

Talents, tools and time

By Susan Champlin Taylor

We're not do-gooders," says Cuma Glennon, a volunteer for 30 years.

"The volunteer is no longer the older matron living in the suburbs," says Linda Day, director of volunteers for the Salvation Army's St. Louis, Missouri, chapter.

"Volunteerism is more than just people helping people," says Judith Helein, director of AARP's Office of Volunteer Coordination.

This is not heresy—just the new facts of life for America's volunteers.

John Thomas is vice president of communications for Independent Sector, a nonprofit organization that works to preserve and expand the voluntary sector. Thomas explains that, according to 1988 survey results, the old stereotype of volunteering has become vastly outdated. "Many people have an image of the volunteer as a middle-aged housewife," Thomas says. "But as a profile of the average volunteer, nothing could be further from the truth. Most women who tend to volunteer are those who work. Volunteers come from the elderly and from young people. There are disabled people volunteering to help others."

And volunteering isn't limited to one individual helping another, as AARP's Helein explains: "We make that mistake sometimes, and it shuts some people off who can't handle that.

Volunteers
are
lending their
hands
in every
corner of your
community.

Now it's your
turn

Maybe those people can repair trails in parks, stuff envelopes, write press releases, serve on boards or work to get drunk driving eliminated. I define volunteerism as people reaching out with their individual talents, skills and interests to help the community meet needs, solve problems and assist others. That covers a lot."

Cuma Glennon started with the March of Dimes 30 years ago and currently volunteers for a variety of causes, including the National Organization for Women, in Pinellas County, Florida. "We're not pious people out there volunteering so peo-

ple can praise us," she says of herself and fellow volunteers. "We get joy out of the cause we're representing."

The 1988 Independent Sector survey, conducted by the Gallup Organization, studied volunteering and charitable giving in the United States. The overall figure showed that 45 percent of all respondents volunteer their time in some capacity, averaging 4.7 hours each per week. (For further survey results see "Who Volunteers" chart.) Says John Thomas, "That's darn close to our 'Give 5' goal," referring to the group's campaign urging Americans to give 5 hours a week and 5 percent of their salaries.

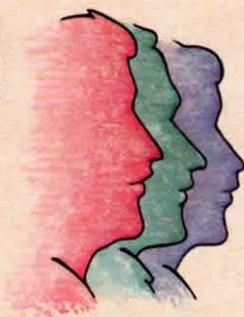
These survey results are particularly encouraging when one realizes that the majority of volunteers also work full time. The so-called core volunteer who comes in 20 hours a week to stuff envelopes or visit the homebound is as valued as ever. But more and more people fit volunteering into their work schedules. Says Linda Day of St. Louis, "We have professional people calling who know exactly what they want to do and how much time they have to do it." Thomas adds, "People are busy. They want to help but they want a start point and an end point; then they make the decision whether or not to re-enlist."

Gwen Jackson, national chairman of volunteers for the Red Cross (a vol-

Who volunteers

There are some surprises in the following data on who volunteers among the various age groups and among both the employed and nonemployed.

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	Volunteer	
Ages 25-34:	44.6%	4.0 hours/week
Ages 35-44:	53.9%	5.3 hours
Ages 45-54:	47.5%	5.8 hours
Ages 55-64:	47.1%	4.7 hours
Ages 65-74:	40.0%	6.0 hours
Ages 75 and over:	28.6%	4.4 hours

Women: 46.7% 4.7 hours	Men: 43.8% 4.8 hours
Self-employed, full-time: 56.1% 4.7 hours	Self-employed, part-time: 59.0% 6.4 hours
Other employed, full-time: 46.4% 4.4 hours	Other employed, part-time: 52.9% 5.7 hours
Not employed: 38.0% 4.7 hours	SOURCE: 1988 Independent Sector survey, <i>Giving and Volunteering in the United States</i>

unteer position), adds that volunteer work can even enhance a résumé: "We're looking for win-win situations. People can take what they learn in their volunteer life into their professional life—and vice-versa. Many people who come out of the work arena, especially those who are retiring earlier, go on to put their skills into volunteerism."

