

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

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Social administration¹ is a generic method which is practiced by social work executives in an array of social service settings including mental health, child welfare, aging, public assistance, among others. It is our thesis that volunteer programs can be considered an appropriate setting for the practice of social administration by an administrator who is a professional social worker.

This paper assumes that the arguments for volunteerism² have been cogently made elsewhere (Braithwaite, 1938; Ellis and Noyes, 1978; Naylor, 1973) and that the special contribution that volunteers can make to the social services is understood. It further assumes not only that the debates concerning volunteerism in the 1980's (e.g., the position of the National Organization for Women which does not accept the role of the volunteer as appropriate for the modern woman) are being addressed elsewhere (Haeuser and Schwartz, 1980), but that data concerning the relationship between social workers and volunteers are also available (Holme and Maizels, 1978).

We operate on the premise that volunteerism is an essential and vital activity with a long and valued tradition in the social services and that the charge for the social work profession is one of defining and refining the relationship between volunteerism and social work. That is what we are about.

THE CONTEXT OF VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

As early as 1938, in her study of volunteerism in Great Britain, Braithwaite focussed on the role of the "voluntary administrator."

The role of the voluntary worker in connection with the social services is not limited to the cases where he can participate in the actual

service rendered. Even when the service itself is performed entirely by professional specialists the general administration and control is in the hands of voluntary committee members (p. 56).

It is of historical interest to note Braithwaite's arguments for the unique contribution of this position. First, she cites the value to the volunteer in that the role provides "valuable training for citizenship." Second (and of particular relevance to the above mentioned argument raised by NOW), there are many capable women administrators who would not stand a chance at being elected to public office on local government bodies, but who have the expertise regarding the social services and also "more time to devote to the work." Third, the voluntary administrator is more in touch with public opinion than is the paid functionary. Finally, the capacity for the public sector to hire "administrative personnel qualitatively and quantitatively" is limited and yet there are many "public-spirited people [who] have specialized public interests and specialized experience -- they would willingly serve as administrators of, for example, hospitals or housing" on a voluntary basis (pp. 57-59).

While much has changed since that book was written, one pattern still persists. That is the fact that there are numerous administrators of volunteer programs who are themselves still volunteers. This is particularly true in small organizational settings often found in homes for the aged, churches, among others. This fact has several implications. It suggests that the organization does not recognize the potential contribution that the volunteer administrator can make to the program, especially in terms of cost-effectiveness. It also suggests that the dependence on volunteer leadership may lead to a weaker program because of the problems of lack of continuity of leadership, lesser organizational support and commitment.

A case illustration can best make the point. In 1960 The Human Relations Commission (to be referred to as HRC) of the City of Champaign, Illinois was concerned with racial tensions in the high school community. It sought the services of a social worker, trained in intergroup relations and community organization, to organize and administer a community program, but defined the position as that of a volunteer. The social worker was willing to serve as a volunteer but redefined the problem and the focus. The HRC accepted her interpretation that the complex community problem required a permanent, ongoing commitment from the city and the HRC and could not depend on the unknown availability of volunteers with expertise in administration, race relations and community work for the leadership role. Rather than volunteering to organize a program which might be at risk because of the lack of continuous leadership, the social worker spent the year developing community support for the program as well as seeking external funding to get the program started with seed money. Funds were obtained for this "Intergroup Activity for Youth" from the National Institute of Mental Health for a three year community demonstration project (Perlmutter, 1966). At the conclusion of the project, the City of Champaign allocated funds for the position of administrator to continue the program as part of the HRC's function. It should be noted that the program itself depended completely on volunteer participation from teenagers, social workers, adults and organized church groups (Perlmutter, 1965). The funding of one half-time administrative position made possible the involvement of more than 100 participants.

In addition to the fact that administrators of volunteer programs are both paid and unpaid, there are several other contextual factors which should be noted.

