

# Trends and Changes in the Volunteer World

by Eva Schindler-Rainman, DSW

"MAY YOU BE cursed to live in interesting times," is an old Chinese proverb. It denotes so clearly the themes that underlie the trends and changes in the world, and therefore also those affecting volunteerism. Volunteerism has an exciting and important past, and has an even more promising, multi-faceted, and more creative future.

The 1980s and 1990s will be most exciting periods for volunteers, staff working with volunteers, and for the systems with volunteer opportunities. The changes that are occurring are rapid and complex, both national as well as international. We are in a time of transition which enables us to be creative, non-traditional, energetic, and bound by nothing but human limitations, turfdoms, lack of vision, or resistance to change. Indeed transition may be the key complex concept that characterizes where the volunteer world has been, and where it is going. We are living in the post-industrial society—the service society or the Third Wave society, as Alvin Toffler calls it. It is a time of change, challenge, and explosion.

The profile of the volunteer has also changed during the last 50 years. Today a volunteer might be any person, from three to 103 who gives time, energy, skills, knowledge voluntarily to a chosen cause or activity, and without monetary profit. Volunteers come from all religious, racial, ethnic, and lifestyle backgrounds, and there are also many handicapped people who volunteer. The vast majority of Americans are available to volunteer in their neighborhoods, in their cities, and/or to work for special causes.

But the fact that these people are available does not necessarily mean that we know how to recruit them as yet.

There are several categories of volunteers available:

*Direct helpers:* These are people who give a direct service to others. This may be done on a one-to-one or one-to-group basis. Included here are such services as tutoring; driving sick people to appointments; helping clients in an Internal Revenue office; shopping for the elderly; and taking care of stray animals.

*Decision-makers:* He or she is the board member; an administrative volunteer; the volunteer who makes policy. Anyone can learn to be a decision-making volunteer, and there is beginning to be a larger range of persons on boards of trustees, commissions, and committees.

*The connector or linker:* This is the volunteer whose major job it is to connect persons to available services, or available services to potential clients. These may include persons who connect clients and patients to public health clinics and centers, or the person who connects adult volunteers to work in our schools.

*Cause volunteer:* These people volunteer to work for a particular cause, like Heart Association, Amnesty International, the local rape hotline—people who want to get involved with an organization or system that operates in an arena which is of particular interest and importance to the volunteer. There may indeed be two kinds of cause volunteers—those who advocate, and those who work directly with making change happen. The change agent volunteer, for example, might be a

person who wants change to happen in organization, and thus becomes a member of the board of directors in order to help the system change in an orderly fashion. An advocate volunteer is one who advocates particular positions, be they political, economic, or in the health and welfare arena.

*The monitor volunteer:* This is the volunteer who is specifically recruited to monitor programs and functions, and make sure that they are being operated in accordance with standards, policies, and the law. For instance, in some localities volunteers have been recruited to work in nursing and old-age homes, both as program participants, and as persons who make sure that the patients receive all the necessary services. Indeed, there has been some legislation into which monitor volunteers have been written.

There are also people to whom volunteering is therapeutically prescribed, and who volunteer as part of a mental health program that will help them become reactivated, or resocialized in a variety of ways. There are also people whose major function it is to do fund raising and/or research.

It is clear, as George Gallup Jr. has stated, that volunteerism is important in our society, and voluntary efforts of an estimated 60 million volunteers and voluntary organizations, are what keeps democracy going, by doing much of what government otherwise would have to do.

Volunteer influence and power is on the increase, and the "Third Sector," as Peter Drucker calls it, is a viable, important force in Ameri-

can society today. It is also growing and becoming a force in other countries around the world.

Here are some of the trends and changes in the volunteer world, as well as some of the changes these trends are causing.

#### **Changing, older, newer populations**

Our society is becoming older, and we are seeing the end of the youth culture. The median age of the population is approximately 30, and that makes it clear that more persons will be available in the older age ranges, and more of these people will be in need of services. In addition, society is becoming more and more varied with an increasing number of persons coming from new and different cultures—Hispanic, Asian, and Polynesian, to name a few.

The availability of these new populations means that we need to find new and different ways to tap into the motivations of people who volunteer. It is estimated that 82% of the population is willing to work on a variety of issues, but it will be necessary to develop new and different recruitment methods to involve the new and older populations.

This trend, then, offers challenges of change, including the need to develop methods to tap into intergenerational and intercultural wisdom; to develop culturally suited involvement methods; to develop community wide resource/skills banks, and centers where persons can let it be known that they wish to volunteer and can be helped to get connected; to develop "touch and go" exploration opportunities for potential volunteers before they decide where they wish to put their energy and time; to develop volunteer personnel policies and records that make the volunteer work place as humane and useful as possible; to develop new volunteer jobs, and some of a more temporary nature than in the past.

#### **Doing more with less**

It has become very clear that as federal human service budgets shrink there are important implications for the volunteer world. "Smaller can be beautiful," but it is a very uncongenial idea when at the same time we are living at a time of

## **We are in a time of transition which enables us to be creative, non-traditional, bound by nothing but our own human limitations**

increased expectations, of more needs, of more sophisticated constituents, and in a society where more and more extensive and complex integrations of wisdom and technology require higher levels of skill and interdisciplinary competence. To respond to this crisis of opportunity, it is clear that volunteer power is needed. The late Eduard C. Lindeman once said: "Volunteers are what holds democracy together," and he asked us to imagine the results if all the volunteers in the United States went on strike. It became very clear that much of the work of both private and governmental systems would stop if that occurred. The challenge of doing more with less includes mobilizing volunteer energy; exchanging and sharing resources; merging overlapping activities and services; finding new sources of funds; voluntary reduction of overhead costs; discovering new ways to deliver old services; moving towards collaboration and interdependence of disparate systems, services, and groups, utilizing the reciprocal and complementary resources available in more creative ways. Human service teams that cut across professional and volunteer lines are another development that will be helpful in providing better services.

