

A HISTORY OF VOLUNTEERISM IN JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Volunteerism in juvenile and criminal justice is certainly not new. In fact, the concept is very old. One of the early volunteers in history was a Greek by the name of Damon who volunteered his time to his friend Pythias many centuries ago. Pythias had been thrown in prison and was about to be executed. His friend, Damon, knowing Pythias wanted to say goodbye to his family, volunteered to take his place so Pythias could go home and visit his family. Thus, Damon is among the earliest volunteers in criminal justice. The King was deeply touched by the friendship of Damon and Pythias. He arranged for Pythias release and pardon with one condition, that they tell the King the secret of their deep and abiding friendship. Thus, volunteers in juvenile and criminal justice goes back to antiquity.

In 1841, a cobbler by the name of John Augustus became appalled by the steady flow of repeat offenders through the lower court in Boston. He thought of a new way to work with offenders. John Augustus persuaded the judge to refer a few of the misdemeanants to him instead of putting them in jail. Augustus assured the judge he would report to the court routinely and if the apprehended offenders were not doing well he would return them to the court for punishment. Thus, a new idea was born which we now call probation and the first probation officer in history was a volunteer. Although probation became professional and utilized professional probation officers thereafter, there has probably never been a time since 1841 and even before then that courts did not use volunteers from time to time. In fact the Philadelphia Society has done volunteer work in criminal justice for nearly 200 years. Thus, there should be no claim that juvenile and criminal justice volunteerism is a concept which was born in the 1950's. We have had volunteers for many years and probably seldom, if ever, in our history were no volunteers involved in criminal justice.

In 1959 the City of Royal Oak, Michigan began utilizing volunteers. Perhaps the unique thing about the use of volunteers in the Royal Oak Municipal Court (Adult Misdemeanant) was the extent and importance of volunteers to the total program. A famous football coach once said, "Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing." This was the situation with the use of volunteers in the Royal Oak Court. Volunteers were not everything, they were the only thing.

In 1961 the Juvenile Court in Boulder, Colorado began to utilize volunteers. Perhaps Boulder's unique contribution to criminal and juvenile justice volunteerism was the introduction of the use of volunteers as a major part of a court rehabilitative service where professional probation officers were already involved. Thus, in Boulder, volunteers became a major part of the program and not a minor or mere supplemental addition.

Growing out of the Royal Oak and Boulder experiences, some new and unique developments began and expanded. First, an article in the Reader's Digest about Royal Oak in 1965 and again in 1968 resulted in about 6,000 inquiries. All were personally answered, by volunteers of course. In 1965 Royal Oak received a grant from the national office of the Methodist Church to disseminate the concept nationally. And in the same year, Royal Oak was awarded a five year research grant which clearly established the fact that when volunteers and professionals (volunteer professionals in the case of Royal Oak) work together, recidivism was greatly reduced, attitudes were significantly improved and behavior changed. Why? Volunteers helped professionals expand services from 3 minutes up to 12 hours a month.

In 1967, Boulder convened a nation-wide gathering of courts using volunteers. A total of 25 courts attended. These were all the courts using volunteers Boulder and Royal Oak could locate.

As a result of the volunteer program in Boulder and Royal Oak, two national organizations evolved. The National Information Center on Volunteers in Courts (NICOVIC) and Project Misdemeanant which later became Volunteers in Probation, Inc. (VIP). NICOVIC, in Boulder, later became the National Information Center on Volunteers (NICOV). Ultimately it merged with the National Center for Voluntary Action into Volunteers! National Center for Citizen Involvement. VIP merged with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency in 1972 and reverted to its independent status in 1983. Both organizations supplied information, inspiration and implementation techniques to the nation. We believe these were the first national organizations ever developed and maintained solely and exclusively to disseminate, expand, enhance and improve the concept of the use of volunteers in juvenile and criminal justice, concentrating on direct service volunteerism.

In 1970, VIP convened the first large national forum for volunteers in juvenile and criminal justice which included prevention, jails, prisons, parole and juvenile institutions as well as court programs. Five hundred conferees gathered in Detroit for the historic conference. VIP continued to present annual forums until 1977. Growing out of the national forums, a new organization evolved called the National Association on Volunteers in Criminal Justice (NAVVCJ). NAVVCJ had the prime responsibility for the national forums in the late 1970's and accepted sole responsibility for the national forums thereafter.

VIP also developed and circulated a national newspaper, the VIP EXAMINER, which ultimately had a circulation of about 40,000. A volunteer editor made the newspaper possible. NAVVCJ accepted responsibility for the publication of the newspaper in 1980.

VIP also developed a national academic center at the University of Alabama, which office became the headquarters for NAVVCJ in 1980. VIP developed a series of 34 hours of audio-visual TV cassettes which are located in 60 centers throughout the country and produced a series of teaching-training module booklets for colleges and practitioners.

NICOV developed numerous excellent publications and gave technical assistance to many programs. NICOV also developed a State Desk which gave much valuable assistance to state directors of volunteer programs.

From 1959 through 1982, VIP consulted with local, state, regional and national programs over 2,000 times. NICOV probably matched this number of technical assistance consultations.

In 1979, VIP conducted a national survey and identified an estimated 500,000 volunteers involved in about 5,000 courts, jails, prisons, juvenile institutions, prevention, diversion, probation and parole programs. (Estimate based upon scientific projection of programs actually identified).

This has been some of the labors of the volunteer movement over the past 25 years. There are so many unrecognized people who have contributed to the volunteer movement. In this 25th year, VIP is proud to join our President, former living Presidents, Dr. Ivan Scheier (NICOV) and Robert Moffitt (Co-Founder and Past President of NAVVCJ, now director of HARVEST, a third world program) by recognizing the professionals and the extraordinary volunteers who have made this national movement possible.

This is a history of the past 25 years. Thousands of others could write a very different history of the volunteer movement. We hope many will do so and thus enhance our future, by preserving our past.

Gratefully and Sincerely,
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