

Doing Unto Others

The Spirit of Volunteerism Is Alive and Well in Washington, Despite Inflation, the Me Generation, and Housewives Going to Work. The New Volunteers Aren't the Red Cross Ladies or Junior Leaguers of Old. They're Men and Women of All Ages, Races, and Incomes. Here's Why They're Helping Others, and How You Can, Too.

By Ann Zimmerman



Adrienne Chalmers, a graduate of Anacostia High and Howard University, has been giving free dance lessons to neighborhood kids for the past five years. Her classes have grown to 100 dancers, who in turn perform

at places like St. Elizabeths and Children's hospitals. "If it wasn't for dancing," says one of her young students in Southeast DC, "I might be in trouble now."

It's not uncommon for Henriette Stegemeier, 27, to put in a twelve-hour day as a legal assistant in Senator Howard Baker's office. But at least one night a week she makes sure she finishes by six. Passing up the evening revelry on the Hill, she heads over to Georgetown University Hospital, where she serves as a volunteer, visiting elderly patients. "They're the people who are going to be in for a while," she says, "whose families may not always be able to get there." Stegemeier is one of about forty Career Volunteers, who work at jobs that include naval officer, insurance executive, and piano-bar performer. "Your life can get pretty stale just working all day and partying with your friends," says Stegemeier. "It gives you personal satisfaction to know you're capable of bringing cheer into someone else's life."

As a Capitol Hill aide, Henriette Stegemeier would seem a prime candidate for membership in the Me Generation—people in their twenties, thirties, and forties who (we're told continually) are thorough narcissists, who are convinced that the only great causes left are their personal struggles to get good jobs and that charity begins and ends at home. But Henriette Stegemeier and thousands

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of her peers are proving that altruism is not dead. Far from it. Volunteerism—doing work for others for no pay—is thriving in the Washington area.

Last year, the Volunteer Clearinghouse of the District of Columbia, which matches the skills and preferences of potential volunteers with the needs of 465 local agencies, placed 1,570 people in volunteer assignments—compared with

The stereotypical volunteers—self-sacrificing lady bountifuls—are still out there, though their numbers seem to be dwindling as women return to work.

191 four years ago when the clearinghouse began. Similar volunteer bureaus in Montgomery and Arlington counties say their placements rose about 10 to 15 percent last year.

These placement-bureau statistics give only a small part of the picture. They don't include the vast majority of volunteers, who find jobs on their own or through service organizations like the 800-member Washington-area Junior League. They don't include the approximately 2,000 senior citizens in the Foster Grandparent and Retired Person Vol-

unteer programs of Action, the federal agency. Nor do they include the civic-minded students from local colleges, almost all of which have their own volunteer-placement organizations. "Student volunteerism has been on the rise here for the last four years," says Jeanine Fay, coordinator of the Georgetown University Community Activities Coalition, which comprises 400 students devoting time to everything from local housing issues to tutoring in the Spanish community. American University started a similar program last year.

The stereotypical volunteers—middle-class, middle-aged housewives working as hospital gray ladies; self-sacrificing lady bountifuls; wealthy, well-connected patrons pitching in for (among other things) social prestige—are still out there, though their numbers seem to be dwindling as women return to the work force. But they are being joined by a new breed of volunteer—representing a broader range of social, economic, and age groups; working on more diverse projects; and volunteering for new and different reasons.

"Volunteers are younger than you think," says Jean Berg, director of the Arlington County Volunteer Office. While the majority of the volunteers in the suburbs tend to be in their thirties, more than two thirds of those placed by the DC Clearinghouse are between 14 and 29.

The shift in age group is but one of many changes in the volunteer corps.



Dr. Marvin Drew is a dentist who has practiced for 26 years in Silver Spring. Every other Thursday, he takes a day off to work for free in the Whea-

ton Dental Care for Seniors program. "If the entire profession would donate a half-day per month, we could take care of all our senior citizens."

