

## YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

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Harriet H. Naylor - April 11-14, 1977

Ten years ago, there was no thought of administrative responsibility for unpaid workers in HEW although volunteering was going on at the service delivery level. A good thing to remember is that's where things begin, where the important action is. That's the level of operation I'd like to talk about, because it's the most important. I like the title that you gave me for today about youth needing a friend, a volunteer, because it's that very quality of freedom to be a friend, that distinguishes a volunteer from a paid staff member. This is tough on the staff members, because they would like to be in the same kind of free relationship with youth or they wouldn't be working in the field.

I think everyone of you who is on the staff of a helping agency working with youth has three times as much to do as a human being can do in work hours. So the important thing for us, a challenging and uncomfortable thing, is to choose how to use our limited time, how to multiply it through involving other people who may not have had all the training we had. During the Depression, our work loads were incredible, case loads between 225-250 cases. There was very little time for friendship in that kind of setting, and there was never more need for it. People who are already vulnerable have terrific need for social support of some sort. One major difference between then and now, is what's been happening to the American family. Then, the family stood behind the individual, even fell back a generation. I can remember visiting collateral relatives who lived nearby. We went out and said, "your cousin or your brother-in-law is in serious difficulty, and we would like to have you help us help them," and we could involve families. No longer is this true. One, they're no longer geographically near enough to be able to do much, and two, there's no legal basis to hold them accountable, as there used to be. The nuclear family is almost the only thing we have left. When that becomes fragmented, the child has almost no place to turn for the kind of social support that we're talking about. On the other hand, there are thousands of people who have no nuclear family either, and who need somebody who needs them, who need to be needed. So our function is to match people who need to be needed to people who have needs. No one is more acutely aware of the needs to be needed than youth themselves, because they don't feel important. They have very little reassurance

about their self importance in our society. They're unpeople, because they don't have a work identity that gives them some prestige in the community. We keep people dependent who in earlier generations were already known as farmers or apprentices in certain skills, or students moving toward certain occupations. Unemployment figures today show thousands of young people who don't have that kind of identity yet. But they're still having all the pains of growing. Whenever I had a crisis my mother used to say that's a growing pain and you'll get over it quickly. That's not much help to anybody when they're miserable, but today's kids don't even have people telling them that they'll get over it, or the affection which went with it. More and more young people need someone to turn to, someone to care and really listen to them. And I'm quoting directly from one 12 year old drug addict, who when he was asked to define his problem, expressed in those terms. He was questioned about what he thought was essential to help people like himself. Incidentally, he has become a counsellor in a drug program, at the age of 15. Thinking back to those earlier days, he said that the most important thing to him was a counsellor he could trust. Somebody who wouldn't smile at him when he was with him alone, and then shoot him down when he was with the parents. This is the kind of integrity that I think we have to require of volunteers who are going to work with youth. Trust is the basis for the relationship. To have a volunteer fail after other people have, is simply to reinforce lack of trust and lack of feelings of self-importance. If even a volunteer isn't trustworthy, and shoots them down, youth certainly can't feel worth very much.

On the other side of the coin is a very encouraging phenomenon, a growth of volunteering with youth in non-traditional patterns. We've always had a lot of volunteering with youth in churches, with educational roles, in recreation organizations, but not always this quality of leadership. The tradition was educational institutions pouring knowledge out. We weren't listening, we were "character building," mostly by instruction, in youth organizations in the voluntary sector. And that kind of instructing exacerbated youth, feelings of worthlessness and ignorance and inability to cope. Instead of strengthening their self respect, it hacked away at it.

We have to have a new approach. I can remember the days when my Brownie leader shot me down. There was a Brownie next to me who had very clean fingernails: she chewed them all the time. I had questionable fingernails, decidedly not immaculate. We were both asked to hold out our hands and display our fingernails and she was good and I was bad. It took me twenty years later to find out it probably was better not to bite your fingernails. I learned exactly

the wrong thing from that. I'm sure that leader felt that she was giving somebody a good lesson in hygiene. Wow!

This illustrates why volunteers need training. They need an experience which puts them in the position of the people they are going to be working with, so they see things from the youth's viewpoint, or teenagers. In leading up to today, I got awfully confused about which was which. I'm going to have to go back to the 1912 charge of the U.S. Children's Bureau: "responsibility for American citizens from birth to the age of 21." When I'm talking about youth, I'm talking about people that the Children's Bureau cares about, and I'm not too concerned about the categories along the way. I'm just going to talk about the young, and working with them.