Of particular importance is the fact that the background, both in terms of education and experience, is very varied. There are no requirements that have been uniformly defined, either in terms of education, experience, or any other criteria. Usually the person comes up through the ranks and operates on an idiosyncratic, ad hoc basis. While this process does provide an opportunity for the creative individual with administrative proclivities to emerge and does also provide recognition of these abilities, the person usually operates in isolation and in a vacuum all too often feeling unsupported in his/her organization.

Most of the people now employed in many fields to administer volunteer programs work quite alone or with very few associates who understand what conflicting pressures can build up. To survive, volunteer administrators (usually called directors or coordinators) must tread a fine line between administrative pressures to pick up a miscellany of tasks with community relations aspects and community pressures to serve the purposes of individuals or groups. Clarity about values and great skill are required to bring all goals into congruence with the idea of service to meet the real needs of persons for whom the services are intended. An organized profession could back up lonely practitioners when pressures mount from either their organization setting or community (Naylor, 1976, p. 47).

This lack of uniformity and an identifiable base is further exacerbated by the fact that directors of volunteer programs work in a broad array of settings. To cite churches, scouts, hospitals, settlement houses, mental health programs, child welfare agencies, services for the aging, and correctional programs is only to scratch the surface of the variety, found both in the public and the voluntary sectors. It is therefore not surprising that the cohort of administrators of volunteer programs is splintered into an array of professional associations. For example, in the greater Philadelphia area there are at least three associations (e.g., The Pennsylvania Association for Directors of Volunteer Services, The Delaware Valley Association of Directors of Volunteer Services and the S. E. Region (Pennsylvania state employees) of Volunteer Coordinators). While these numerous organizations are evidence of the urgent need for professional association, the lack of cohesiveness and unity weakens the capacity of these various groups to serve as a strong force.

One final contextual reality must be noted. Whereas historically volunteers came from the upper strata of society and reflected a noblesse-oblige orientation (Gurteen, 1882; Lubove, 1965; Seeley, 1957), this is no longer the case today (Manser and Cass, 1976). Volunteers come from all segments of society. One area of change which must be noted is the role of the black volunteer leader (Austin, 1970), which has dramatically increased since the 1960's. The involvement of volunteers in administrative positions is also increasing.

THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

The role of the administrator of volunteer programs is almost without boundaries, ill-defined and oft amorphous. It encompasses both middle management and top management functions as it spans an array of administrative tasks. For example, the administrator of volunteer programs is usually involved in the more widely-known tasks of recruitment and placement. However, these two aspects are only part of what is conceived as a total approach to personnel management, which

includes staff development, in-service training and supervision to assure effective and satisfying performance on the part of the volunteer. These are functions frequently associated with middle management.

Richards (1978) describes this level of activity in detail in her discussion of one specific type of volunteer administration, that which typically takes place in the church setting. Richards emphasizes the importance of good administrative practice as being essential to the effective operation of a church program. This is interesting especially since churches are unique in that there is an enormous pool of potential volunteers in the organization which reduces the recruitment function. But the management principles from the business world nevertheless are sought here for a different set of problems surface which require managerial sophistication vis-a-vis appropriate system functioning and communication.

..., since all staff are as familiar with the potential volunteers as the Coordinator (administrator) of volunteers is, they can freely recruit volunteers themselves. In other agencies this volunteer service is somewhat removed from staff and they find it expedient to work through the volunteer office. In a church, where the function of the volunteer coordinator is somewhat foreign, staff tend to bypass the office to fill their own needs (Richards, 1978, p. 51).

MacBride (1979) focuses on a different set of competences needed by administrators of volunteer programs which is closely identified with executive functioning. These include financial management (including fund-raising and budgeting), public relations, public education, record keeping, program development, proposal writing and program evaluation. These are certainly technical areas of performance shared by top administrators in a wide array of settings, including profit and not-for-profit organizations.

Thus it is obvious that the position of administrator of volunteer programs cannot be readily categorized or defined; what is equally obvious is that it requires a broad set of skills and competences.