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When the DC Clearinghouse first started, says Sue Whitman, its past president, "we had the typical white middle-class housewives." Today, half of the volunteers placed are black. About 30 percent are men, who are working in the ranks, not simply serving in their traditional roles as board members of non-profit organizations and agencies. Perhaps the most surprising fact, especially in a city of transients and workaholics, is that half the volunteers have full-time jobs and another 20 percent are students.

Variety is the key word in Washington's burgeoning volunteer movement. Here are some examples of what's happening:

Dancing in Anacostia: It was the neighborhood kids with nothing to do whom Adrienne Chalmers wanted to reach when, at age 18 and in her senior year at Anacostia High, she started giving free dance classes in her church. In five years, she has seen her Saturday classes grow from 20 to almost 100 teenagers. And she's seen their attitudes change: "They used to be negative about everything," she says.

Chalmers's spirit of benevolence—which never faltered, even during her exams at Howard University—has been adopted by her dancers. She and her students perform regularly at area fund-raisers and at places like St. Elizabeths and Children's hospitals. This summer she got several of her kids summer jobs dancing at community centers and parks with the DC Department of Recreation Showmobile.

"Where I come from, there isn't anything to do on those streets but deal with drugs," says Maurice Gordon, a 17-year-old resident of Southeast DC who regularly attends Chalmers's classes. "If it wasn't for dancing, I might be in trouble by now."

A dentist for seniors: Every other Thursday, Marvin Drew takes the day off from his 26-year-old dental practice in Silver Spring. Instead of practicing his backhand or his putting, he practices his profession—for free—in the Wheaton Center's Dental Care for Seniors program.

The program was started last year; since then, the 11 volunteers—6 dentists and 5 assistants—have served 542 senior citizens who live on fixed incomes of \$4,000 or less a year. "We can't let these people hang," says Dr. Drew, who also sees this service as a way to combat the pressure for socialized medicine. "I get my pay," he says. "I meet colorful people, rich in experience."

Help on the phone: At an undisclosed location in DC, senior citizens sit all day and night waiting for the phone to ring. These sixteen volunteers—some as old as 80, six on limited incomes—form the

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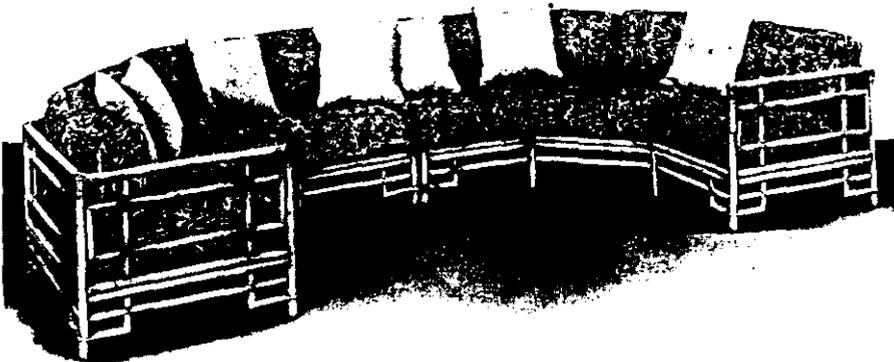
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These are six of the thirteen neighborhood boys who, as junior park rangers, have been spending their spare time patrolling and cleaning up the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens—and learning about nature at the same time. Says Gary Scott (far left): “This is

my second year and I like cleaning the ponds and knowing the names of the plants, animals, and food.” Oth- (from left): David Hill, Kenneth Matthews, Ronnell Leake, Mark Folk, and Kenneth Williams.

backbone of the Emergency Action Switchboard for the Elderly (EASE, 638-5194), a 24-hour hotline and outreach service funded by the United Planning Organization. They are voices of comfort for the lonely and people of action for the needy, intervening on behalf of people like Mrs. D., who phoned them this winter because her gas had been shut off. “It makes me feel useful for something,” says one EASE volunteer. “And that keeps me from needing the service myself.”