One of the things that's happening now, is the fragmentation of services in communities. Nobody's more aware of this than youth are. Put yourself in their place. You graduate from one agency to another and maybe nobody goes with you; you face a whole new batch of people to help you. Get sick and suddenly you need medical services, and there's not a familiar face! Here you are, frightened about yourself, with nobody connecting you to the new services or helping keep your connections with the old if you need services in the community. There's been a lot of youth partial care for temporary residence, highly unstructured. I'm kind of relieved that my husband, who was a child welfare social worker with particular interest in emotionally disturbed children, hasn't seen the growth of the kinds of shelter care that are springing up. The needs are so urgent, but there is often little or no professional help. I think we need to plug in some of the knowledge that we have about human growth and development, and not reinvent the wheel. But we can work through amateurs, (literally people who do it for love) or for a variety of reasons to make certain that young people are taken care of. But what really causes them to run away or commit statutory offenses is not getting enough attention. Nobody is paying any attention to what happens at home to young people until they land at one of the community services. And then suddenly people do look at the family patterns, attempting to lock the door too late. Studies have established quite indisputably that abusing parents are people who were abused children themselves, and we have to deal with that most vicious of cycles at whatever point we find out about it.

What we're finding is that very little work is being done to change the conditions that a child leaves when he runs away, or when he is removed from home for one reason or another, to change the home

conditions. And we have young people begging to stay in very sparsely staffed and unstructured programs, spartan residential facilities, begging to stay because it's so much better than what they'd go home to. And that's an indictment that I think we cannot ignore in our agencies. There isn't a child in need who doesn't have some adults in the background who need services, too. It takes a very special volunteer, the kind of volunteer who's going to be trustworthy, whom that young drug addict described. The child and we as responsible workers must be able to count on integrity and standards which apply to the parents as well as to the child, knowing the volunteer offers consistent supportive relationships for both. That volunteer may offer the only continuity that family has in the community, be the only person who knows both sides of the story. Another thing that that child I am quoting pointed out was that there's two sides to every story. And too often nobody ever hears the other side. Volunteers can help us see the whole person and the whole family and their situations. Seeing clients as people, they can often interpret each to the other not in a technical analytic way, but the way friends who care do. No one trusts a turnabout who identifies with the parents when with the parents and identifies with the child when with the child. This kind of volunteer social support carries a responsible consistent set of values in both relationships.

Now having gone through the rigors of social work training when it was at its most Freudian, I went through several years very afraid of giving this responsibility to a volunteer. At this late date, I see the special community representative role of the volunteer. We as staff have a professional perspective, and training to discipline ourselves in our professional relationships. But our clients have to have someone react to them as society will, so they can test themselves and even change to society itself. The volunteer fills this function, and is free to express friendship and compassion in a natural way which brings out the best in people. We taught volunteers not to become involved, and they soon left our agencies. Now we see it is their very caring and being involved that helps people. In schools of social work I was told that we were replacing the do-gooder who meant well but did poorly. So I identify with staff who are apprehensive about delegating some of their responsibility to volunteers because I believe they have the highest of motives, it's an effort to uphold standards. Let me say child welfare is a field which has been most successful at getting high professional standards established. From my standpoint and Bob Bobbitt's child welfare has been most successful at keeping volunteers out of their programs, partly because they did so very well to prove the worth of trained service. There are more laws mandating trained service workers in child welfare services than any other form of

service, except perhaps psychiatric. I'm working, living in the middle of social workers at HEW. The first step I find I can take in child welfare with them is, "Well yes, if you can find a volunteer with the training..." But if you think about the Volunteer Development System I gave you, you will see that there are different things that unpaid persons can do, and we on payrolls need to have those things done. Youth are very quick to find out who is getting paid to help them and who isn't, and they need both, and they feel the difference in the relationships. The youth needs a friend and advocate, and so does the youth welfare worker! The triad works together to help the youth.

It takes quite a lot of time for building trust through real teamwork experience, and unfortunately, we at the federal level don't have a chance to do this because there's a law that says we can't have volunteers in our offices. So unless we have some volunteer experience before we land in the bureaucracy, we have no way to build this feeling of trust. We have to take somebody else's word for it. And that's kind of what my job has turned out to be, interpreting.

But, in the meantime, what's going on out there where the kids are? Beautifully innovative programs are being developed on behalf of children and youth, and even more impressive are the opportunities for youth themselves to be volunteers, to participate in agency and community decision-making. Adults who have worked with youth enjoy the mutual admiration and advocacy for more volunteers, which youth express, to enrich and extend program outreach.

