

# Harriet Naylor on Helping to Preserve Democracy: The Role of Volunteer Administration

Anne S. Honer

## PREFACE

Since her death in 1985, it has been a year of remembering Harriet Naylor, a designer of the principles upon which the field of volunteer administration has grown. Not only a pioneer, Harriet Naylor continued to lead and challenge throughout her more than 40 years in the field. When her second book, *Leadership for Volunteering* (Dryden, NY: Dryden Associates), was written in 1976, editors noted that Ms. Naylor had already had 30 years experience in international volunteer work. Her professional training in social work and adult education provided the foundation for her work as Director of Volunteer Services, New York State Department of Mental Hygiene; consultant to the Office of Volunteer Development for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; and Director of Education and Training for the National Center for Voluntary Action. In recent years, she had toured the country as a consultant and speaker on "volunteerism," a term she sometimes regretted coining because of the unanticipated attention it received. In 1983, she was made an honorary lifetime member of the Association for Volunteer Administration.

In my correspondence with this leader in the year before she died, Harriet revealed some of her thoughts for a new book, thoughts which included her views on centralized decision-making ("it denigrates many able people with a lot to contribute"); training ("rote training is less than helpful because it gives false confidence!"); and the need for philosophers and theologians to "help us understand what builds faith, positive expectations,

etc. in a world which ridicules, puts people down . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Harriet Naylor's final presentation, however, was not in print but in person on May 1, 1985 at a Girl Scouts of the USA conference on volunteers at the Edith Macy Conference Center, Briarcliff Manor, New York. She had spent much time there many years ago as a volunteer, researching organizational management. A transcript of excerpts from that conference shows that Naylor's belief in the necessity of nurturing and developing volunteers in order to preserve democracy was her constant theme even to the last.

Harriet Naylor was one of those rare people who was able to help you "lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons."<sup>2</sup> Her many years of actual experience working with volunteers and in agencies did not hold her feet in the sand; instead, they released her creativity and enabled her to inspire others to seek and assume leadership in their own spheres of influence.

Will we continue to hear her voice? Harriet Naylor's visions of volunteerism were those of power and influence and leadership, ingredients essential to the preservation of democracy. She saw volunteer administrators as developing volunteer power and leadership within organizations' programs and instilling their vision in new professionals.

## ROLE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN A DEMOCRACY

Basic to a democracy is freedom of choice. Citizens choose their leaders by voting; show their lifestyle preferences in selecting their neighborhoods; choose

---

Anne S. Honer is Assistant Executive Director of Rhode Island's Volunteers in Action (VIA), this country's only statewide voluntary action center. She directs VIA's Community Skillsbank and provides the major staff support for the VAC's training and agency relations activities. She has served the Association for Volunteer Administration as National Membership Chair and reviewing editor of *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*.

their religious beliefs; and, hopefully, choose their vocations by seeking training related to their interests and aptitudes. Their understanding of the world around them is shaped by their choice of information sources—by the news programs they hear and the publications they read. To Harriet Naylor, what was even more important was that, by volunteering, citizens influence what values are to be preserved and which human services are to be made available.

As volunteers in the systems providing human services, citizens provide checks and balances to program implementation, ensuring that programs truly meet the needs of clients and other constituents. In *Leadership for Volunteering*, Naylor points out that because volunteers are free to choose to what they commit their time, skills, and energies, they can be advocates for effective programs. They talk to their friends and to decision-makers about well-run programs; further, they may have more credibility than paid staff because they do not personally benefit by taking a stand. Programs with volunteer involvement are strengthened by that participation and the issues volunteers raise.

Naylor recognized that government increasingly has removed Americans' choices by prescribing which human services will be provided through its support—and withdrawal of support—for such programs. Most Americans see or perhaps personally feel the impact of this influence as well-run and effective local programs are cut because of changing national or state priorities. For many Americans, even the right to choice itself has been threatened. For example, public transportation in rural areas is rarely "cost effective," yet is the only link for many rural poor or older people to health services, other programs, and companionship. As rural public transportation systems were de-funded by government, people's choices as to how their needs—even which needs—would be met were also "cut."

The housing choices of the elderly may be determined not by their own neighborhood and housing type preferences, but by their age, income, health, and participation in specific programs serving the

elderly. Closer to home for volunteerism, a low income person not yet 60 years of age may be prevented from choosing to volunteer because he or she does not meet the age requirements of a specific Federal volunteer program. Without the insurance coverage and transportation between home and workplace, volunteering might be impossible for that person.

In addition to increased government involvement in policy making within service-providing organizations, Naylor witnessed an era in which the trend was towards an increase in salaried staff. Individuals trained and accredited to provide human services took on much of the planning and priority-setting functions previously delegated in large part to volunteer leadership. As a result, volunteers at all levels had fewer choices for volunteering. Both communities and organizations suffered because they lost the participation of volunteers in the planning and implementation process.

Naylor felt that doing *for* others, as salaried staff were increasingly doing, was not to anyone's advantage. We should do *with* people . . . and that's part of the process which preserves and strengthens democracy:

*So voluntarism is learning that slowly, for a long time, we [professionals] did things for people and we had very patronizing attitudes about it, and it was greatly resented. But we have found that by planning with and working with people, our programs will work because they are everybody's plan.<sup>3</sup>*

#### ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR IN VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Naylor realized that there must be a system within which volunteers can work in order to maximize their potential. This system she called a "volunteer development system." This perspective emphasizes that the volunteer administrator is primarily responsible to volunteers for their development within a program. Keeping in mind that volunteer activities should contribute to achieving organizational goals, volunteer administrators themselves would stimulate individual growth, deepen volunteer commitment to the organization, and at the same time

work to keep volunteer spontaneity and responsiveness.

"Our field is so significant to individual development in a democratic society.