Math in the inner city: Last year, 110 students from four inner-city high schools gathered one night a month at Martin Luther King Jr. Library for workshops on topics like “The Mathematical Theory of Waiting in Lines”—the practical application of math that you never get in school, even if you manage to make it to calculus. The group is called the DC Mathematics Society, a program started by Ketrion Inc., a Rosslyn-based consulting firm with 300 employees. The firm wanted to help DC kids. “If we were a shoe company, we’d give them shoes,” says John Kettelle, the firm’s 47-year-old president. “We wanted to show the kids how our employees make a living and that it can be fun.” This year the program will be available to interested students from all the city high schools. “The District is a watershed of awfully nice kids,” says Kettelle. “It’s a thrill to see them interested.”

Good neighbors: The cars in the parking lot of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are no longer being vandalized. The litter is disappearing, the nature trail

damaged by storms is being fixed, and the kids from surrounding neighborhoods no longer make the gardens the site of their search-and-destroy missions. The reason: Thirteen neighborhood boys, ages 10 to 17, were recruited earlier this year by their advisory neighborhood commissioner to become junior park rangers. Summer mornings and after school, they patrol and clean the gardens and learn about nature from the park ranger. The boys can tell you, for ex-

ample, which plants are edible and which medicinal, and how to press flowers. The program’s success has encouraged a similar project at Fort Dupont Park.

Why are so many people devoting time to community needs—time that could be spent logging more mileage jogging, learning to roller skate, or thinking up schemes to beat inflation? The reasons are as varied as the people involved. But one of the strongest is the growing realization that government cannot solve all our problems—that government efforts were not too effective in the first place, and that government services are shrinking all the time.

The decline of government is behind one of the biggest movements in volunteerism today: the move back to the block. Hardly a neighborhood in Washington is immune. In Anacostia and Prince George’s County, groups of neighbors weatherize each other’s houses; on Woodley Place in Northwest DC, residents try to save their trees from Dutch elm disease; and in Montgomery County, communities organize patrol groups to fight climbing crime rates.

Where public projects—from the War on Poverty to Pride Inc.—seemed ineffective in combating problems like juvenile delinquency, individuals are beginning to step in, realizing that they can make a difference. Individuals like Elizabeth Richmond, a 53-year-old welfare recipient who has “made more happen without 25 cents than the government could have done with \$20 million,” in the words of one community leader. One of the many services Richmond has per-



Forrest Ford, a 74-year-old retired lawyer from the Justice Department, is one of 2,000 area senior citizens in Action’s Foster Grandparent and Retired Seniors Volunteer programs. Two mornings a week, Ford volun-

teers as a teacher’s aide at the Alive Child Development Center in Alexandria. “I have no kids of my own,” Ford says, “and contact with children keeps me young.”

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formed in her rough-tough neighborhood—just east of where Fourteenth Street and Rhode Island and New York avenues converge—is the formation of a gospel choir. Since its inception three years ago, it has involved more than 100 teenagers, most of whom were in trouble with the law or headed that way. It started when Richmond encouraged a group of rowdy kids who were keeping her awake with their raucous singing to come to her home and learn how to harmonize so “they wouldn’t sound so bad.” A few months later they were singing at Mayor Walter Washington’s farewell dinner. “Most of them have stayed out of trouble,” says Richmond. “Some have even gotten baptized.”

The desire to pick up where government has left off—or where it hasn’t even been yet—is turning traditional service organizations such as the Junior League from angels of mercy into agents of social change. Three years ago, the League helped launch My Sister’s Place, a shelter for battered women and children. The League provided funds as well as eighteen volunteers because members were “looking for a project that was really going to help a community problem, something that was going to make a difference,” says League member Deborah Leach.

This year, the shelter was used by 1,000 women and children. Twenty Junior League members volunteer there, manning the 24-hour hotline or working on Capitol Hill, persuading legislators to pass a \$65 million domestic-violence bill. “This project was not a bandaid,” says Leach. “It is having an impact.”

Not all volunteers today are volunteering for the purely selfless motives of yesterday. “What’s in it for me?” is becoming a common—and acceptable—question for volunteers to ask. Take Frank Letkiewicz, for example. He began volunteering last year because something in his professional life “was missing.”