As bureaucrats more and more we're getting into legislation. I brought with me a compilation of laws, just listed with a thumbnail description, which call for volunteers in one form or another. Let me just read you some titles: The Rural Development Act has specific statements that volunteers should be involved as citizens in the planning and delivery of services. The same emphasis is in health, with health planning and resource development. From a legal standpoint the greatest blow I think was the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1974 which took all services for youth except runaways Title III out of HEW and gave them to the Justice Department, the basic assumption seeming to be that all people between the ages of 12 and 20 are potential delinquents.

In a bureaucracy, when you don't have a law that says you have to do something, there's plenty else to do. And so youth have been getting

too little attention in the last few years. In fact until the transition team came in and began to read the transition papers we'd all written (we all had to describe our work, and make recommendations about what we thought ought to be happening in the future), the Office of Youth Development because Title III, the Runaway Program, had been funded for only three years to expire this year, was recommended for abolishment. There would be nothing in HEW for youth, if that recommendation had been followed. But I want to give you social workers of whom as you know, I'm one, too, the beautiful good news that the new Assistant Secretary for Human Development is a social worker, supportive of the Office for Youth Development and welfare reform. The National Conference on Social Welfare sent me a book yesterday called "The Future for Social Services in the United States, Final Report of the Task Force." I didn't find nearly enough about volunteers, explicitly, but implicitly there isn't a recommended service that couldn't be reinforced and extended and multiplied in geometric proportions with volunteers, especially that bridging among community agencies we've been talking about to strengthen families.

Another force that was instrumental in changing the direction about paying attention to the needs of youth is a relatively new organization started by Mary Conway Kohler, who pulled together an organization she calls the National Commission on Resources for Youth. It's a clearinghouse of bibliographical material and program resources, the most challenging of compilation of good ideas going on all across the country. The basic philosophy is what she's calling youth participation. There are some of you here who are too young, but there are some of you who remember the thrust during the turbulent 60's to put youth on community decision-making bodies. It worked out sometimes as the saddest kind of tokenism. I had two offspring who were used in that role who used to come home just tearing their hair. They were patted on the head and told to be quiet and wasn't it nice that they were there. They were given the first cookie when the cookies were passed, but nobody really listened to them. What Mary Kohler is talking about is youth participation which gives youth something important to do. It takes them out of the category that Mary Kohler, in her colorful way, calls "not yet people," makes them people whose ideas are very earnestly considered and brings them into the design of their own future, which is a terribly important part of citizenship development.

These first steps toward this kind of participation are a turnaround of the coin of services for youth by adults. And we need them. I've just been talking about the kind of person we need. The kind of

integrity it takes. In rehabilitation fields, there's Charles Truax, who did a doctoral study at the University of Oklahoma on rehabilitation counselling. He studied people with very high academic credentials and low in three personal characteristics. He compared them with people with low academic credentials with very high rankings in tests for these three characteristics and found the characteristics of great importance in the helping process. When you're choosing volunteers to work for you, they're crucial. The first one is integrity - he calls it genuineness, where you're not a different person with the child from the person you are with the adult. You ring true to both. The next one is accurate empathy. Not just sentimental sympathy which is beautiful in its way, but not terribly helpful in zeroing in on what it is that's bothering somebody. Now not everybody can zero in this way, so find other volunteer jobs for people who can't reach a relationship with that depth. You have to do a very careful placing job so that you don't give a youth who needs deeper social support a volunteer friend who is incapable of having that kind of relationship.

The third one is probably the most significant, nonpossessive warmth. I don't get my kicks out of your growing dependency on me. I get them from your growing ability to be independent of me. That's tough, but it's terribly important to the developing young person to know that he's free to grow, and that that will be seen not as neglect by his volunteer, but as progress.

Now, let's take it one step further because the kids are, and we've got to run to keep up with them. What can young people do as volunteers and what good does it do them? Many persons working in youth agencies, as volunteer coordinators or directors, spend at least half of their time placing the youth themselves in volunteer roles. And the other half, placing other people with their clients. Client volunteering is terribly important for a reason that is important for all people but especially the young. It builds self esteem to feel that one can be a volunteer, that he has something to give. We've proved this in the education field in Boston. The Director of Volunteers for the public school system used fifth graders with reading problems as tutors for second graders who were beginning to read. Second graders just leaped ahead, doubled their reading speed. The next year they tested the fifth graders before and after as well as the second graders and they found the fifth graders tripled their reading speed, so they took the children with reading problems not the good readers, but the ones who needed improvement. You never learn anything half so well as when you have to teach it. So the benefits of volunteering are just beginning to be given to the young. We haven't trusted them with real responsibility. We

can and we must. For one thing, I'm fond of saying that they don't know from experience, like us oldsters, what can't be done. So they go ahead and do it.

