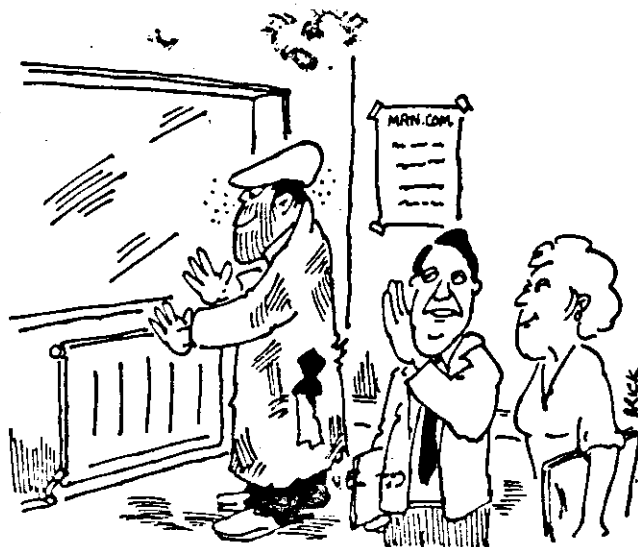
- 2.1 This project was established by the National Working Party of Young Volunteer Organisers and the Young Volunteer Resources Unit. It commenced in December 1980. It is an 18 month project seeking to raise the standards of management in Youth Action and Young Volunteer agencies. Appendix I provides more detailed information.
- 2.2 The Support Group consists of:

Chair: Marjory Hester (Youth Officer: Buckinghamshire)
Rachel Carmichael (General Secretary: Leicestershire C.V.S)
Sarah Chisholm (Youth Action Cambridge)
Kate Hansford (Birmingham Young Volunteers)
Jenny Hill (Training Officer: N.C.V.O)
Rick Kelshaw (Manager: Delta Metals Manchester)
David Stead (Deputy Director: N.C.V.Y.S)
Neville Cheetham (Head of Unit: Y.V.R.U, NYB)

Project Officer: Warren Feek (Y.V.R.U, NYB).

3. The Attitude to Management

- 3.1 Management tasks are seen as both separate and threatening to the worker in a youth work agency. This produces a set of priorities for work which gives the performance of management tasks a low position.
- 3.2 That set of roles could be looked at as follows:
- (a) The primary concern of workers is their target/client group of participants. Effective use of time is often assessed by the proportion spent in actual contact with that group. The higher the better.
 - (b) Other highly rated work tasks include the creation of community contacts, training events and contact with other workers.
 - (c) Lowly rated as priorities are working with management committees, staff supervision (either supervising or being supervised); adequate budgeting, good planning, funding applications. These are seen as interfering with the primary focus of the work.
- 3.3 This attitude needs changing. Unless those tasks outlined in (c) are performed competently, the changes of operating efficient and effective face-to-face contact are slim. The maintenance of the agency (funding), the support workers (supervision), a broad community based decision-making process (management committees) the selection and planned approach towards groups (planning) and a strategy for the use of resources (budgeting) are essential for the conduct of any good agency.



NOBODY KNOWS HOW HE GOT ON, BUT HE'S NEVER
MISSED A MEETING

4. The Relationship between Agency Objectives and Management Style

- 4.1 There is clearly an important relationship between the way in which an agency conducts itself and the objectives or goals it supports for the community it is involved with. The following four points outline the key areas in which the agency attitude and its performance are inconsistent.

4.2 Community Involvement

- 4.2.1 Most, if not all community based youth work agencies have, as one of their key objectives the involvement of the community in gaining more control over their own living situation. The manifestation of that community in an agency is their involvement in the decision-making process - the executive committee, board of directors or management community.
- 4.2.2 But many workers have a negative attitude towards such a group often regarding them as a necessary evil. The feeling tends to be that though it provides legitimacy for the agency the management committee tends to disrupt the valuable work workers could be doing if they didn't have to service them.
- 4.2.3 This is a serious inconsistency as it derives what is being espoused as being good for the community (involvement in decision-making) by the agency is not good for the agency itself. This also places the worker, the 'professional' with the vested interest, in the position of making the major policy or programme decisions. The element of community responsiveness, from which the agency was probably born, has been lost.