A 29-year-old biochemist from Gaithersburg, Letkiewicz had left a technical job with the Environmental Protection Agency for a managerial position in a private consulting firm. “It was moving a lot of words around paper,” he says. “I missed having a direct impact on people’s lives.” He toyed with the idea of becoming a physical therapist and began spending Sunday mornings working in the Montgomery County swim and gym program for children with motor-coordination problems. “I now have the feeling I’ve contributed something to these children’s lives,” he says. “And that fulfillment has made it less urgent for me to change my career.”

Kerry Allen, executive vice president of the National Center for Citizen In-

Volunteer work can be the first step toward a good paying job—especially for women returning to the work force after raising children.

volvement, says there are more and more volunteers like Letkiewicz these days, using their charitable work to meet their own needs. Allen thinks the Me Generation’s emphasis on “personal growth” can be compatible with volunteerism.

In fact, volunteer work can be the first step toward a good, paying job—especially for women returning to the work force. Nancy Dunn, former head of the Montgomery County Volunteer Bureau, says volunteering is a great way “to get training, supervision, professional criticism, feedback, and references.” Volunteer work on the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission, investigating discrimination cases, requires a minimum of six hours a week—perfect for a woman with children who can use the experience to get a paying job in a few years. Elyse Rothschild recently left the Montgomery County Volunteer Bureau, where she volunteered as a placement counselor, to become the paid director of the Montgomery County Displaced Homemakers Center.

Many companies have begun to give more weight to an applicant’s volunteer experience, and Civil Service applications now have a space for volunteer experience.

Another reason that more people are volunteering is that large corporations are beginning to place more stress on volunteer work. Consider Operation Clean Sweep, a DC beautification effort initiated by the Community Involvement Committee of Xerox Corporation and FM radio station OK 100, which will be working with neighborhood leaders and residents. The object is to instill civic pride “and to show we’re a concerned and involved corporate citizen,” says James Brown of Xerox, who was once a basketball star at DeMatha High.

Most corporate-sponsored volunteer projects here are new—in their first or second year—but they are part of a growing trend on the part of businesses to provide not only money but also personnel to improve the city. “The reason,” says Ron Lee, director of community relations for Xerox, “is that government is not as capable as it used to be in addressing problems.”

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There is, of course, something in it for the corporations, too. According to Kerry Allen of the National Center for Citizen Involvement, corporate volunteer programs offer employees "an opportunity for personal growth, to try new skills, to relieve the routine. As a result, companies gain more committed, satisfied workers, a better image, and a healthier community in which to work."

For years, companies have "loaned" their executives to fund-raising campaigns for several months, keeping them on the payroll. Now they're even beginning to grant their employees social-service leaves. IBM employees, for instance, can leave the company for up to two years to train minority-group members in word-processing, in a program co-sponsored by the Urban League.

Not every volunteer agency is filling its ranks. Those with problems include the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, and Big Brothers.

Other companies are granting employees time off during the day for community service. Last summer, Pepco employees took ten senior citizens from the Bel Pre Health Care Center in Maryland on a picnic and to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Glen Echo Park. Pepco personnel also work in the Advanced Career Training Program for DC and Montgomery County students who are not planning to go to college. The students are brought to Pepco to observe and work with an array of employees—engineers, accountants, and so on—so they can better determine their own career paths. "We're beginning to get applications from government agencies asking for references on these kids," says Steve Martin, Pepco regional representative.

C&P Telephone created a position for an in-house volunteer coordinator three years ago to serve as a liaison between employees and local volunteer agencies, including Literacy Action of Washington, Friends of the Superior Court (which works with juvenile offenders), Capital Children's Museum, DC Hotline, and For the Love of Children (FLOC). Last year, Elmer Davis, a dial administration clerk, decided to check out the opportunities listed in C&P's volunteer office. She has been tutoring an eight-year-old mentally handicapped boy ever since. "I'm doing my part to help those who

need it," she says.