I'm thinking of a young student who came in to one of the state hospitals when I was in the mental health field. There was a man there, let's call him Mr. Smith, and he had a chair, and he did get off of it and go to meals three times a day and he did go to bed at night. But Mr. Smith might have been a piece of furniture in that chair for all the attention that anybody paid to him because the whole staff had had Mr. Smith say no to them so long. If they had briefed this youngster, they would have said, "Don't bother with him, he doesn't want to do anything." But she walked over to him and said, "Mr. Smith, it's a heavenly day outside, why don't we go outside and pick dandelions." And Mr. Smith got up, straightened and walked to the elevator with her, went out and picked dandelions. Mr. Smith is now out of the hospital. It was the hospital director who told me that there isn't an expert there who would have said Mr. Smith would ever get out of that hospital. But it was one freshman's faith in Mr. Smith, lack of knowledge about Mr. Smith, that stimulated Mr. Smith to make the effort that was his first step in getting back into the mainstream.

Never discount the power of ignorance. The volunteer coordinator was a little alarmed about this because it was against the rules. That hospital superintendent who told me the story, said the volunteer coordinator had more unlearning to do than all of the rest of us. And I thought that was very significant. Because she had been so cautious about rules that she'd forgotten that rules were made for people. She was trying to please the staff and obey their rules. Taking this chance paid off in a lot more creative things in that setting since then.

What Mary Kohler is talking about is not only service volunteering by young people, but participation in new program development. This very lack of knowledge of what can't be done, because it costs too much, is what experience leads you to value. Working with young folks, I'm going to enjoy a new set of values that are probably based on far more important things than mine were. This is a point of view I want to get into policy and program development. Like you, I take many things for granted as essentials that aren't essential. And somebody has to point it out to me. Usually it's somebody young who can. I think youth have a right to participate in the decision-making. We have youth advisory committees for a lot of programs, not decision-makers. We're having a turnover of the

three-hundred odd advisory committees at HEW right now, and I'm getting feedback from some of the people who served. There's a lot in the press about how expensive and unproductive they are. Well, one of the main reasons for the unproductivity is not that they don't say important things, it's that nobody listens. And this is what youth will not tolerate. The young people who have been put on advisory committees here and there are the ones who are telling us, "Don't put young people on those committees, they don't want us, and they don't pay any attention to what we say. They don't hear what we say."

So I think we in staff roles have to make sure that there is real listening, and not people sent there for showcase reasons only, then ignored. Status people have ignored the creativity that youth bring to program implementation. I'm thinking of young students from a community college which had a very bad reputation for drug abuse. Well, four students applied to be volunteers in a state school for the retarded. And they said that they wanted to "do unto the least of these" and they rightly decided that the least of these were the multiply physically and mentally handicapped. And they work in what we called the crib ward, which was for persons who were immobilized completely, who might move from a mattress on the floor to one on the bed, not able to feed themselves. These students worked there for about a week and then came in with the weirdest rig you ever did see. It looked like an ironing board: it could be set up on an angle. The problem with those patients was they didn't eat very much because it's hard for them to swallow lying down. Well, this got them up so they could swallow more easily, but it also got them up so they could use their hands to feed themselves, because the level was right for them, strapped to these cushioned boards the kids had made out of their own materials. They're now being made commercially because they were such an effective way to teach handicapped people to feed themselves.

The nurses on that ward had just been horrified when these student volunteers came in, when long hair was beginning to be popular. One of the nurses who just radiated starch said to me, "If I hadn't been in such a desperate spot that day I never would have let those kids in." She had thought them repulsive, but became their prime defender, because they got an idea which revolutionized the care pattern in that area for those very, very vulnerable people. One of the major problems that I think we are handing to youth, by default, if no other way, is what to do about people who need vocational habilitation. They'll never be employable, but they have a right to much more humane life than they're ever going to get with the limited services they have now. And the young particularly,

those with a poor self concept, or poor estimate of their own worth, need somebody to look up to them. And the bond that develops between these people who have been really put on the ash heap of humanity to somebody who cares about them, brings out a completely different behavior pattern from the one they had before. Now we match kids in the state training schools for the delinquent one to one with kids in the developmental centers for the retarded. And there's a significant fringe benefit, the behavior problems in the state training school for delinquents were very greatly lessened. And when they talked to the kids about it the kids response was, "He looks up to me, I never had anybody look up to me before, everybody always looked down on me."

How can we create situations for everybody to have someone who looks up to them? To me that's one of the goals of my office.

