Recruiting and Training Retired Adults as Volunteers: An Israeli Experience

Elhanan Marvit, ACSW

In Israel, the pressure of a six-day work week, the demands of daily living and the struggle to meet inflation and high prices prevent most adults from developing and engaging in leisure time activities during their work years. Thus, the retired adult is left with no basis upon which to build and create purposeful and self-fulfilling use of his/her time in retirement.

Voluntary mutual assistance has deep roots in the Jewish tradition as exemplified throughout Jewish history. The Talmud sums up this concept in its well-known verse: "All Israel is responsible one for another." This tradition was expressed by the way in which the Yishuv (the state of Israel before independence) attempted to meet the needs of its populace.

The mass immigration which followed the establishment of an independent state necessitated the new government's assuming responsibility for many of the previously voluntary functions of the Yishuv. Formerly voluntary functions such as the Army, the educational system and the social service network were integrated into the public sector. Greenberg sums up this process as well as some of its side effects:

> Independence and subsequent government assumption of responsibility for most of what had previously been handled voluntarily and informally contributed to the

far-reaching changes in the social climate in the early years of the state. Communal involvement waned to the point where volunteerism became difficult to promote at all.[1]

The most pressing need of the new state was to provide its thousands of immigrants with shelter, food and work. Cultural values such as mutual voluntary assistance had, by necessity, to be relegated to second place and seemingly got lost in the shuffle. But in the early 1970's, the confluence of several social phenomena created the need to return to those previously held values of voluntary assistance. Among these social phenomena was a search for new solutions. It was felt that pre-state Zionism could no longer answer the needs created by the new values and symbols of the 1970's.

The Yom Kippur War in October, 1973 forced a re-evaluation of the current solutions to existing problems. Moreover, the war created a spontaneous outburst of volunteering in proportions that resulted in many being turned away from hospitals and other facilities. In order to tap this wellspring of volunteer activity, several governmental bodies formed volunteer bureaus on local and national levels.

Concomitant with the felt need to return to the previously held values of volunteerism, the number of those eligible to receive services grew, and

Elhanan Marvit, ACSW, CSW, has worked with retired adult volunteers for the past ten years both in Israel and in the United States. He has worked in an advisory and leadership capacity in volunteer agencies, has worked directly as a volunteer in various programs, and has administered voluntary programs in Israel as their director. He currently works for Eshel as National Director of their Shelter Housing Program.

the range of social problems widened. Simultaneously, extreme budgetary pressures forced cutbacks in the network's personnel. Those professional personnel who remained proved to be insufficient in numbers to meet the new needs. This dilemma continues until today, and projections indicate that the fundamental social changes which led to increased need will continue unless new and innovative solutions can be found.

The "non-traditional" volunteer--the trained retired adult--is being utilized to bridge the gap between the need to provide increased social services and a time of retrenchment of professional staff. It must be noted that these volunteers are not viewed as substitutes, but rather as supplements to existing social service personnel.

The Yishuv which developed in the late 19th century and which existed until May, 1948, was characterized by a young and vital population. This demographic phenomenon is understandable when one considers that the Halutzim (pioneers) left their elders in order to rebuild Palestine through the Zionist ideology of a "religion of labor." This ideology did not concern itself with one's elder years and resulted in the alienation of the pioneer's elders.

From the 1880's until 1948, the percentage of the aged in the population remained constant at approximately 3%. Moreover, these few aged were concentrated in the already established "holy towns." They were by no means associated with the Halutzim, whose aim was to build a country.

At the time of the establishment of the state in 1948 only 3.8% of the population was aged. Today, in slightly over three decades, the proportion of elderly has risen to almost 9% of the total population. Present projections indicate that at the turn of the century, over 10% of the population will be aged. Consequently, the proportion of elderly in Israel's population is expected to almost triple in 50 years.

The graying of Israel's population is due to a decrease in the birthrate, an increase in the life span and an influx of upper middle-aged and elderly immigrants during the first few years of statehood.

One may view the retired adult's thrust toward volunteer activity as an attempt to quiet the ever-increasingly loud "whispers of mortality." As Marshall observed when discussing this stage of life,

> With aging comes recognition that time is running out. Life, which has so often been viewed as a preparation for something to come, becomes preparation for dying and death itself. No future lies beyond the passage.[2]

By adopting the role of volunteer one is showing concern for "the other." One transcends a concern about one's own future and now becomes part of something larger: the group's continuation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature on the retired adult as a volunteer, training volunteers and training retired adults as volunteers is based on North American experience. However, it does have relevance to the Israeli program under discussion.