But the corporate volunteer movement is still a small one, according to *Volunteers from the Workplace*, a 300-page book by the National Center for Citizen Involvement. Only 330 companies report that they have community-service programs. And, according to Ron Lee of Xerox, "Most companies in Washington could be doing a lot more."

It's true, says Nancy Stewart, of the metropolitan-area Volunteer Coalition: "Volunteerism in Washington is blossoming." But not every community group is filling its ranks. The DC League of Women Voters has a shortage of volunteers; in the past few years, participation has dropped by half—down to 580 women in 1979. There's been a lot of renewed interest recently, says Sue Panzer of the League, but the sort of women who join the League can't give the time they used to. "It's taking more skill and more people—more paid people—to divide their work into smaller pieces and still meet increasing community demands," she says.

Other traditional community-service agencies, including the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, have similar problems. They're looking to the young and the elderly—instead of working-age men and women—for help. A few months ago, the state of Maryland gave them a boost by passing a law that allows volunteer drivers a state tax deduction of 18½ cents per mile, compared with the former 9 cents. A similar bill that would apply to federal taxes was introduced by Representative Barbara Mikulski of Baltimore and is still knocking around Congress.

Big Brothers of the National Capital Area has double difficulties. The country's economic woes seem to be discouraging new recruits while at the same time increasing the need for them. There are currently 1,000 boys in the District alone waiting to be matched with adults.

Many agencies, including hospitals and day-care centers, that need daytime volunteers are suffering as more women go to work. But other daytime projects remain popular. The Smithsonian Institution, for example, uses 2,000 volunteers—nearly half its total work force. And the Northern Virginia Hospice Society has a waiting list of more than 200 volunteers. (Hospices provide non-hospital settings for dying patients.) So finances and changes in family patterns can't take the full rap for decreases in volunteers at certain agencies. There's competition out there. As Marian Clarke, director of the American Red Cross Volunteer Personnel Office in DC, put it, "We used to be the only game in town." No more.

How To Get Involved

If you're not sure where you want to volunteer, and you want to learn the possibilities, go to a volunteer placement bureau. There's one in the District and in every county in the area. Their function is to match your interests, skills, and availability to an assignment.

"There's something for everyone," says Jean Berg, of the Arlington County Volunteer Office. She tells of finding a spot for a volunteer who wanted to use his knowledge of astronomy: "We finally hooked him up with the Arlington Planetarium and a Boy Scout troop. You see, the sky's the limit."

Placement bureaus also list jobs tailor-made for people with busy schedules. Examples: telephone reassurance programs, in which a volunteer phones an isolated elderly person and talks for a few minutes each day, and transportation projects, in which volunteers drive residents of nursing homes to medical appointments or to go shopping.

Here are places that will help you find the volunteer work you want:

District: Volunteer Clearinghouse of the District of Columbia, 1313 New York Avenue, Northwest; 638-2664.

Maryland: Montgomery County Volunteer Bureau, 301 East Jefferson Street, Rockville; 279-1666. Volunteer Services Division of Prince George's County, Room 5032, County Administration Building, Upper Marlboro; 952-4131 or 952-4450.

Virginia: Alexandria United Way Volunteer Bureau, 1707 Duke Street,

Alexandria; 836-2176. Arlington County Volunteer Office, 1800 North Edison Street, Arlington; 558-2654.

Getting into Action

Action, the federal volunteer agency, has several Vista projects based in this area, including one at Lorton, where two of the four volunteers who provide career counseling are inmates. Vista volunteers serve one or two years and are paid about \$300 a month. Action also has several programs for volunteers age 60 and over. Its Foster Grandparent program is limited to senior citizens with low incomes. Working at places like the Hospital for Sick Children and Forest Haven for the mentally retarded, Foster Grandparents put in four hours a day, five days a week, and receive a stipend of \$2 an hour, plus a free medical examination, training, and daily hot meals and transportation. These provisions, minus the stipend, are also available to the elderly in the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP). The work they do ranges from manning information kiosks on the Mall to providing legal services for the elderly; there is no income restriction. For information on Action programs in the District and Virginia, call 804/771-2197; in Maryland, 301/962-4442.

