ABSTRACT

Social work began as the work of volunteers and over time evolved into the professional function that we know today. This article describes the initial role of volunteers in providing needed social services and the reasons for their eventual estrangement from professional social workers. It is suggested that prevailing historical and organizational forces in the twentieth century made this separation virtually inevitable. It is recommended that social workers and volunteers develop a new way to reconnect and renew a vigorous partnership in the twenty-first century.

Social Work and Volunteers: A Case of Shifting Paradigms

Jean Lafrance, Ph.D.

Mary Richmond was a volunteer who became one of the founders of modern social work. She played a key role in its growth as a profession and in the development of social work education. She was one of the first to observe and comment upon the tendency of the social work profession to deny visibility to the volunteer. She warned her colleagues that the issue could be expected to resurface (Colcord and Mann, 1930).

Recent literature has documented social work's lack of interest, and even resistance, to working closely with volunteers (Haeuser and Schwartz, 1980; Lafrance, 1993; Schwartz, 1979; Strickler, 1987). The 1983-84 supplement to the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* reported on a National Forum on Volunteering which proposed that:

> *The resistance of helping professionals to volunteer involvement is ... pervasive.... In field after field—education, social services, museums, libraries and health care—the major barrier in effective volunteer involvement lies in the inability or unwillingness of paid, helping professionals to accept volunteers as legitimate partners in the helping process ...* (Manser, 1983).

Where volunteers are accepted in social service organizations subtle forms of professional resistance to them can occur. Senior level professionals have learned to deal with high-level leadership volunteers whom they attempt to "handle" by engaging them in the processes of developing policy and improving public relations. Professionals at lower levels have volunteers effectively carry out routine tasks, but rarely involve them in roles that require more complex service skills and talents (Schwartz, 1979).

No matter how tempting it may be to decry social work's lack of appreciation of volunteers—their predecessors in the helping professions—an exploration of the factors responsible for this development may be more productive.

One of the greatest changes in human services delivery in this century has been an increase in formal organizational structures including professionalization, regulation and bureaucracy (Cohen, 1960). William James warned society of the dangers that accompany the creation of structured organizations when he wrote: "Most human institutions, by the purely technical and professional manner in which they

Jean Lafrance, Ph.D., has performed a wide range of senior public service functions in the province of Alberta, Canada, where he maintains a long-standing interest in volunteerism. In 1989 he explored the barriers to the greater involvement of community volunteers in the area of child welfare within 400 community groups. The recommendations that resulted from this study formed part of the groundwork for the redesign of the children's services system now underway in that province. He recently completed doctoral studies at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. His dissertation explored the reasons for acceptance or nonacceptance by government administrators of volunteers' contributions of time and advice to social service programs.

come to be administered, end by becoming obstacles to the very purposes which their founders had in view," (Cohen, 1960). Even the most casual of observers would agree that many modern social service programs have fulfilled James's prediction.

When social services were first conceived, volunteers led in the provision of needed services and initiated important social reforms. By the early twentieth century, citizen influence on social services began to wane as increased professionalization, and a growing bureaucracy, altered the roles citizens could play in planning and delivering services.

This article describes the devolution of the volunteer role from that of leading social service programs and reforms to assimilation into a defined and managed structure designed to meet human needs. It suggests that new forces at work today will reestablish a balance between those who administer social services and the citizens who wish to contribute to helping them develop.

PHASE I—
VOLUNTEER DOMINATION

In the early 1800s the population of the United States increased significantly because of a high birth rate and the influx of 4 million immigrants, many of whom settled in cities. Migration increased from rural areas to the cities to meet industrial demands for the labor of men, women, and children. Living patterns changed and communities faced new social problems. These problems stimulated the moral conscience of the country, creating a desire to reform individuals and society as a whole (Sieder, 1960). As citizens sought new ways to assist the less fortunate, their efforts to organize became known as the Association for the Improvement of Conditions for the Poor (AICP). The first of these was formed in New York City in 1843 by a group of wealthy men whose objective was the organization and coordination of existing organizations that served the poor.

The AICP became a model for the subsequent development of the Charity Organi-zation Societies (COS) in North America, the first of which was formed in Buffalo, New York in 1877. Jeffrey R. Brackett (1895) described the objectives of the COS as "… the diminution of poverty and pauperism by cooperation of benevolent forces and diffusion of knowledge touching charity and benevolence."

