

Source: Fondazione Italiana
del Volontariato

WHY VOLUNTARY SERVICE?

In recent years organized voluntary service has come into its own in the wide range of social activities performed by ordinary citizens in a spirit of public service.

Voluntary social service to tackle the problems raised by the deteriorating quality of life, particularly for the weakest and most deprived sections of the population, **first came into being as a remedy and - increasingly today - as a new approach to re-establishing social ties and relations.**

In 1991, Italy enacted a framework law which officially sanctioned relations between voluntary social services and government institutions, even though before then, and irrespective of the law, voluntary groups had been working with generosity and freely, drawing on their autonomy and great flexibility, to serve so many vital areas of society, both on an individual basis and through their associations.

Voluntary social service has now become a major part of what is known as the "third system", alongside the public institutions and private enterprise, to rally the general public to volunteer their services as a demonstration of community solidarity and a new political awareness.

THREE CHALLENGES FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

There are three major challenges which voluntary social services must take up and overcome in order to make their work effective.

Firstly, they must uphold a **high quality of service** to come to terms with the increasing complexity of the individual demands made on them. Services must concentrate less on the provision of material aid, and increasingly concentrate on psychological health and caring. This quality can be obtained only by research, vocational training, and by comparing and exchanging real-life experiences with others.

It was for this reason that the idea of establishing a **forum** was first broached among volunteer workers: a forum to serve as a neutral clearing house, without any connections with the movements involved, with the purpose of collecting and exploiting the great legacy of experience and work that everyone has accumulated, to be then circulated and redistributed, providing consultancy, cultural promotion and support services.

Volunteer work can no longer be left merely on the spontaneous generosity of volunteers. Specific skills and competence are needed.

The second challenge relates to the need for **cooperation** between movements

(and groups), to **coordinate** their work around joint objectives with a non-partisan "political" dimension, capable of improving the quality of everyday life in the community. To achieve this, it is necessary to overcome a piecemeal approach, and to encourage the joint implementation of strategies and programmes on the basis of the decisions taken by their respective national, regional and local officials, full respecting the autonomy of all the movements involved.

The time has therefore come to think in terms of a **service to support** this growing need for agreement between voluntary groups, their officials, movements and the whole of the "third system" which not only comprises voluntary services, but also associations, charities and social cooperatives and foundations: in other words, all the non-profit-making bodies to which society is looking today with great interest.

What is needed is a **neutral ground** where the humanitarian, social, economic and other concerns relating to the removal of the causes of injustice and the other ills referred to in Article 3 of our Constitution can be tackled in a spirit of cooperation.

The *third challenge* relates to **information** on the voluntary services, within and outside the movement.

It is not so much a matter of putting forward the ideas of one movement or another, but of **disseminating the values of solidarity, freely given service and sharing**, bearing personal witness, caring for the weakest, devoting one's free time and creativity and self-denial - all those typical qualities and features of voluntary service.

In addition to supporting the publications promoted by different groups, instruments must also be devised for providing mutual information, and running vocational training and refresher schemes. Eschewing all commercial intentions, these organs of information must be designed to spread communication far and wide on everything that is being done by these free associations of members of the general public.

THE ITALIAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOUNDATION

Fondazione Italiana per il Volontariato was promoted by the Rome Savings Bank - Cassa di Risparmio di Roma - with the **specific object of meeting the needs of voluntary workers** who for many years had been advocating the establishment of some form of organization to support their social commitment, one that was free of all institutional, party political and economic constraints.

Its *general objects* are set out in the Constitution as follows:

- *to promote, encourage and sustain voluntary services* in every form and in every field in which volunteers work in the performance of their duty to show social solidarity as sanctioned by the Italian Constitution. It shall therefore support any activity which is likely to foster the emergence of new voluntary schemes and strengthen those which already exist;
- *to encourage greater familiarity* with voluntary service through research, study and meetings;
- *to gather and publish information and research being promoted*, both through its own publications and by lobbying all the mass media;
- *to foster the broadest possible familiarity with the achievements of volunteer workers* and their problems, and the prospects for the development of voluntary service, on the part of Italy's public institutions, with which it shall cooperate whenever requested within the terms of its institutional objects;
- *to encourage the planning, implementation, enhancement and coordination of all voluntary activities*, by providing a range of forms of support;
- *to provide consultancy* on matters relating to voluntary work at the request of movements, institutions and governmental agencies;
- *to develop public relations and exchanges* with other national and international institutions, both public and private, having similar objects, under appropriate agreements;
- to perform any other activity that may serve the purposes of the Foundation.