#### **Human Underutilization**

Closely tied to the trend of doing more with less is the concern about human underutilization. A new field of human resource development is emerging as a result of this concern. This needs to become part of the volunteer world also. This concern includes thinking about better opportunities for retired people; for persons who are physically and/or mentally ill; or people with language or other educational limitations and/or different values and life-styles.

#### **Changing values**

We are living in a time of changing values, from an emphasis on conformity to an appreciation of pluralism and the beauty of difference; from an emphasis on quantity to one on quality, or demassification; from an emphasis on rootedness to one on mobility; from an emphasis on long-term commitments to an appreciation of temporariness and very short

commitments; from an acceptance of authority to confrontation; from the definition of success being upward mobility to a definition that is more situational stating that success is what helps actualize the person; from little or no focus on mental and physical quality of life to a heavy emphasis on both of these.

The challenges here include development of more temporary volunteer opportunities; and emphasis on the beauty of difference and new and better ways to utilize differences; increasing the discussion and therefore the understanding of value and lifestyle differences; the need to emphasize alternative plans, job descriptions, and ways of work; the need to learn the skills of conflict utilization and resolution, and the art of creative compromise; to develop flex-time and job-sharing in the volunteer world.

#### **Corporate sector social responsibility**

It is clear that during the past few years the corporate world has become increasingly involved in, and interested in the volunteer world. Many large, and now also some small companies, have a vice president in charge of community relations for volunteers, who is responsible for seeing that employees have the opportunity to volunteer in causes of their choice in the community. This volunteer service becomes part of their employment records. An organization known as Involvement Corps has been active for the past several years in helping corporations develop volunteer programs for their employees.

It is also clear that many corporations in addition to human resources have financial resources available. The corporate world feels that it is important that the private sector stay alive, and indeed become increasingly more potent, important, and visible.

Challenges here include the need for non-profit organizations to learn about and connect with the corporate world; to develop relationships with officers of corporations who have been designated as community liaison persons; to invite corporate persons to participate in agency activities; to discover which corpora-

tions have grants and funds available for the non-profit sector; to learn approaches and skills in working with the corporate sector.

It is clear that volunteerism will flourish as never before because of the efforts and the interests of the government, nonprofit, and corporate sectors.

#### **Changing technology and communication resources**

Rapid change in socio-technical systems is affecting the volunteer world also. There has been such complex and fast development in computer technology, including home computers, and computer conferencing across great distances. Increasingly this technology is becoming available to organizations and institutions. Cable television, video and audio tape advances, word processing, telephone lectures and conferences make it possible for human beings to communicate in a great variety of ways. Indeed, these developments are the foundation for people to get together to develop a variety of causes and services in new ways, in spite of shortages in and high cost of environmental energies, and a shrinking budget.

The challenges here include increasing our knowledge about and skill in the utilization of these technologies; to involve knowledgeable persons on decision-making bodies as volunteers; to develop some sophistication about costs and trade-offs in relation to the utilization of these technologies; to help train people in the use of new ways of work, and new machines.

#### **The science of futuring**

There is an increased emphasis on futuring and future planning. This becomes necessary as projections of human material and environmental utilization are more carefully looked at, and more urgently realistic. Some of the emphasis in terms of need for careful future planning is on working with diminishing resources, developing survival skills in the forecasting of new programs and services.

The challenges here include the need to learn realistic and useful future planning methods; to involve persons as consultants who can help with futuring and realistic views of

what the future will be like, as far as that is possible; to involve persons from all levels of the system in doing future planning; to collaborate with other groups in future planning.

Of course the biggest challenge here is to get involved in looking at the present and the future, and combine the resources of outsiders, volunteers, and staff in planning for the future of the many necessary services in the volunteer world.

#### **Volunteer world in change**

It is clear from the above trends and changes with the many challenges that the volunteer world itself will have to continue to change. It will be necessary to develop new opportunities, places and spaces for volunteers to serve. Volunteers will need to have important roles in all sectors of community, including recreation, religion, education, business, politics, the media, and human services of all kinds. The social action emphasis of citizen involvement will increase, and it will be important for volunteers to affect such movements as the patient rights movement, neighborhood and quality of life movements in their arenas. Volunteers will increasingly become the social change agents of our society.

The changing times require the volunteer world to act rather than re-act; to welcome today and tomorrow rather than to prolong the yesterdays; to create and innovate rather than to depend only on the traditional; to guide rather than goad; to involve rather than mandate; to encourage interdependence rather than separate turfdoms; to welcome change rather than resist it; to be excited, puzzled, and optimistic rather than depressed, powerless, and overwhelmed.

Today is yesterday's tomorrow, and the future of volunteerism is exciting, bright, and challenging indeed for all of us.

*Eva Schindler-Rainman is a consultant to national and international business and volunteer organizations. This paper was presented at the 1981 AMA Auxiliary Leadership Confluence. A bibliography of suggested reading compiled by Dr. Schindler-Rainman is available from AMA Auxiliary Headquarters.*