

# An Untapped Volunteer Resource: People with HIV Disease, ARC, or AIDS

Irene K. Wysocki

We all know that maintaining and replenishing a pool of talented volunteers is an ongoing and often difficult process, and as volunteer managers we must be creative and even take risks in our choices. The questions we need to ask are whom to recruit and how to recruit. A rich resource of skilled and willing volunteers to consider, then, lies in the approximately one million people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). People with HIV infection, AIDS (Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome), or AIDS-Related Complex (ARC) can tremendously benefit any volunteer administrator and organization, offering advantages such as flexible schedules (a volunteer manager's dream-come-true), enormous talent, and an extraordinary motivation to help others. Beyond their direct volunteer efforts, they can also help an organization make a contribution in the fight against AIDS and HIV disease by fostering understanding about the epidemic and about people with AIDS.

For those unfamiliar with working closely with individuals with AIDS, many questions arise. How do I find these individuals and how do I go about recruiting them? For other staff and volunteers, what might be the ramifications of incorporating this group of volunteers and how do I address those issues? This article will attempt to answer these questions and present an understanding of this extraordinary volunteer resource.

## THE HIV-POSITIVE VOLUNTEER

After the 1989 International Conference on Volunteer Administration workshop, "Managing People with HIV Infection, AIDS, and ARC," many members of the audience commented that it had simply never occurred to them that a pool of "ideal" volunteers existed in the HIV-infected population. While people infected with HIV may be unable to maintain a full work schedule and are technically disabled (covered by the list of handicapped conditions in the new Americans with Disabilities Act), they are nonetheless productive and can often provide substantial volunteer hours. Many are also young, well-educated, and professionally trained. For example, the author has found pertinent volunteer assignments for lawyers, doctors, public relations experts, writers, editors, and graphic artists. Given volunteers with such high-calibre skills *and available volunteer hours*, managers can frequently expand the scope of traditional volunteer assignments. A volunteer with the time and requisite expertise can often take on large, involved projects for which an organization would otherwise have to hire an employee or paid consultant.

In addition to the skills and time offered to an organization, a qualified volunteer also needs to have a sense of personal commitment and responsibility toward helping others. Again, many potential volunteers with HIV disease meet

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*Irene K. Wysocki*, Director of Volunteer Services of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, has been involved in the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco since 1985. She began as a volunteer educating the general public about AIDS and developed the current volunteer program at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, where for the past three years she has been managing volunteers. She strongly supports the AVA Board of Directors' resolution discouraging discrimination against volunteers with HIV infection and seeks to share with her colleagues the methods she and others have employed to cope with the disease among her own corps of volunteers. Ms. Wysocki received a B.A. degree in Psychology and Business in 1986 from New College of California.

## APPENDIX A

### **An Untapped Volunteer Resource: People with HIV Infection, AIDS, or ARC**

#### **How to Effectively Manage People Who Are HIV-Positive as Volunteers:**

In the United States approximately one and a half million people are living with HIV infection.

A large segment of this population of people is in the prime of their lives and careers. Frequently, they are professionals. After coping with the shock of being diagnosed as HIV-positive, they often embrace life with an enthusiasm and energy that few of us ever experience. Tapping their energy and giving it direction can help them as individuals and us as volunteer managers.

#### **As Volunteer Administrators, What Is Our Obligation to This Population?**

As volunteer managers we see the many contributions that volunteers provide. These contributions become even more important for HIV-infected persons because for them, helping others is very important. As volunteer managers we have the rare opportunity to empower these people by channeling their energy into focused volunteer work.

#### **By Using HIV-Positive Volunteers, You Can:**

- Expand your horizons as a volunteer manager.
- Set a public example for compassion during a time of widespread misunderstanding about the AIDS epidemic.
- Support volunteer managers' needs to make changes in their programs which match societal changes around AIDS and AIDS-related discrimination.
- Use your leadership skills to change community responses to the needs of those with HIV infection.

#### **How Can Managers Best Learn to Support This Volunteer Base?**

The ability to look at our fears about HIV infection and what this means to us personally is a critical first step. The second important step is to educate ourselves so that we overcome our fears.