The value of volunteers to the organizations they serve cannot be overstated. Says AARP executive director Horace Deets, "The only way a membership organization works well is if sufficient members come forward to volunteer their time to help. When you look at how our programs and ser-

vices are delivered, it's by means of member to member. Very simply, this organization would not exist without volunteers."

Other organizations concur. The Salvation Army uses the services of 1.2 million volunteers. Says Lieutenant Colonel Leon Ferraez, director of communications for the Army, "We have only 5,000 professional commissioned officers, and we serve 18 million people a year. There's no way that group of officers could meet the needs of all those people."

The same holds true on the national level. Although some people may feel that if they never again hear the phrase "a thousand points of light"

again it will be soon enough, there is no question that President Bush, and President Reagan before him, called attention to the value of volunteers to American society, and to the growing role they are playing. (The hard-headed question of whether this was to justify cutbacks in government funds for social programs is open to debate.) Bush has since created the Thousand Points of Light Initiative to expand the role of volunteerism.

Says Ferraez, whose Salvation Army has seen an annual 10 to 12 percent increase in its volunteer force: "The volunteerism spirit in the United States represents a way of life not equaled elsewhere in the world—a generous way of life. You hear a lot about crime, drug abuse, and all the bad news, but volunteerism is on the increase as well. That's the good news."

Says Barbara Hirsch, who chairs volunteers for the Tulsa, Oklahoma, chapter of the Red Cross: "I don't think communities could continue to function without volunteers. If it weren't for all the time and effort individuals in the community give back, we wouldn't have museums and ballets and the arts and social services."

The types of work volunteers do, and their motivations, are nearly as diverse as the individuals themselves. From working disaster duty with the Red Cross or Salvation Army to counseling adolescents, joining the local community theater or leading nature walks, volunteers are all over the map. But they seem to share a common reward: an internal satisfaction that can't be gained any other way. Summarizes John Curtis, now in his ninth year as a Foster Grandparent in Portland, Maine, "It's a wonderful thing to know that somebody somewhere needs me."

How do people start volunteering? Again, the answers are as various as the people. "I was riding my bike through Rock Creek Park (in Washington, D.C.) and they flagged me down," says Judson Reed, who now

Get involved!

Think you'd like to volunteer, but not quite sure how to start? Make a list of the things you're interested in (the arts? the environment? children? the elderly? literacy?), then check in your community for organizations that are involved in these causes.

Chances are they'll be delighted to put you to work.

To find a local volunteer referral center in your area look in your phone book's white pages under Volunteer Center, Voluntary Action Center or Volunteer Bureau. For specific groups that might need help look in the yellow pages under Social Service Organizations. If there are no such listings in your phone book write VOLUN-

TEER—The National Center, 111 N 19th St, Ste 500, Arlington, VA 22209 for the name of a volunteer referral agency in your area.

AARP's own Volunteer Talent Bank is also an excellent place to start. After you fill out a registration questionnaire indicating your skills and interests, the Talent Bank can connect you with organizations needing volunteers with your qualifications. The program currently works with 13 outside organizations as well as with AARP programs and services. Says Talent Bank director Diana Lawry, "When we notice a lot of potential volunteers with a certain interest category, we look for organizations that are doing a good job in that effort." The Talent

Bank came into being four years ago after the AARP Board of Directors looked at the variety of volunteer recruitment efforts across the Association. "From there it was a quick leap to noticing the diversity of the volunteers' interests and skills, and that as broad as AARP's programs are, we might not have something for everybody," says Lawry. "Then we began to look to other organizations."

The Talent Bank is available to anyone over age 50, AARP member or not. To enroll, address a postcard request to VTB Registration Packet (D910), AARP Fulfillment (EE 104), 1909 K St NW, Washington, DC 20049. Allow six to eight weeks for delivery. —S.C.T.

works with the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, a plan to convert an abandoned railroad line to a hiker-biker path.