Volunteers are defined as "individuals who freely contribute their services without remuneration, to public or voluntary organizations engaged in all types of social welfare."[3] A recent survey in Israel found that 10% of retired adults engage in voluntary activity.[4] Perry views the retired adult as a vastly neglected source of volunteer personnel. Bowles views voluntary mutual assistance as breaking society's stereotype of the retired adult as a service consumer by substituting for it the role of service provider. Instead of retiring into a "roleless role," voluntary activity affords the retired adult a functional, prestigious role--that of volunteer. Sainer and Zander discuss voluntary activity as a buffer against role losses.

Retired adult volunteers were found to feel more useful, to be more satisfied with life and to exhibit few symptoms of depression and anxiety. In other words, voluntary activity enhanced life satisfaction.[5]

Bailey and Crage found that skills similar to those needed by the volunteers of this program could be enhanced through short-term training. Moreover, Avery found that trained volunteers maintained their skills over time. The Potter-Effrons discuss the value of volunteer training in terms of volunteers' increased reliability, commitment and skills. As a result, the volunteers become more valuable to the agency. Freeman sees training volunteers as a means of delivering services more efficiently.

Research suggests that many retired adults possess the interpersonal and learning skills necessary to benefit from training.[6] Trained retired adults could be equally as effective in group counselling situations[7] as in peer group counseling situations.[8] Rosenblatt, in his pioneering study, found that training enhanced the ability of the retired adult to deliver the service. Cowan, Leibowitz and Leibowitz found that by utilizing trained retired adults, both the client group and the volunteers benefitted. Shephard and Valla found that the learning which took place in Project V-Strap increased the motivation of the retired adult to become involved in community affairs.

In summary, a review of the literature indicates that volunteerism serves an important function for the retired adult. Moreover, training--if done effectively--can help the agencies, the clients and the volunteers themselves.

THE PENSIONERS' VOLUNTEER PROJECT

The Department of Continuing Education of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Volunteer Bureau of the Department of Family and Children's Services of the Jerusalem Municipality embarked on a cooperative venture: "The Pensioners' Volunteer Project (Proyect Gimlayim Mitnadvim)." The purpose of this project was to train recently retired adults to serve as volunteers in Jerusalem's social service network.

In order to actualize this project, a program director was hired. His role included:

(1) Identifying sources of potential recruitment.

(2) Recruiting recently retired adults.

(3) Interviewing all retired adults individually upon their application to the program, to determine their suitability for the program.

(4) Training the participants in cooperation with the Hebrew University.

(5) Following up on absences and dealing with personal concerns of the volunteers.

Recruitment

Our recruitment goal was to interest qualified individuals in applying for entry into our program. Our method of interesting applicants was to provide a university-level training course which would challenge our applicants' desire for learning.

The admission criteria utilized were that the individual be:

(1) recently retired (within the past 2-3 years);

(2) able to form non-judgmental, supportive relationships with individuals of varied cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds;

(3) open to new learning experiences;

(4) committed to volunteering 6-8 hours weekly.

Our first task in the recruitment process was to identify sources that would yield those individuals we had identified as the "target population." Such sources included Senior Centers, the Pensioners Association, and the Hebrew University's Adult Education Center. Of the 55 individuals who enrolled in the course, we re-

cruited 18 from the various Senior Centers, 10 from the Pensioners' Association and 9 from the Hebrew University.

The next step in recruitment was the applicants' individual interviews with the project director. Each interview had two purposes: the applicant was presented with an opportunity to "think through" his or her decision, and the director ascertained the individual's appropriateness for involvement in the program.

Demographic Data

An analysis of our recruitment efforts revealed that we recruited a higher proportion of relatively young (average age 62) native-born Israeli women with a high school diploma than exists in the general elderly population. Most of the members of this group had never volunteered prior to this experience.

When asked why they had never volunteered before, the answers were variations on the same theme: too busy with day-to-day chores to volunteer. One project member summed this up poignantly by saying: "It's my time now."

Of the 55 individuals who began the course in early February 1983, 35 completed the course successfully in May (i.e., received certificates). Most of the individuals who did not complete the course "dropped out" within the first three weeks. The reasons given ranged from illness to family responsibilities. Several of the volunteers left the program to return to work. One of the main reasons given for "dropping out" was the location of the course. Despite strenuous objections from the Municipality, the training was conducted in a particularly inaccessible location, at the Mount Scopus campus of the University.

Training

The purpose of the training component of the project was to train effective volunteers by:
(1) providing knowledge of existing welfare and social services in the community;
(2) providing training and skills in the area of human relations and interpersonal communications;
(3) providing information on the role of the volunteer.