THE NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

A professional identity for volunteer administrators is identified as a priority need, as evident in the literature in the field (Althof, 1974; Anderson, 1976; Gowdey, et al., 1976; Naylor, 1976; Smith, 1976). Okin (1973) suggests that the single factor which can most determine the effectiveness--the impact--of the masses of citizen volunteers is the appropriate training of the directors of volunteer programs.

Activity in this regard is occurring in many quarters. First, the professional associations are becoming stronger and more involved in the issue of professionalism.³ Second, the U.S. Department of Labor's Division of Classification includes volunteer administrators as professional managers (Rehnberg, 1979). Third, a national certification plan is being developed and tested by the Association for Volunteer Administration (Boulder, Colorado), to articulate competence and provide societal sanction. Finally, occasional courses, workshops, and programs are offered in colleges and universities around the country.

The central question becomes, "what is the best route to take toward pro-

fessionalism?" There is no answer to this question in the field and little evidence that the question has been directly addressed. In this proposal, we suggest an educational route, the route of professional education.

However, it is our view that it is necessary but not sufficient to focus only on the education of volunteer administrators since their capacity to function at an optimum level depends not only on their competence but equally on the organization's capacity to provide support and sanction for their office. Consequently, while it is necessary to strengthen the performance of the administrator, it is also necessary to build into the educational program content directed at key actors in the organization, including the executive directors and members of the Boards of Directors.

THE STATE OF THE ART: EDUCATION IN VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

In 1979 a national survey of colleges offering programs in Volunteer Administration was conducted among a population of 35 colleges identified by the Association for Volunteer Administration. The findings were as follows: not one academic degree was offered; there were five certificate programs and two continuing education programs.⁴ These findings support those of an earlier, more extensive study of "Higher Education Programs for Administrators of Volunteers" (Walker and Smith, 1977:3). Both studies highlight the undeveloped nature of the field, with a high turnover in courses. While the 1977 study did identify a few degree programs, it found that "masters degree programs that have any specialization in volunteer administration are quite rare (only two in our sample)."

Walker and Smith discuss some of the issues related to "program initiation, development and implementation." They identify both barriers and facilitators vis-a-vis degree programs. The barriers are primarily related to the university, where there is a reluctance to take on new programs unless there is "no financial risk to the institution." Furthermore, there does not seem to be a stake in this program area, and interest constantly waxes and wanes.

This issue of a "stake in the program," oft a barrier from the university perspective, is presented as a facilitator from the perspective of the field.

The most significant success factor in program success seems to be the active, persistent and continuing committed involvement of one individual or a small group of individuals, involved themselves in or deeply concerned with the practice of volunteer administration (Walker and Smith, 1977:4).

A second facilitator is the participation of national or local organizations and leaders in the field of volunteer administration in the development of the educational program. This is based on the authors' assumption that college administrators and faculty usually have little knowledge or understanding of the field.

A third facilitator is finding an appropriate home for the program in the educational institution. Experience has shown that successful programs are usually located in "Human/Public/Social/Community Services or in Business/Management Schools...." Fourth, the fear of the impact of the new program on the base unit should be dealt with, and discussion should include the program's

implications for related departments in the institution. And finally, the pressure of a powerful and prominent local voluntary action coordinating group is important.

Winifred Brown, Director of the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center of the City of New York, has emphasized the need for professional education in Volunteer Administration, especially as the interest and activity in this arena increases.⁵ Currently 30 states in our country have Offices for Volunteering, and a Federal Commission on Volunteerism is in the offing. The development of an effective cadre of professionals to meet these demands is a necessity. Brown's view is that the core of a graduate program should be in a standard professional school, such as social work, with a concentration in Volunteer Administration.