By 1895, there were 100 COS in the United States (Green, 1954). Although they hired paid staff to investigate the need for aid, it was local committees of volunteers who decided what should be done and provided the actual assistance. At first, the underlying assumption was that friendly visitors could influence the family in need by virtue of their superior social status. However, since too few wealthy and upper-class individuals were available to help the growing numbers of urban poor, paid workers gradually assumed these responsibilities (Green, 1954). As paid workers gained greater experience, they found the causes of poverty to be multi-faceted and not easily resolved by the efforts of well-meaning volunteers. This led them to search for more "scientific" approaches to solving problems (Lubove, 1965).

As the twentieth century approached, a dramatic change was taking place. The view held at the time was that poverty resulted from moral inferiority; volunteers were expected to help the poor rise above their circumstances by force of example and the judicious use of moral suasion. Now those charged by society with developing new approaches to helping the less fortunate were influenced by the possibilities offered by scientific theory and practice. As trained observers, they began to gather data which revealed poverty to be an abnormal condition that required fundamental changes in housing, employment practices, health conditions, education and recreation. As a result of these discoveries, they concluded that good deeds and increased giving by the rich would never fully address the problems of poverty, and they began to pursue other approaches to their solution.

PHASE II—
A PARTNERSHIP UNRAVELS

The Charity Organization Societies were strongly attracted to scientific theory and practice from their beginnings in 1877 when the first COS was formed in Buffalo, New York. In 1890 a conference of Charities and Corrections in New York declared that "… patient research will be applied to the solution of the ages … and the world will bless the unknown benefactor who has brought the scientific method to bear," (Kellogg, 1890).

While there was support for the search for solutions based upon the scientific method, some warned that "philanthropy is becoming a business and a profession, and social agencies have begun to shut away the layman from any active connection with their function, crushing him beneath a magnificent and thoroughly perfected machine" (Winslow, 1915). Thus began an historic struggle to balance the scientific with the benevolent dimensions of helping the poor.

The twentieth century ushered in a new era in philanthropy where benevolence was redefined as an intelligent and efficient service designed to restore the poor to self-sufficiency, rather than as an opportunity for the rich to gain salvation or express their feelings of altruism (Lubove, 1965). Initially, this approach to philanthropy did not conflict with the notion of volunteerism. For example, the National Council of Jewish Women, founded in 1893, recognized and emphasized from the beginning the importance of "scientific training" for both volunteers and paid personnel (Sieder, 1960). However, as time went on, increased specialization and the presumption that expertise was needed to deal with the problems of poverty made the status of the volunteer ambiguous and insecure.

As interest was expressed to define social work as a profession and promote professional education, Nathaniel Rosenau of the Buffalo COS initiated a call for trained persons to provide social services (Rosenau, 1893). Five years later the Charity Organization Society of New York City established its Summer School of Philanthropy and formal social work education began.

As the knowledge gap between volunteers and paid staff widened, the latter assumed greater responsibility for providing social services, gradually gaining the respect of volunteers by virtue of their superior knowledge. At first, the working relationship between volunteers and professionals was marked by a high degree of mutuality and equality which eroded as social work became a professional discipline and assumed greater authority and respect.

Early social work leaders such as Richmond attempted to strike a balance between paid and volunteer service, but younger social workers were less committed to the principle of broad citizen participation. Richmond became openly critical of what she considered the unyielding and self-righteous attitudes of some trained social workers who saw themselves as substitutes for the volunteer. She insisted that volunteers were "the real sons and daughters of the community, while the paid worker, though she may be a loving daughter, is often an adopted one" (Henderson, 1917).

By the time Richmond published *Social Diagnosis* in 1917, social workers considered themselves members of a profession. At first, cooperative linkages between professional social workers and volunteers were maintained. The National Social Workers Exchange was established to promote and facilitate opportunities in the field of social work for both paid and volunteer workers, the precursor to professional social work associations and volunteer bureaus (Sieder, 1960). Increased professional self-awareness grew in the years of prosperity between the First World War and the Great Depression. Agency standards of service were developed and opportunities for volunteers were specifically defined in the health and social service fields. Principles and techniques for the recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteers were developed. The National Committee on Volunteers in Social Work, organized in 1933, maintained a relation-

ship with the National Conference of Social Work, and brought together volunteers and social workers to forge productive partnerships (Sieder, 1960).

The Social Work Yearbook (precursor to the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*), starting with its second volume in 1933, devoted space annually to glowing reports of volunteers' contributions to social work. Had this attitude and quality of relationship between social workers and volunteers prevailed, it might have led to increased cooperation and mutual respect. Many social workers, however, pressed for an even greater emphasis on technical knowledge, thereby distancing themselves even further from volunteers (Kellner and Tadros, 1967).