For Young Volunteers

One way to pry your children from the television set is to get them involved in the community. The *DC Directory of Volunteer Opportunities for Youth*, pub-

lished yearly by the DC Clearinghouse, lists more than 200 nonprofit organizations that offer volunteer work in a variety of fields, including office work, health care, day care, and services for the elderly, handicapped children, the environment, the arts, and recreation. The Montgomery County Volunteer Bureau publishes a *Summer Guide to Volunteer Jobs for Youth*. Both publications are available at local volunteer offices (above), public libraries, junior and senior high school guidance offices and libraries, and recreation centers.

Volunteering also offers young people a way to try out adult jobs. Written for teenagers, the book *Exploring Careers*, published by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, gives ideas on where to look for career-oriented volunteer jobs. It is available as a single volume of 550 pages (\$10) or as 15 separate booklets (\$2 each, \$12 for all 15), at Government Printing Office bookstores or by mail. Make check or money order payable to Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20407.

How to Turn Volunteer Work into a Paying Job

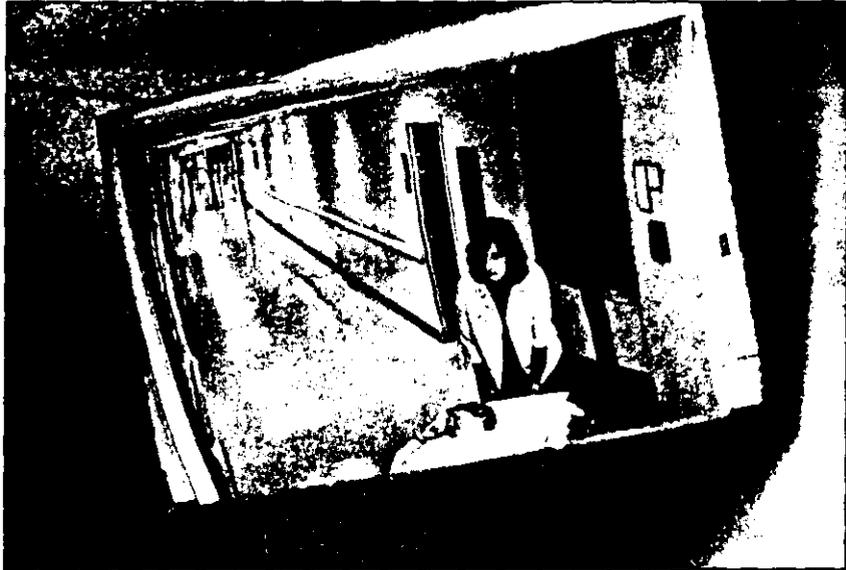
Volunteering is becoming a good way for people to enter the job market or return to school. And there are now publications that tell how to get credit for volunteer service. *Personal Career Portfolio* is one of them—a 28-page booklet with sample forms for recording the experience you derive from volunteer work. Send \$1 to the National Council of Jewish Women, 15 East 26th Street, New York, New York 10010.

I Can—a Tool for Assessing Skills Acquired Through Volunteer Service, a book developed by the Council of National Organizations for Adult Education, also has a section on documentation. It costs \$4.75 and is available from Ramco Printing, 228 East 45th Street, New York, New York 10017.

The Educational Testing Service recently published a booklet called *How to Get Credit for What You Have Learned as a Homemaker and Volunteer*. Send \$3 to ETS, Publication Orders Services, Department EO1, Princeton, New Jersey 08541. □

The Washingtonian's Annual Volunteer Guide

The *Washingtonian* is planning a guide to volunteer opportunities for the fall of 1981. We'd like to begin gathering information now from placement bureaus and from organizations that need volunteers. Please send it to: Ann Zimmerman, *The Washingtonian*, 1828 L Street, Northwest, Washington, DC 20036.



Henriette Stegemeier, a legal assistant to Senator Howard Baker, spends one night a week visiting elderly patients at Georgetown University Hos-

pital. She's seen here in a corridor mirror: "I just do it to put a smile on someone's face. You realize how small your own problems are."