The first training goal was achieved through the didactic method (i.e., lectures). These lectures were delivered by university-affiliated staff or by outside consultants for 1½ hours. Among the topics covered were:
- how to give help
- welfare services in Israel (2 sessions)
- the volunteer's role in the service delivery system
- volunteering with special populations (the aged, the blind, children, the developmentally disabled, the mentally ill, and youth)
- work with individuals (2 sessions)
- work with groups
- work in the community
- the volunteer and the professional

In order to provide training in interpersonal communications as well as on the role of the volunteer, the participants were divided into 3 small groups of 15 to 18 members each. The program director divided the participants into these groups on the basis of their education and prior volunteering experience. Each small group met for 1½ hours. While each group followed the same curriculum, each was led by a member of different human services professions-- one by a social worker, one by a psychologist and one by a small group facilitator.

Among the topics covered were:
(1) helping
    (a) how to give help
    (b) confidentiality
(2) problem-solving
(3) listening
    (a) latent communication
    (b) manifest communication
    (c) small group listening exercises

(4) the role of the volunteer
    (a) in the setting
    (b) relationship with the professional

Much of the above material was related through the use of role-playing and small group interactive methods.

An integrative seminar enabled the program's participants to integrate the didactic section with the small group experiental section. The seminar was led for one hour at the end of every meeting day by the program director. Several different teaching methods were used in this seminar, such as small group sensitivity exercises, discussion and some didactic techniques. This seminar also served as a forum for obtaining the volunteers' feedback and working through any problems.

Further, the volunteers were invited to participate in a national conference on volunteering co-sponsored by the Prime Minister's Office and the Hebrew University. This experience was seen as an aspect of the volunteers' training as well as a means of extending recognition of the retired adult volunteers' services.

Upon completion of the course, each of the volunteers received a certificate from the Mayor of Jerusalem. His signature was also on the certificate itself. The Mayor spoke of the importance of volunteering to the social fabric of Jerusalem. By inviting and involving the Mayor, it was felt that the volunteers received a high degree of recognition and thanks from the community at large for participating in the program. According to the literature, community recognition is an integral aspect of a retired adult volunteer program.

The group approach (as outlined by Sainer and Zander in their seminal article) was central to our recruitment and training efforts. It was found that recruiting retired adults from already existent groups was the most successful method.

The volunteers were offered an experience they could share with their peer group. We offered a new "reference group" for the retired adult--a group of retired adults undergoing "retirement shock" (loss of roles, diminished social contacts and the burden of leisure time).

Our training efforts likewise utilized a group approach. Our integrative seminar and small group building exercises focussed on peer group learning.

Because the program involved existing resources (i.e., the Volunteer Bureau of the Jerusalem Municipality for recruiting staff and placement, and the Hebrew University School of Social Work for training), the program's cost was kept low.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

We have attempted to show how the parties to this social transaction benefitted: the retired adult, by being provided with the valuable and socially sanctioned role of the trained volunteer, and society, by gaining additional staff to help meet the needs of those less fortunate.

Israel is currently undergoing a rebirth of voluntary activity as well as an awakening to the needs of the retired adults in its population. This program has attempted to meet both needs.

It is our hope that this program will serve both as an example and a catalyst in the facilitating of similar programs in Israel and elsewhere.

FOOTNOTES

[1]*Harold I. Greenberg, Israeli Social Problems in Perspective, Dekel Academic Press, Tel-Aviv, 1979, p. 91.*

[2]*Victor W. Marshall, "No Exit! A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Aging," International Journal of Aging and Development, Volume 9, Number 4, 1978-79, 345-358.*

[3]*Violet Seider and Doris Kirschbaum, "Volunteers," Encyclopedia of Social Work, National Association of*

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[4]Shimon Bergman and Rachel Bar-Zuri, The Retired Person (Ha-adam B'Gimla-oot), The Center for Planned Retirement, Clerical Workers' Federation (HeHistradut Hapkidim), Tel Aviv, 1980. (in Hebrew)

[5]Abraham Monk and Arthur G. Cryns, "Predictors of Voluntaristic Intent Among the Aged," Gerontologist, Volume 14, Number 5, 1974, 425-429.

[6]G. Labouie-Vief, "Toward Optimizing Cognitive Competence in Later Life," Educational Gerontology, Volume 1, 1976, 157-170.

[7]E. Waters, S. Fink, and B. White, "Peer Group Counselling for Older People," Educational Gerontology, Volume 1, 1976, 157-170.

[8]Françoise Becker and Steven H. Zarit, "Training Older Adults as Peer Counsellors," Educational Gerontology, Volume 3, Number 3, July-September, 1978, 241-250.

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