Says Mildred Whaley, a 16-year volunteer with the Salvation Army in St. Louis, "My husband passed away, my son died shortly after that, my mother had gone into a nursing home, and I retired—everything happened to me at once. A friend of mine called me up and said, 'Don't sit around—let's go down to the Army.'"

"I kept reading about kids with drug problems, and it really got to me," says John Curtis of his decision to volunteer as a Foster Grandparent with the drug rehabilitation program Day One. "I thought, 'Why doesn't someone help them?' Then I realized, 'I'm someone.'"

Though volunteers often spontaneously decide to become involved, most workers agree the best way to get people to volunteer is—ask them! "It's almost too ridiculously simple," says John Thomas, "but we have to be told

over and over again: People volunteer because they are asked, and particularly when they're asked personally by someone they know."

In fact, the Independent Sector survey noted that three-fourths of the respondents said they did not refuse to volunteer when asked. So, because only 45 percent reported volunteering, it's evident people aren't being asked. Yet the potential is everywhere, says the Red Cross' Jackson: "I've met and talked to people about volunteering while shopping in the supermarket. I always wear my Red Cross button because I'm so proud of it, and people will come up and ask me about it. You'd be surprised how many people are interested."

Jackson adds that it helps to be specific when asking people for their time. "Until you go to someone with a job description, it's hard for him or her to react. How can I say yes to something when I don't know what's entailed? People want to know what the job is, what time they have to be there,

how long will it last, what they need to know."

AARP's Helein adds that the organization needs to be sensitive to the volunteer's needs and motivations: "The spirit of altruism isn't dead, but most people are volunteering for other reasons too. It's okay to volunteer because you want to meet new people. It's okay that you just learned a new skill and you want a safe place to practice it. They're volunteering for a reason, and if we can fulfill that reason, that's their satisfaction."

In thinking of the qualities organizations look for in their volunteers, a few terms come up repeatedly: dedication, enthusiasm, a belief in the organization they're working for, reliability. "What's critical is that service mentality," says Horace Deets. "A willingness to do whatever one can do, given one's specific skills, ability and time available to be of assistance to others."

"You must be willing to be part of a team, because there's no way volun-

teers can function alone," says Betty Queen, a volunteer leadership development trainer for AARP. "You also need to be flexible, because often you'll find you're asked to do things you didn't expect—that's part of the charm of it!"

John Titley is past president of the Service Corps of Retired Executives, in which retired and active businessmen and -women counsel people running or starting small businesses. Titley cites the "ability to listen" as a crucial quality for SCORE volunteers. "When you're in a management position in the business world, you have the responsibility of telling people what to do. But when you're counseling clients [on a volunteer basis], you're attempting to understand their problems by listening to what they're saying. Then you lead them to make their own appropriate decisions."

During the recruitment process, the matching of person to program is an important part of an organization's task. Says Louise Crooks, herself a volunteer now serving as president of AARP, "Not everyone wants to do the same job—and that's good!" Adds Linda Day of the Salvation Army, "We take as much care with our volunteers as an employer takes selecting the right employee for a job. That's part of the benefit a volunteer receives from your program: knowing you've made a careful match."

Anne Harvey, director of AARP's Program and Field Services Division, notes, "The main thing is to clearly identify the expectations before the person becomes a volunteer so he or she knows what the organization expects, and vice-versa."

Once a volunteer is on board, the next step is training. This may be an

orientation to the organization itself and/or training in the specific skills required for one's position. At AARP, says Marguerite Potts, director of the Leadership Development Department, "Our philosophy is that we take the knowledge and skills people bring from their life experiences and help transfer them into a usable form for their volunteer work. They have a right to expect to be trained so they can carry out their responsibilities."