Such a wide-ranging Constitution, which also provides the possibility of decentralizing its structures, offers the broadest scope for initiative; it leaves room for cooperation with a minimum of formality, and for the provision of cultural and operational support at the request of anyone interested in voluntary work.

The Foundation is also interested in European and international voluntary service, and is linked to all the other public and private bodies that will ensure mutual enrichment, and the possibility of taking part in cooperation ventures between countries and continents.

Cassa di Risparmio di Roma has provided substantial financial support for the start-up of the Foundation, but according to its Constitution the Foundation may require "grants, donations, legacies, and gifts and revenues of any kind", which evidence the interest of both the public and private spheres of society in supporting the commitment of volunteer workers to practising that solidarity which underlies the Italian Constitution

in their specific daily commitments.

THE SERVICES OF THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation provides volunteers and all the members of the "third system" with a **range of services** that can be grouped into seven sectors:

INFORMATION

In order to encourage relations and communications between different experiences in the world of voluntary service, it runs an information service which includes the following:

- publishing information on **social events and schemes** being run by volunteers and the "third system", and on grassroot groups' activities;
- permanently updating the "**Thematic Dictionary**" of laws governing voluntary service;
- publishing "**Rivista del VOLONTARIATO**" and "**Quaderni**" (separate supplements).

TRAINING

The Foundation is able to offer the following:

- assistance in **designing training schemes**, schools and courses for officials and groups of voluntary workers;
- **direct participation of its own experts and outside experts** as speakers for programmes by agreement with groups and movements;
- information on **acquiring and selecting experiences** of an educational nature and on "social leadership";
- specific **training courses** for social workers;
- **study grants and scholarships**, both national and international, for areas of its research and on issues selected by the Foundation.

STUDY AND RESEARCH

The Foundation:

- promotes the establishment of a more mature "solidarity mentality", through **studies, debate and discussions** at various levels;
- conducts **research into voluntary service and aspects of the non-profit sector** in order to create a comprehensive information system on voluntary service (a data bank);
- **cooperates with other research institutions**, including universities, on similar surveys;
- provides **consultancy to voluntary bodies** wishing to promote their own studies and research.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

It also provides consultancy, support and assistance to groups through:

- liaison work between the **public and private voluntary services**, in the area of solidarity services;
- assistance to establish relations between voluntary workers and **the mass media, advertising and entertainment**;
- "**national solidarity prizes**", to identify and support exemplary initiatives of solidarity promoted by groups, movements and local authorities in order to combat deprivation of any kind.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

It has a specific department to:

- **collect publications, news and information** on the activities in the European and non-European voluntary movements;
- liaise and cooperate with **international organizations and NGOs in the developing countries**;
- **provide information and services** for Italian volunteers working in the field of development cooperation;

- **liaise between Italian voluntary services in Italy and Italian voluntary services operating abroad.**

CONSULTANCY

This is designed for individuals, groups and institutions, and may take different forms:

- **cultural** consultancy for the preparation of documents, research, publications and conferences on voluntary service; this service is also available to young volunteers who wish to gain experience with social communication;
- **design and planning** consultancy: the evaluation of projects, programmes and other initiatives promoted by voluntary workers, also in conjunction with local government;
- **recommending** experts, speakers, researchers and consultants, upon request, to meet the internal and external requirements of voluntary groups;
- **cooperating** with national and regional legislative bodies, for the drafting and revision of bills.

DOCUMENTATION

A consultation and documentation service containing material on voluntary service and the solidarity mentality:

- **a specialized library;**
- **a newspaper and magazine library and press-cuttings service** on voluntary service;
- **a voluntary service data bank.**

"RIVISTA DEL VOLONTARIATO"

The "service" which Fondazione Italiana del Volontariato wishes to offer society, and particularly the volunteers working in it, includes the dissemination of information and cultural and research materials, to enable their work to become much better and more systematically organized and no longer depend upon spontaneous enthusiasm, to create a consolidated mentality and practice.