4.3 People Centred

- 4.3.1 The major concern of the agency is the development of the individuals, groups and communities with whom it works. The type of development encouraged will depend on the agency's approach and its particular philosophy.
- 4.3.2 Yet the needs of the staff employed by agencies either as individuals or in a group are often ignored. This also applies to volunteers both at administrative and practice levels, however, the treatment of staff is, in this case, central. There is little to be seen in the way of appraisal or supervision, a planned approach to training and effective use of staff team meetings.
- 4.3.3 This contributes to high staff turnover, long hours, lack of training and development opportunities and exploitation. It is inconsistent with an agency looking to improve the 'lot' of the people with whom it is working.

4.4 Involvement of Young People

4.4.1 Agencies particularly in the youth sector, are concerned that within the communities in which they live young people are not given the opportunity, the encouragement or the appropriate incentive to become involved in the decision-making process. This is considered serious as a large percentage of the population is young and many of the decisions which adults make directly affect young people. There is also an, often unwritten, assumption in this argument that should young people begin making decisions, their decisions would be different.

4.4.2 The performance of youth agencies in this area is not good. Firstly, there is confusion as to why young people are being involved. Is it to give experience which will provide a useful training or development exercise helpful in later life? Or is it because young people are the most appropriate people to be involved in making the decision?

Secondly, in looking to recruit members for a management committee workers follow the traditional line of going for important, influential people in the community and to balance that with a group of their (the workers) peers with whom they feel comfortable.

Thirdly, there is the similar problem to that discussed when looking at community involvement. The recruitment and development of a strong well supported group of young people to make important decisions about an agency or project's operation or development is a direct threat to the perceived freedom of the worker. It would involve the worker working to a set of objectives or strategies designed by a community group, in this case young people.

4.4.3 This is an important management issue. The failure of many agencies to begin a programme of increasing the role of young people in decision-making within the agency, both weakens that agency, including its performance, and fails to provide the lead or model from which other community institutions can learn.

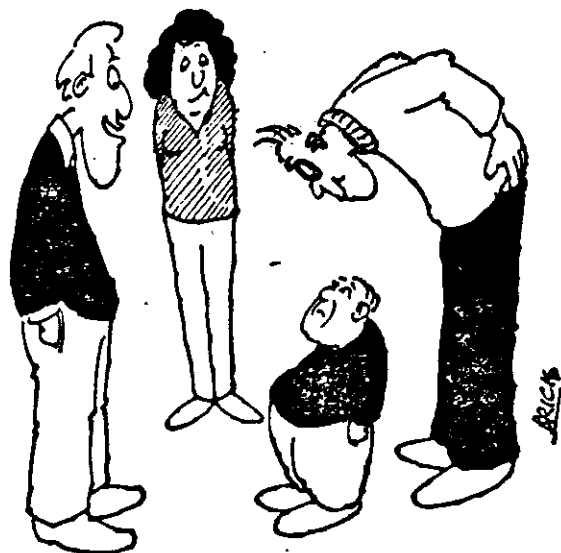
4.5.1 Virtually all agencies claim that they are attempting to make a significant contribution to the positive development of the communities within which they work. It is felt important that these communities do change in order to remedy injustices or conflicts within their ranks. This demands a reasonably clear idea of the problems being confronted, to what state or position you are aiming, the appropriate project, programme or method for achieving that and resources needed to carry out that strategy.

4.5.2 Though asking for, promoting and offering assistance to communities to be involved in that process the agency itself is often suffering from the lack of a clear direction; poor identification to the problem to be confronted; inappropriate or haphazard development of actual programmes and bad allocation of resources. In addition the philosophies on which they are based and on which they justify their intervention tend to be centred on individuals in an agency, not as a well defined agency perspective or approach.

There is poor agency planning. Its intervention and the grounds on which that takes place are not well spelt out in an agency philosophy.

4.5.3 Again the implication is that the agency is making demands on the community that it is itself not beginning to address.

There is poor agency planning. Its intervention and the grounds on which that takes place are not well spelt out in an agency philosophy.



WE'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO BALANCE
OUT THE TEAM

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The above issues are major ones. However, they do provide a relevant perspective through which to view the management difficulties of agencies in this field.
- 5.2 Though not wishing to prejudge some of the responses different agencies may develop in relation to these problems some key skill areas can be identified. For example skills in developing and supporting a management committee as one response to community involvement. Or, as a further step on from that developing community forums which can raise issues of interest and direct agency resources towards helping to meet them.
- 5.3 There is a need for more attention to be given to this vital area.

Warren Feek, Management and Resources Project, is producing the following booklets which will be available May/June 1982.

Management Committees

Funding - The Applicant's Perspective

Funding - The Funding Agency's View

Staff Teams

Individual Staff Development

Management Issues