

SETTING UP A STUDENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM . . .

*requires the involvement of experienced
adult volunteer and community leaders.*

By Mary M. Evans, CVA

Who would have guessed that when Ivan Scheier offered his services in 1985 to come to Duluth that not only would his expertise help generate ideas for an enjoyable week but his probing would have long-term effects on our volunteer community. With Scheier's direction, workshops explored future needs of volunteering in our area.

Out of that interchange came a plan with two main initiatives: one to get more students involved in volunteering; the other to see how we could help the older population find volunteer opportunities. We gave ourselves five years. After two years, the student program is well on its way. It is this story I would like to share with you.

First, there is the descriptive name—The Student Volunteer Leadership Program (SVLP). This is not just a volunteer program where college students go out in the community to give their help. It is a comprehensive project where students handle SVLP's personnel, public affairs and program for college students at the University of Minnesota, Duluth (UMD).

The personnel coordinators oversee student volunteer recruitment and follow them through the program. Public affairs takes care of publicizing program information and media coverage for SVLP events, such as a community service day to bring local agencies on campus to pub-

licize their volunteer programs and needs. The program staff deals with volunteering, decision-making, career development and values clarification.

Thus, rather than serving only as a placement service, SVLP provides students with the opportunity to sharpen their leadership skills, generate societal responsibility and explore career options through community service both on campus and in the greater Duluth area.

Second, there is a commitment by those involved in the 1985 workshops to make SVLP work. As director of the Voluntary Action Center, I originally called a group together to write a proposal for Scheier's time. The group included R.J. Falk, a UMD professor who over the years had been an enthusiastic supporter of innovative student projects and later became assistant to the vice chancellor, and a number of volunteer directors from the area.

Third, there is the community that supports volunteer effort. From the beginning, when the Minnesota Association of Volunteer Directors (MAVD) sent out information on writing proposals to obtain Ivan Scheier's time, the core group of MAVD members in Duluth worked. They obtained a grant, in-kind hotel space and meeting rooms and a lot of volunteer help. When Scheier left Duluth, a networking group and the determination to succeed were in place.

Soon after, an SVLP advisory council, composed of the Volunteer Center director, faculty, active and retired leaders of

business, social service agencies, health and government, plus student representation, was established to provide a foundation for SVLP and give support to the students.

The council set priorities and sought to create a change in the student population. The beginning was slow. A few students helped with our annual city recognition of volunteers during Volunteer Recognition Week by serving refreshments and cleaning a street banner. I wondered what was going on when two students disappeared with the banner. It was not long, however, before it reappeared—clean and hanging outside the library. The students had taken the banner to the lake and used the brushes from a boat to clean it. A different approach but one that certainly had results.

Another student helped with the Voluntary Action Center's Volunteer Opportunity book, which lists agencies where people may volunteer. Together we learned how to write on a computer.

The students' efforts were good, but we realized that the program needed much more shaping. With the advisory council's help, an office for SVLP was found in the downtown area. A phone was installed and students attempted to staff this site, but it didn't work. The number of students needed at the office and the distance from campus contributed to the low usage. The reason for the city location was to involve students from two other area colleges, but that was not possible at first.

Mary Evans is the director of the Voluntary Action Center of Duluth, Minnesota.

The 1986 school year began well with a volunteer fair held at UMD. Area agencies handed out information about volunteer positions with their programs. Agency representatives spoke about volunteering with youths, elderly and handicapped persons, meeting medical needs, working at cultural facilities, and other opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce director spoke about leadership. The afternoon ended with leadership exercises and refreshments. Students signed up to volunteer. However, problems arose when nothing was really done about following up on the students.

The student volunteer leadership idea stayed alive in the advisory council with the need for money successfully met by a matching grant from the Ordean Foundation. The matching element meant more effort, but it was worth it because the story got out to the community. Letters of support came from the UMD chancellor, the president of the College of St. Scholastica, business leaders, agency executives and volunteer directors. Matching contributions came from Minnesota Power, Honeywell, Dain Bosworth, The National Youth Leadership Council, Oneida Realty, St. Mary's Hospital, UMD and ACTION.