As one of its initiatives designed to attain this end, the Foundation publishes a journal, "**Rivista del VOLONTARIATO**", which is designed for all those who, in one way or another, are working in the social sector, both public and private, in order to document developments in policies, promote a solidarity mentality, and to supply groups of volunteers mainly, but also all other social workers, with useful information and aids, to improve their performance and enhance coordination between all the members of this "third system".

The journal comprises three parts:

- **general information**, to serve as input for debate and documentation, dealing with social and economic policy issues, and major experiences in the Italian and international voluntary services field;

- **education and training**, mainly designed for voluntary service social workers, to raise their cultural levels and lay the foundations for general autonomous basic vocational training. This will be pursued in the forms of separate "dossiers", or pull-out supplements, with contributions from experts in different fields on specific topics;

- **a service section** for the use of "groups" and anyone else interested in social work, both to promote it or to be involved in it. In particular, the following services will be supplied:

- a regular feature article on legislation;
- three reviews: European and international voluntary services and the third system, press reports *about* voluntary services, and the voluntary service's *own* press;
- thematic bibliographies;
- an opinion column for voluntary workers;
- a practical guide for the organization of groups and relations with institutions and with the mass media;
- proposals for further reading and listening.

The journal is assisted by a **scientific committee** of distinguished psychologists, educationists, sociologists, legal and financial experts, media experts and experienced volunteers.

In addition to the journal, the Foundation publishes **monographic publications** essentially for training purposes.

RELATIONS WITH THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF NATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE ASSOCIATIONS AND FEDERATIONS

The Foundation maintains relations at all times with the "**Standing Conference of Presidents of National Voluntary Service Associations and Federations**", which was set up in Rome on 5th May 1991 to represent the whole of the voluntary sphere, promoted and organized by its members, in dealings with government, parliament, institutions, political parties, the market, trade unions, lobbies and pressure groups, and churches in Italy. The Conference is particularly concerned with attending to the needs of the members of the "third system" - in other words, the **associations, social cooperatives, charities and foundations** which make up the whole of the "non-profit world" alongside the voluntary services, committed to working for a better society.

In full respect for every member's autonomy, the Foundation acts as the operational secretariat of the Conference, and hosts the General Meetings.

The following Associations and Federations representing two million volunteers are members of the Conference, to which any national social voluntary service movement may seek membership:

·Associazione Italiana Genitori (AGE) ·Associazione Italiana Ascoltatori Radio e Tele-teatro-cine-spettatori (AIART)
Associazione Amici dei Bambini (Ai Bi.) ·Associazione Cattolica Internazionale al Servizio della Giovane (ACJSIF)
·Associazione Culturale Ricreativa Italiana-Ragazzi (ARCIRagazzi) ·Associazione Italiana Alcolisti in Trattamento (AICHT) ·Associazione Nazionale Pubbliche Assistenze (ANPAS) ·Associazione Papa Giovanni XXIII ·Associazione per il Volontariato nelle Unità Locali dei Servizi socio-sanitari (AVULSS)
·Confederazione Nazionale delle Misericordie d'Italia ·Coordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidarietà Internazionali (CIPSI) ·Federazione degli Organismi Cattolici di Servizio Internazionale di Volontariato (FOCSIV) ·Fratres ·Gruppi di Volontariato Vincenziano ·Lega Nazionale per il Diritto al Lavoro degli Handicappati ·Movimento di Volontariato Italiano (MoVI) ·Radio Club Ciechi d'Italia ·Segretariato Enti ed Assistenti Volontari Operanti nel Carcerario (SEAC)
·Società San Vincenzo Dè Paoli ·Telefono Amico Italia

The following socio-cultural agencies cooperate with the Conference:

·Fondazione Zancan ·Centro di Formazione e Studi per il Mezzogiorno (Formez)
·Laboratorio per le Politiche Sociali (Labos) ·Osservatorio Meridionale ·Ufficio studi of Caritas Italy

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Incorporated under Prime Ministerial Decree
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The Board of Directors
The Board of Statutory Auditors

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President of the Foundation

Luciano Cavazza
General Secretary

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Editor of "Rivista del VOLONTARIATO"