This development was predictable in a society that had been dominated from the second half of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century by the Newtonian mechanistic model of the universe. This model led to a view of the modern world as composed of a multitude of distinct units (Capra, 1983). This dominant paradigm influenced such organizational theories as the School of Scientific Management which Taylor developed in 1911, and Bureaucratic Theory, which was described by Weber in 1947. Both theories view organizations and their members in mechanistic terms. The social service agencies formed in the twentieth century continue to reflect a way of thinking in which people and systems are viewed as interchangeable parts of a larger whole. The scientific method was accepted as the most efficient way to organize work, launching an inevitable societal movement toward increased mechanization, specialization, and bureaucratization (Morgan, 1986). This influence persists to this day, often making social services difficult to access because of their segmented and specialized nature.

According to Kuhn (1970), the only means to problem-solving that a community will encourage its members to undertake is that which fits with the current paradigm. With the arrival of the Great Depression, society urgently sought effective and efficient solutions to problems of a magnitude never before encountered. This led to the creation of large government-funded organizations that could cope with massive demands for service. As these agencies focused on the challenges of delivering services to people with complex needs, citizens were increasingly distanced from the "business" of serving clients. One social work pioneer said, "... technologists and specialists [are] insulating themselves progressively from the folk process, and becoming, each in his limited sphere, wise in particulars and ignorant in general," (Lindeman, 1932).

The societal problems created by the Great Depression were complex, large-scale, and difficult to solve even with the best knowledge available. Lay people were ill-equipped to contribute to solving them, and answers had to be found within the current paradigm. The bureaucratic model was dominant and had the required attributes: it was rational, efficient and able to deal with large-scale problems. It was considered indispensable for the mass production of goods and services that helped to achieve great technological progress (Blau, 1960). All large organizations in North America reflected this trend and social service agencies, both public and voluntary, were not exempt from its influence (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958). However, the very attributes that enabled large social service systems to successfully meet the extraordinarily challenging conditions of the time ultimately blocked the involvement of ordinary citizens. The stage was set for the domination by social workers through the professional and bureaucratic paradigms.

PHASE III—
PROFESSIONAL DOMINATION
Although volunteerism had always been viewed as the duty of a citizen in a democratic society, by the 1920s it had become a privilege that philanthropic societies granted to those who accepted their discipline. The attitude toward volunteers had changed dramatically from the days when they were clearly in charge.

By 1919, the Charity Organization Society of New York City had established a committee to look into the volunteer problem. The committee concluded that although friendly visiting had value, it should not take precedence over modern social work advances. Volunteers were urged to accept training. Mary Richmond, who had called for a "thousand untrained volunteers" in 1890, was now to insist that social services volunteers be trained and held to a high standard of personal responsibility (Colcord and Mann, 1930).

An ongoing relationship between professional social workers and volunteers endured in spite of these tensions. In 1946 some intriguing insights were provided on the role of volunteers at the National Conference of Social Work where it was said that "millions of men and women ... are waiting to receive the inspiration, direction, and guidance *which only the Social Work profession can give.*" [Emphasis added.]

In this same address, the social work profession was exonerated for not having concentrated on citizen education since it had been occupied with building up its own professional philosophy, techniques, and prestige.

By the 1960s and 1970s new opportunities presented themselves for volunteers in fields of significant societal and political importance. Strickler (1987) suggests that social workers may have felt threatened by this newly assertive group of volunteers, some of whom were beginning to assume functions that had once belonged to social workers. She speculates that this may explain why social workers hesitated at this time to consider the potential of volunteer assistance even when faced with dramatically escalating demands for services and diminishing resources.

PHASE IV—
FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Few would disagree that in large social service agencies efforts to provide stability and efficiency can lead to excessive bureaucracy. The deficiencies of large bureaucracies and their failure to meet the objectives for which they were created are of increasing public concern. Many will agree with William James's caution about the ease with which institutions created to serve society can lose touch with the people they were meant to serve. As established structures for service delivery begin to crack in the face of overwhelming societal demands, some organizational theorists suggest that organizations can re-invent themselves and deal with the challenges that face them.

Land and Jarman (1992) explain that organizations follow a pattern when it comes to change. In the first phase—organizational forming—organizations use an entrepreneurial style that promotes and invites creativity and experimentation. The forming organization seeks creative and inventive ways of operating that connects it with the larger environment. This describes what occurred as social work pioneers and volunteers from all segments of the community labored together to meet the challenges of poverty and industrialization.