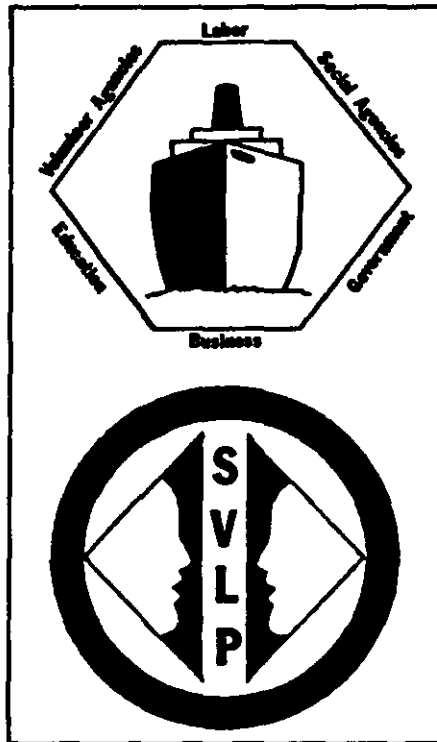
In February 1987, students involved with SVLP took a leadership role in convening a group of faculty from three area colleges, area volunteer directors and others working with volunteers. Glen-sheen, an historic home, provided the setting for the morning meeting.

Panels of faculty, agency people and students gave presentations. Each group introduced ideas about student volunteers from its particular perspective. They discussed how to make students accountable, what work needed to be done to get credits, what sort of supervision should be expected, and could agencies make sure worthwhile work was available. The students realized some of the problems others faced. Their interest was heightened.

With spring came the graduation of seniors involved in SVLP. As this problem had to be faced each year, a decision was made to hire some students to provide continuity in SVLP's administration. The need for structure became apparent.

During the summer, with the support of a Student Service Learning grant from ACTION, there really was action. Students held weekly planning meetings, coming up with ideas for organizational structure and what they needed in terms of support.

They worked on ways to develop and shape leadership skills, how to connect



Student designs for SVLP logos. (Bottom logo is used today.)

community service with career exploration, how internships and credits could become part of SVLP's offering.

Falk's connection with the university administration brought not only verbal but financial support from the university. Money was beginning to solve some of the problems; the ideas and work of the students solved others.

They borrowed a computer to work on a brochure, flyers, a newsletter and membership material. They designed a logo and made signs. They developed application forms and placement cards. They sought contributions.

They worked in the Duluth VAC office, learning how to refer volunteers and compile a list of agencies. They selected six areas of involvement for student volunteers: youth, environment, relief, education, elderly and recreation. They were specifically concerned about feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, protecting the environment, teaching the illiterate, caring for the elderly and inspiring children. Each project area has one or two contact students who serve as coordinators.

SVLP is a student-run program with a student director, Jillouise Simonson. The students now have an office on campus, with their shingle hanging outside the door. It is an active place where students stop by to inquire about the program from

student volunteers who staff the office. They have a phone and are getting a computer through two matching donors. There are 30 students working three hours a week in the community. Some of them are working with high school students on a work experience career exploration program.

This fall SVLP volunteers helped with a leadership week for incoming freshmen and reserved dorm space for displaying SVLP materials.

This is just a beginning. Now that the program has developed a nucleus, it is expanding out to the other two colleges in the area. It has established a link with the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) and more than just the three colleges in the area are now networking with SVLP.

What makes this project so interesting for me is the part the Volunteer Center played. When the project was proposed, Duluth had high unemployment in the area and many agencies were hurting because of the cutback of federal funds. Our planning committee sent a survey to a broad base of influential citizens to identify the high priority needs of the community and establish the present status of volunteering. The survey gave us direction for the workshops to be presented while Scheier was in Duluth and at the same time built public awareness of the volunteer activity going on through the Voluntary Action Center. Those who responded to the survey had an opportunity to help with the future direction of volunteerism by giving their support to the workshops and what developed from them.

Past training provided by the VAC had helped to compile a list of those outside the volunteer field who showed interest in volunteering. It was in this way that the University of Minnesota-Duluth link was established. The SVLP was the end result of the desire to recruit the younger population. Here the VAC's recruiting experience helped develop ways of finding and placing students in community agencies. The VAC has worked very closely with volunteer coordinators and the students, making contacts possible and networking easy.

In today's world the development of social responsibility can be done in different ways. The students in this program have found one way. They will be our future community leaders. They bring with them the knowledge and experience of a college project which makes them aware of the benefits of volunteerism.