As effective volunteer managers, we must:

- Sensitize ourselves to HIV infection.
- Reduce homophobia.
- Reduce irrational fears of HIV infection.
- Sensitize our staffs and other volunteers to the needs of people with HIV infection.
- Educate ourselves and our staffs about the issues surrounding a life-threatening illness, such as HIV-infection.
- Support the will to live in all persons with life-threatening illnesses.

#### **Benefits to Volunteer Administrators and Their Organizations When They Work With People With HIV Infection**

People living with AIDS or HIV infection will expand our volunteer bases, providing flexible schedules, enormous talent, and extraordinary motivation to help others. Other benefits are:

- Their contributions to AIDS prevention education. They can speak to these issues first hand.
- They offer volunteer managers the opportunity to learn about AIDS and HIV infection in a way that can lessen irrational fears.
- They can provide volunteer managers the personal enjoyment of getting to know and to support individuals with AIDS or HIV infection.

- They offer volunteer managers the opportunity to learn special supervision skills.
- Their individual skills increase an organization's talent pool.
- They provide an organization a way to make a direct contribution to fighting AIDS and to make a statement to other agencies about their leadership role in the AIDS/HIV epidemic.
- They provide remarkable volunteer leadership.
- They can help your agency play a role in changing your community's response to AIDS.
- Their desires to help others are furthered by providing them meaningful work in the organization of their choice.

## APPENDIX B

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AIDS FOUNDATION VOLUNTEER SERVICES DEPARTMENT

"It is the intention of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation to provide equal opportunity to all qualified persons without regard to race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, national origin, physical challenges or veteran status."

*-from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation Volunteer Services Policies and Procedures Manual*

#### AIDS Terms:

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus  
 AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome  
 ARC: AIDS Related Complex  
 IDU: Injection Drug User  
 PWA: Person With AIDS  
 CDC: Centers for Disease Control  
 ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

One Million people infected  
in the United States

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8 to 10 million people infected  
worldwide

#### ADA List Of Conditions Found to Be Disabling

High Blood Pressure (ANT)	Trunk/Spine Defects and Deformities	Diabetes
Epilepsy	Blindness	Arthritis
Back Condition	Hearing Impairment	Cancer
Heart Trouble	Mental Illness	Gastrointestinal Problems
Asthma	Neuropsychiatric Problems	Drug Addiction (See 1978 Amendment)
Amputation	Skin Condition	Alcoholism (See 1978 Amendment)
Respiratory Ailments	Speech Impairment	Obesity (New York State)
Paralysis or Palsy	Cosmetic Disfigurement	<i>AIDS/ARC/HIV Antibody Positivity</i>

### U.S. AIDS STATISTICS BY STATE

New AIDS Cases per 100,000 Population in U.S. States and Territories<sup>1</sup>

Highest (30+ cases)	High (15-30 cases)	Medium-high (12-16 cases)	Medium (9-12 cases)	Low-medium (6-9 cases)	Low (3-6 cases)	Lowest (0-3 cases)
Dist. of Columbia	California	Connecticut	Colorado	Arizona	Alabama	Alaska
New York	Florida	Hawaii	Delaware	Mississippi	Indiana	Arkansas
Puerto Rico	Georgia	Massachusetts	Illinois	Missouri	Kansas	Idaho
	Maryland	Texas	Louisiana	New Mexico	Kentucky	Iowa
	Nevada		Pennsylvania	North Carolina	Maine	Montana
	New Jersey		Washington	Oregon	Michigan	Nebraska
	Virgin Islands			Rhode Island	Minnesota	North Dakota
				South Dakota	New Hampshire	South Dakota
				Virginia	Ohio	West Virginia
					Oklahoma	Wisconsin
					Tennessee	Wyoming
					Utah	Guam
						Pacific Islands/ Trust Territory

<sup>1</sup> Source: HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, November 1989, Centers for Disease Control

## CDC National AIDS Hotline: 1-800-342-AIDS