In the second phase—organizational norming—organizations pattern themselves on the bureaucratic paradigm. To generate stability and efficiency, organizations in this phase of development seek management processes that ensure order and predictability. Specialized roles and internal organizational priorities take precedence over the requirements of communities and consumers. It seems fair to say that this model typifies many social service organizations today. Land and Jarman postulate that the legitimate accomplishments of this phase invariably bring organizations to a stage where they become so large and complex they exhaust their ability to be responsive and innovative.

In the third phase the organization must reinvent itself to survive. This phase requires the creation of opportunities for shared leadership and the integration of diversity. In order to survive, the organization must recognize its interdependence with employees, the community, constituents, and clients.

Many large social service organizations are between phases two and three. If they are to thrive, let alone survive, they will need the innovation, creativity and support that volunteers can provide. As agencies seek to connect with those on whom they depend, volunteers will become essential because of their connections to the community, their good advice, and their ability to relate on a more human scale with clients.

In summary, in the early twentieth century social work moved away from its dependence upon volunteers in order to pursue a professional identity. This resulted in increased distance between social workers and volunteers. Today, as the societal structures established within the bureaucratic paradigm begin to break down, a new alliance must be forged between social workers and volunteers to help people in need. The alliance will not come from a paradigm of domination by one of the other, but from a spirit of equality that respects and values the unique contribution each has to offer. The opportunities for service are many. Society must reinvent the organizational structures that have been established over the past century to help people. This monumental task cannot be the sole province of professionals. It must call forth the best that both professionals and volunteers have to offer.

REFERENCES

Blau, P.M. (1960). *Bureaucracy in modern society*. New York: Random House.

Brackett, J.R. (1895). The charity organization movement: Its tendency and its duty. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections.* Twenty-second annual session held in New Haven, CT. Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis.

Cahn, G.F. (1947). The volunteer gives and receives. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social* Work. New York: Columbia University Press, 276–281.

Capra, F. (1983). *The tao of physics.* New York: Bantam Books.

Cohen, N.E. (Ed.) (1960). *The citizen volunteer: His responsibility, role, and opportunity in modern society.* New York: Harper & Brothers.

Colcord J. & Mann, R. (Eds.) (1930). *The long view—papers and addresses by Mary E. Richmond.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Green, H.D. (1954). *Social work practice in community organization.* New York: Whiteside, Inc. and William Morrow & Company.

Haeuser, A., & Schwartz, F. (1980). Developing social work skills for work with volunteers. *Social Casework, 61*(10), 595–601.

Henderson, C.R. (1917). Foreword to the first edition in Amelia Sears, *The charity visitor: A handbook for beginners.* Chicago.

Kellogg, C.D. (1890). *Statistics: Their value in charity organization work.* Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. Madison: Midland Publishing Co.

Kellner, J., & Tadros, C. (1967). Changes in society and in the professions: Issues in the emergence of professional social work. *Social Service Review, 41*(1), 44–54.

Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lafrance, J. (1993). *Citizens, volunteers and participation in social welfare programs: An exploration of social service administrators' perspectives.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Southern California.

Land, G., & Jarman, B. (1992). *Breakpoint and beyond. Mastering the future—Today.* New York: Harper Business.

Lindeman, E.C. (1932). *New trends in community control.* Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. May 15–21, 1932. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lubove, R. (1965). *The professional altruist: The emergence of social work as a career.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Manser, G. (1983). *Volunteers.* Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1983-84 Supplement. Silver Springs, MD: National Association of Social Workers.

Morgan, D.L. (1986). *Images of the organization*. Newbury Park, CA; Sage Publications.

Richmond, M. (1917). *Social diagnosis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Rosenau, N.S. (1893). Collected papers. Annual conference of the Buffalo Charity Organization Society.

Schwartz, F.S. (1979). The professional staff and the direct service volunteer: Issues and problems. *Journal of Jewish Community Service, 54*(2), 147–154.

Sieder, V. (1960). The citizen volunteer in historical perspective. In Nathan E. Cohen (Ed.), *The citizen volunteer: His responsibility, role, and opportunity in modern society*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Strickler, G. (1987). The social work profession's attitude toward volunteerism. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration, V*(4), 24–31.

Taylor, F.W. (1911). *Principles of scientific management*. New York: Harper and Row.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. London: Oxford University Press.

Wilensky, H.L., & Lebeaux, C.N. (1958). *Industrialization and social welfare*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Winslow, E. (1915). Philanthropic individualism. *Survey, 34*, 555.