THE SOCIAL WORK MSW AS PROFESSIONAL BASE

(1) Rationale

The field of volunteer administration is rapidly emerging as one of major proportions. In the Delaware Valley area of Pennsylvania alone it is estimated that there are a minimum of 3,000 volunteer programs which would require 3,000 volunteer administrators.⁶ There is a growing awareness on the part of this cohort on a national level that professional status is essential to provide them with the sanction and support they need in their workplace. It is keenly felt that the various workshops and continuing education programs are inadequate to meet this need. While a national certification program is being promulgated by the National Association for Volunteer Administrators in Boulder, Colorado, this is not enough. In addition to the issue of status and sanction is the issue of expanding the horizons and the job mobility of the individual volunteer administrator. As the situation is now, he/she is locked into this single job category. There is a need for transferability not only to paid employment but to other administrative roles in the social services. Similarly, MSW's could seek employment in the field of volunteer administration, thus encouraging a fluidity of movement.

It should be emphasized that the MSW degree should allow for the specification of "Concentration in Volunteer Administration" as a visible product.

There are many areas of compatibility between the profession of social work and the field of volunteerism. First, and perhaps foremost, is the dual concern of both fields not only with the delivery of services but also with advocacy for its client populations. Manser and Cass (1976) highlight this duality and Naylor (1976) gives emphasis to advocacy:

The possibilities for strengthening programs by volunteer advocacy are growing out of experience in community action programs and governmental services as well as more traditional voluntary agencies. Acting as advocates or interpreters, volunteers serve clients directly, help people find appropriate services, or mobilize resources in their behalf.

In all kinds of human services the volunteer serves as advocate for services with people and their families from the earliest prevention level throughout treatment, and continues to help persons to confidence and competence throughout the rehabilitation process.

It is interesting to compare this view with that of Slavin (1980:17) who writes about the role of the social work executive.

Advocacy in social work...is normally seen as adversarial to administration, as a corrective action against arbitrary or destructive agency behavior. The target of advocacy action is most generally authority, the "powers", or organizational policy, the very aspects of the social agency with which the administrator is most centrally identified. On the one hand this makes it extremely difficult for the administrator to project a client advocacy posture. On the other hand, when deftly managed, the authority position of the administrator can facilitate advocacy behavior by staff members, clients, client organizations, and community consumer bodies. Easy access to board members both individually and collectively places the administrator in a strategic position of influence internally. Relationships with key persons of influence in the community, with organizations positively associated with advocacy goals, and with the media can be used to further client objectives.

A second area of compatibility is that social work is practiced in a broad array of settings and fields of service, as is volunteerism. Third, many of these agencies already have large volunteer programs (e.g., Homes for the Aged, Hospitals, Women Organized Against Rape, etc.); not only are direct relationship possible with the administrators of the volunteer programs, but the development of field work internships in volunteer administration is clearly feasible.

And finally, social administration is practiced at both the middle management level and the top management level. The administrative skills practiced by volunteer administrators which were identified earlier are also part of the expertise inherent in the MSW administration program. We will therefore explore the professionalization of volunteer administrators through the Masters in Social Work degree.

(2) Implementation

In this discussion of implementing an MSW program for volunteer administration we will address these topics: (a) criteria for admission, (b) curriculum design and (c) continuing education.

(a) Criteria for Admission

Schools of Social Work have always had flexible admissions criteria and have not only appreciated, but expected, diverse backgrounds among their applicants. Thus it has not been unusual to have an array of educational undergraduate degrees represented, ranging from English literature to mechanical engineering. It should also be noted that this diversity of background has also been found among directors of volunteer programs.

In addition to the educational requirements for admission, Schools of Social Work have paid attention to the life experience criterion of their applicants. The applications are always carefully read with a focus on the actual work of the applicant in some form of social service activity. Whether the experience has been for paid or volunteer performance has not been of concern; what has

mattered is the nature of the experience and the commitment it represents to this field of service. Again we find a convergence between the experience of volunteerism and the interest of the Schools of Social Work.

In addition to the above criteria of interest to MSW programs are the qualifications often required by programs which offer a major or concentration in social administration. An added expectation for acceptance into these programs usually is that of experience in some form of direct service, usually with a minimum of two years. Volunteer activity equivalent to the full time experiential requirement is acceptable.