... "4 Naylor believed that everyone needs opportunities to volunteer in order to be "wholly human," for through volunteering people discover skills and abilities they didn't know they had.<sup>5</sup> And if volunteers are going to preserve our democratic way of life, they must recognize their own skills and abilities and provide leadership wherever needed. When successful, the volunteer administrator trains individuals to take responsibility for those matters which involve their lives and to be able to do something about them. "We could be developing volunteering as a route out of powerlessness."<sup>6</sup>

Unless conscious of this need to develop volunteers, volunteer administrators may tend to "manage programs" and not "lead people," when leadership is the more appropriate strategy. Democracy thrives on leadership, not management. Volunteer administrators who are trained to think primarily in terms of controlling human resources to achieve organizational goals and structure may give a lower priority to the enabling, empowering or liberating of volunteers. Naylor exclaimed, "Let's get management ideas under control so that we can spend time and effort on something else, for a change!"<sup>7</sup>

In the last two decades, the profession of volunteer administration has developed the tools with which to work in a variety of settings. But they are just that—tools. In her last years as she traveled around the country speaking, consulting, and writing, Hat urged volunteer administrators onward. "Leave those techniques to those we supervise," she suggested in her letters. She believed that the important work for volunteer directors is to inspire others to choose volunteerism to preserve those freedoms they value. If people don't volunteer, these freedoms eventually will be lost.

*We can't really overcome the impact of inflation and depression but with a volunteer development system we can bring in volunteer caring and concerns to undergird the program systems*

*and then free them to turn public policy priorities toward unmet needs.<sup>8</sup>*

Clearly, the message for those in the profession of volunteer administration is to master management and move on from there to strengthen the skills of freeing the potential of each individual who chooses to volunteer.

There are challenges. New populations are being added to the volunteer pool, including the court-ordered community service workers and those in physical or mental rehabilitation programs. Volunteer administrators screen these volunteers by assessing each person's ability to meet an agency's need; if a prospective volunteer's skills do not meet a need, he or she can be referred to another program.

Naylor's perspective was that volunteer administrators should keep alive the voluntary nature of the individual's commitment. They should understand the volunteer's skills as well as motives for wanting to volunteer for an organization, and explore the opportunities to volunteer which do and could exist. Volunteer administrators attempt to *screen people in*, not out. Wherever possible they have a responsibility to push their organizations to the limits of their adaptability and advocate for the right of all individuals to volunteer.

*Volunteering is a fragile, priceless commodity and we above all people should not try to control or regulate it, but encourage adaptability, response to emerging needs and some of the heroic job achievements which will raise the [volunteer's] self-image, confidence and competence by inspiration.<sup>9</sup>*

Many who have experienced the growth in confidence and competence that results from inspired leadership know its importance to individuals.

*Leaders emerge from the crucible of experience—they are not born, but made, and training makes a good many people into leaders with confidence based in the new competencies they learned as volunteers.<sup>10</sup>*

For example, in her speeches at the conference in May of 1985, Naylor told of a

shy, young Girl Scout who was elected troop president by her peers. Surprised by the choice, Naylor had faith that the democratic process was wiser than her personal perceptions of the girl. With her guidance, the young Scout became a very effective leader.

#### ROLE OF VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSION

Besides program management and leadership development those in the field of volunteer administration have the additional responsibility to share and teach "a vision of the values we hold dear, [and] not just informational, but self-help supportive relationships in our networks."<sup>11</sup> We must lead and develop not only volunteers, but also others in the field of volunteer administration.

In a publication released last year, Naylor suggested that the real challenge for the profession of volunteer administration was "to identify its role in society, its values and perimeters in the wide amorphous field of practice."<sup>12</sup> There are far-reaching implications for our society in how professionals see themselves. The task-oriented manager asks: "How do I do x, y, and z?" The value-seeking leader asks: "How do changes in society affect my profession—and how does, or can, my profession change society?" In other words, what unique knowledge, skills, attitudes, and visions do volunteer administrators as professionals have in common that will shape society's future?

Since many professions share common management skills, professional volunteer administrators must look to their visions for their uniqueness: who, where, what will they be in the future? What will be their professional relationships to their organizations? What assumptions will guide professional research and practice?

Volunteer administrators believe in the right of individuals to contribute their time, money and skills to causes, organizations and movements of their choice. And, partly because of Naylor's influence, today's volunteer administrators recognize their responsibility to create an effective partnership of volunteers and causes, organizations and movements.

Creating such opportunities will provide direction and focus as members of a democratic society are led to fulfill their choices. Harriet Naylor said in her last publication, *Beyond Managing Volunteers*: "I believe that democracy can survive if volunteering does!" And if volunteering survives, it will be in large measure because leaders such as Harriet Naylor were with us in our formative years.

---

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Harriet H. Naylor, letter to author, August 11, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Bach, *Illusions: The Adventure of a Reluctant Messiah* (Delacorte Press, 1977) p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Unpublished excerpts from Harriet Naylor's speeches, May 1, 1985. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the Girl Scouts of the USA in making these excerpts available for writing this article.

<sup>4</sup>Naylor, letter to author, February 4, 1984.

<sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, *Leadership for Volunteering*, (Dryden, NY: Dryden Associates, 1976) p. 26.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup>Naylor, February 4, 1984 letter.

<sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, *Leadership for Volunteering*, p. 211.

<sup>9</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, February 4, 1984 letter.

<sup>10</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, *Leadership for Volunteering*, p. 208.

<sup>11</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, February 4, 1984 letter.

<sup>12</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, *Beyond Managing Volunteers* (Boulder: Yellowfire Miniseries #17, February, 1985) p. 1.

---

The author thanks Susan Ellis and Ivan Scheier for their assistance in the preparation of this article.