Keeping volunteers happy is another crucial element, and organizations use varied techniques to motivate and reward them. Some name "Volunteers of the Year"; others publicize volunteer efforts in a newsletter. Yet, says the Salvation Army's Ferraez, "Recognition is not the first priority. Really the greatest tool for keeping volunteers is making sure they're busy and have significant jobs to perform."

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Along this line, Judith Helein notes, "Many volunteers feel recognized if, after they've done a good job, you give them a harder job to do. Some feel recognized if they're asked to train other volunteers. It depends on what's internally motivating them, so it's important to get to know who they are."

In many organizations, the increasing level of responsibility leads to a chance to work one's way up in the volunteer hierarchy. John Titley of SCORE did exactly that: He started in a local chapter in Portland, Oregon, then rose through district and regional positions to the board of directors and finally the presidency. "Apparently a willing horse gets the load!" Titley says.

But regardless of awards, publicity and status, the primary benefits of volunteering are internal. Why would people bother to work without pay if

there weren't something basic "in it for them"? For some, it's seeing that they've made their mark. Says 63-year-old Judson Reed of his work with the Capital Crescent Trail, "Certainly there's a selfish angle to this: I hope we can get this trail finished before I'm too old to ride a bike! But then, too, some of it is altruistic: This will be a great recreational facility for people all across the county."

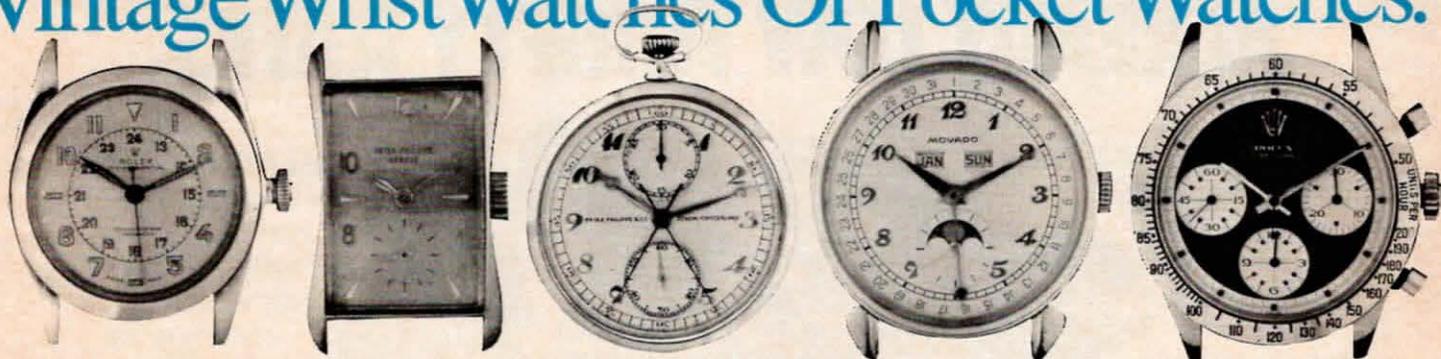
Lupita Marquez, a Foster Grandparent in Colorado, spent five days a week, four hours a day for 19 years nurturing premature infants at Denver General Hospital. "Sometimes they wouldn't react at first," she says. "But by the second day, it would be as if they'd known me all their lives. There's such a reward in that."

"I like knowing I'm going to help somebody," says Mildred Whaley of the Salvation Army, who illustrates

her statement with a poignant example. As part of her work with the Army's League of Mercy, Whaley makes regular visits to the local veterans' hospital. One day she noticed that one patient was fully dressed. "You're going home!" she exclaimed, only to be told that no, he was moving up to the eighth floor—the hospital's cancer ward. The man then asked if he might hold Whaley for a moment. "I swallowed," she recalls, "because I didn't know what to do. But I thought, 'Well, you're here to help,' so I said okay. He put his arms around me and put his cheek against mine, and I put my arms around him. When he let go he had tears in his eyes, and he said, 'Thank you. I just needed a personal touch to go on.'"

"I tell you, I went out in the hall and cried. But this is what I like to do—to know I'm helping." ■

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