Most of the things that happen because people have a poor self image are pretty destructive and impinge on to the rest of the world. Low self image correlation with inability to read is very high. If I don't think I can learn, I can't. If I think I'm dumb, if I think I'm not worth much, I can't make the effort it takes to learn to read. I am sure low self esteem is related to vandalism, it reflects poor sense of community or motivation for preserving the beautiful or the good. Even the autographs and graffiti on subway trains in New York have been blamed on a need for identity recognition. Except there's been a beautiful twist to that. I took a Californian who'd never seen anything like that just to see the decorations - have any of you seen those subway trains? Beautiful! It's incredible that what started out to be defacing has turned out to be beautiful. People with imagination said to public schools where vandalism is costing us more than books, "Look, there's a construction project over here. The builders are going to build a fence around it. We'll supply you with paint, will you paint it? Starting first with fences, then brick sides on the buildings where there's been so much torn down and new buildings are not as tall as the old ones, leaving wall space to be decorated. Some projects have gained artistic recognition, according to this report from the National Commission on Resources for Youth.

Some of the agencies highly centered on devastating diseases, as United Cerebral Palsy, National Association for Mental Health, the National Autism Society, all have youth memberships. These are usually made up of brothers and sisters of victims of the disease. They were started purely as fundraising, but because the assigned staff

listened, those organizations all have created new programming. They let the adults do the technical research, but for imaginative activity kind of program, the youth are considered the major source of ideas.

Let me share with you a few examples of what's going on: in Evergreen, Colorado, there is a pattern of apprenticeship for youth, developed with the Chamber of Commerce in which young people are placed in the city zoo, with veterinarians, electricians, photographers, store managers, potters. The purpose of the program is for young people to experience work with adults who are neither teachers nor parents, and to learn about the life of their community through first hand experience. This could happen in any community, it is so transferrable.

In Berkeley, California there's a career center in which students are trained to advise their peers on employment matters and they are surveying communities for employment opportunities and then carry on a placement survey with some adult help. But youth are doing leg work, the talking to other kids, and that's what's important. They're interviewing, teaching job-seeking skills to their peers. In the city arts workshop, some of the things they've done have had ethnic components. For example of the fifteen projects that won prizes for a New York City youth art program, one was a mural on the Jewish heritage, another was a history of Chinese immigration, there was a Black liberation mural, and a wall of respect for women mural. In the George Washington High School in Denver the students themselves devised the carpool plan and operated it for energy preservation; a youth day care helper program keeps track of all the day care centers in town, involves the university in teaching staff child growth and development and then arranges and practice teach by high school students in day care centers.

The Forth Street Eye is a community magazine on the lower East Side of New York City operated entirely by young people who interview, edit, translate, take photographs, and do the production work. The magazine is then used as a reading text in elementary, junior and senior high schools in that area. It reflects the culture of the children attending school. In Gloucester, Massachusetts there is a project to restore a colonial cemetery which had been the target of vandals until the whole town was appalled and a resident sculptore enlisted a few youth. Gradually the project has grown, with young people landscaping, clearing brush, and straightening headstones, to research and history documentation. They restored this as preservation for the Bicentennial in their town. There are

other high school archeology projects. There are public service video workshops to help make tapes on issues in Minneapolis and St. Paul. A tenants union asked students to help make a tape on renters rights. The unions supplied the legal information and the students made tapes and showed them to alert residents of their rights and the different issues and viewpoints by working with community adults. They learned videotaping as well as about the important issues.

I think those are enough examples to illustrate what I think is the point of youth involvement: that youth really are people and that we have to give them ways to feel like people. We act on the basis not of what is a fact, nobody questions if they are people, but if they're not treated like people, they don't feel like people, they don't act like people. In giving leadership to young volunteers, as volunteers, I think we do a great deal more for the future of our society than with any other group, because after all, the people who are youth today, are the ones who are going to be running this country before you know it. The way they feel about themselves and the way they feel about their ability to make a real difference is going to make the difference in whether this democratic society can survive or not. Those who continue into adulthood, feeling that they can make no difference, are going to make a difference no matter what. The kinds of differences they make will be destructive rather than constructive. To me the volunteer aspects of this are the important method or strategy elements that make it possible. We never in the world will invent a correctional system that will correct, so the more people we can divert from it by improving their feelings about themselves, the better our society will be for our children and grandchildren.

And that's precisely why I'm here. We can't do it alone as staff members. We've got to have help, we've got to multiply ourselves a dozen times over with the help of other people. Not just anybody, only people who are interested, caring, better listeners than talkers, and more concerned about others than about themselves. I wouldn't screen anybody out, but I would let them grow in situations in which they can't hurt other people to prove themselves, if we're in doubt about them. It's amazing how people can be turned around when they find out that they're just people now, they don't have to wait several more years before they become people.