

## Are Stepping Forward

# Volunteers Now Are Getting Choosier

By EFTHALIA WALSH

When President Carter or his representative hands out the national Volunteer Activist Awards in Washington this Thursday, during National Volunteer Week, he will encounter a new phenomenon. Volunteers and volunteering have changed. The recipients will fit neither the lady bountiful stereotype nor the familiar den mother-church worker mold. Today's volunteers are more sophisticated, more professional, more oriented to advocacy — and fewer in number.

"Voluntarism," says a recently published study by Gordon Manser, former president of the National Assembly for Social Policy and Development, and Rosemary Cass, "is at a crossroads and in an agony of transition through which it must pass."

The decline in volunteers, which began in the mid-1970s, is impossible to document with statistics, and spokesmen for most voluntary agencies deny it for fear of making matters worse, but it is a fact nonetheless.

The biggest drop, experienced volunteers say, is in the number of white, educated, middle-class women, who did most volunteer work in the past. Some former women volunteers are now in school or working.

"For a while there, volunteering was almost a dirty word," says a paid coordinator of volunteers for Head Start. "It's not so bad now, but many women still feel guilty about volunteering; it's no longer as socially acceptable as it was."

One contributing factor is the radicalizing effect of the resolutions against volunteering that were passed in 1971 and then again in 1974 by the National Organization for Women.

"We were concerned for the exploitation of women," Sandra Porter of NOW says, "and traditional social service volunteering can be exploitive."

NOW's position has been somewhat modified, and any volunteering that has to do with social change is considered acceptable. "But," Miss Porter says, "women must have a goal they understand and be working toward that goal by volunteering."

The religious sphere has been particularly affected by the reduced number of women volunteers.

Catholic University sociologist Dean Hoge reports that at a meeting of religious educators two weeks ago at the



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A volunteer checks blood pressure in New York City "health fair."

Yale Divinity School, "They were shedding a tear about getting Sunday school teachers. The housewife types are not as available as they used to be." Representatives of the National Council of Jewish Women, Church Women United, and the Lutheran Council of the United States are also reported to be seriously concerned about volunteer recruiting.

Ruth C. Clausen, president of the League of Women Voters, puts the situation in dramatic terms. The leadership of the organization, which has traditionally relied mostly on volunteers, is now "an endangered species," she says. The league has had a drop of 5,000 to 6,000 in membership during the past year, although "the national board and staff devoted a great deal of attention to membership growth."

The experience of the nation's museums, where volunteer workers make up 57 percent of the 100,000-person work force, appears fairly typical.

"We've seen a shift to more students, men and retired people to fill the gap left by women," says Lee Kimche, museum services director for the Federal Government.

The Veterans Administration, which keeps detailed records of its 53,000 unpaid helpers, also reports that the average age of volunteers is increasing. And according to Helen Kelley, director of the six-year-old Federal Older American Volunteer Program, 250,000 men and women are working in the Retired

Senior Volunteer Program in 692 projects across the country.

Student volunteering is also on the rise. Jeanne Carney, director of ACTION's National Student Volunteer Program, which collects information and gives training and technical assistance, estimates that at least 500,000 high school and college students are taking part in volunteer activities. Educators, she says, have recognized the educational and growth value of volunteer experiences. As a result, more and more colleges are offering structured internship programs, although critics ask whether a student is volunteering if he receives college credit for his efforts.

Observers of school, church and political organizations note a change from longterm volunteer commitments to transitional, shorter-term, even one-time volunteer efforts.

There is also a new kind of advocacy volunteering. Diane Epstein, president of the 2,200-member Walt Whitman High School Parents-Teachers-Students Association in Bethesda, Md., spends up to one-third of her 40-hour volunteer week preparing testimony for court cases of various kinds and working on other advocacy-related activities. At least ten other volunteer members are involved in some form of advisory or advocacy work.

Fierce competition among agencies has resulted from the shortage of volun-

teers as well as from increased demand for volunteer services.

To attract new volunteers, many agencies are now using a variety of marketing techniques. And since self-interest is said to be one of the volunteer's chief motives in volunteering these days, agencies are encouraged to view it positively. Volunteer coordinators are instructed to give volunteers what they want, which is often to polish up skills so they can look for paid jobs. Agencies are advised to design programs that provide training, supervision and detailed job descriptions, and to give volunteers thanks, recognition and letters of recommendation. Volunteers are to be utilized, not used.

Another recent phenomenon is the growth in the number of organizations to encourage volunteering. One of these, the National Voluntary Action Center, recruits volunteers for more than 36,000 agencies and has sponsored 10,000 workshops and training sessions at local centers supported by public and private funds.

The national group also sponsors the Volunteer Activist Awards, which this week will go to five groups and four individuals. The groups are being recognized for work in such areas as child abuse prevention, planning for school desegregation, lobbying for support for a children's psychiatric treatment center, advocacy for rural education, and organizing adolescents who assist homebound elderly. The individuals due to receive awards include a retired social worker who runs a program serving the wives and families of imprisoned men, and a sociology professor who works with battered and homeless women. Awards are also scheduled to go to a deaf woman who serves as an advocate for the deaf and to a psychiatrist who volunteers his service to poor people.

Those familiar with the general volunteer picture believe that a currently fashionable "me-first" attitude is partly responsible for the declining numbers of volunteers and for a lessening of the selflessness that long marked the unpaid efforts of Americans.

"That the vital spark of volunteerism should be allowed to flicker or to be extinguished seems unthinkable, and yet there is disquieting evidence that this is precisely what is happening," Mr. Manser and Miss Cass said in their study. Volunteer advocates, however, say that helping thy neighbor has long been the American way, and that only a cynic would claim this was changing.

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