It is important to identify a special admissions issue which may exist for potential applicants who are already working as Directors of Volunteer Programs and who want to become MSW candidates. Schools of Social Work must recognize their special needs. If they are employed, they cannot easily leave their jobs for a full time degree program. In such situations, some schools offer extended degree programs which allow people in employment to retain their jobs while attending school for an extended time period. As part of the admissions process the employing organization must be involved in order to plan for the educational experience of their employee. Thus the criteria for admissions in these situations extend to include both the applicant and the employing organization. The employing organization must demonstrate its flexibility in meeting the School's criteria for the educational program in areas such as time for courses, field work requirements, among others.

(b) Curriculum Design⁷

Myers and Richards in 1979 did an extensive study of all appropriate professional programs in the greater Philadelphia area and concluded that "the administrative sequence of the School of Social Administration Graduate Department embodies many of the (areas of volunteer administration), and with the addition of specialized material regarding volunteerism seems a most appropriate 'home' for this sequence."⁸

The curriculum they were identifying as compatible with their needs includes courses which cover social work philosophy and ideology, social science knowledge and technical skills.⁹ In addition to organization theory and social policy, the specific technical courses in administration include financial management, personnel management, grantsmanship and proposal writing, information handling and program evaluation.

However, several special needs of this cohort must be addressed. For example, a seminar on volunteerism is essential which provides an overview of that special field (history, personnel, programs, services, etc.). It should also be noted that excellent instructors are available from the field of volunteer administration who should be included in the teaching faculty, either for this seminar or for special mini-courses.

Finally, the design of field work for this group requires special attention. Several items are worth noting. First, an experienced administrator of volunteer programs could provide an excellent placement if this can be arranged. Second, if the administrator is also the student, there should be consideration given to allowing credit for life experiences and reducing field work hours. Third, if the student is working in the agency and using it as a field placement, supervision by another administrator should be arranged.

Since we are usually dealing with a mature and experienced adult student, special curriculum design and flexibility will be necessary if we are to meet the needs of the group of practitioners known as volunteer administrators.

(c) Continuing Education

While addressing the needs of the administrators of volunteer programs, another area requires urgent attention. All too often the volunteer administrators are left to carry the ball on their own, unsupported in their systems and under-resourced. It is essential that workshops, courses or any other appropriate format be developed for the executives of the organizations which contain volunteer programs in order to help these systems understand, value and support this vital manpower pool. In addition to the training for executives, schools should also address the continuing educational needs of the administrators of volunteer programs.

CONCLUSION

We are living in difficult and tumultuous times. Human services are at risk as are the human service professions. There may be a tendency for groups to close ranks, to become protective of their turf. This may especially be the case in relation to professional social workers and their reactions to volunteers at a time when jobs are harder to obtain. It, therefore, cannot be emphasized enough that volunteers do not replace professionals but rather perform functions that otherwise could not get done. And it is the administrator of volunteer programs who must serve the critical role of defining the roles, interpreting the functions and bridging the gap between the volunteers and the professionals. The necessity for professionalizing this cohort, important in any context, becomes all the more necessary in these complex times.

Notes

1. Also referred to as social work administration.
2. Volunteerism has been defined as a service provided without pay, through which the citizen who participates "is both a contributor to democratic solutions and a participant who is finding opportunity for personal growth and satisfaction" (Okin and Wiener, 1973:3).
3. The Association for Volunteer Administration, Boulder, Colorado, is very active and publishes several journals among its various educational and research activities.
4. The survey was conducted in November, 1979 by Cora Myers, Senior Consultant, The Consultant Community, and Janet Richards, Coordinator of Volunteers, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Huntingdon Valley, Pa.
5. Winifred Brown, Director, Mayor's Voluntary Action Center of New York City. Talk given at the Volunteer Action Council, Philadelphia, February, 1980.
6. Letter from Cora Meyers, November, 1979 to the School of Social Administration, Temple University.

7. Although many volunteer administrators do not have a first degree (BSW or BA), in this discussion we are focussing on the MSW.
8. Letter sent November, 1979.
9. The curriculum format is available upon request from the author.

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