

THE CHANGING ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN A RESIDENTIAL FACILITY FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a new project implemented at Austin State School (Texas) directed toward using volunteers as extensions of professional staff. The recruitment, orientation, training and supervision of volunteers in many areas as well as reactions of participants gives evidence to the fact that this may be the answer to the manpower shortage in State supported institutions. It has been observed that along with the training of the volunteers by staff more effective communication has been achieved between departments within the institution, and residents have reaped many beneficial services.***

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The Austin State School

The Austin State School was founded in 1917 expressly for the care of the mentally retarded and was the first such State residential facility to be established in Texas. Since the institution was founded and up to the present time, the population, facilities and programs have substantially increased. The Austin State School is one of seven special schools administered by the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. (Two additional special schools are presently being constructed in Corpus Christi and Lubbock.)

The population in terms of enrollment is approximately 2300 residents who are housed in 33 dormitories located on two campuses. The School accepts Texas applicants of all races, male and female, all levels of retardation, all ages except ambulatory applicants below the age of six months from 39 counties located in South Central and Southeastern portions of the State.

The Project

The School now has in operation eight federally funded grants which contribute significantly toward improvement of institutional programs. One of these is the Volunteer Research and Training Project titled, "The Use of Volunteers as Trainers of Retarded Children." This Project was funded for a three year period by a National Institute of Health, Title V Grant and implemented in March 1966. The staff consists of a director and a project analyst. It is unique in that it is the only known project of its kind operated by a State institution. Well-trained professional staff within the institution function as trainers and consultants to lay persons who are charged with implementation of treatment and training programs. Both professional and sub-professional staff teach volunteers to perform needed services

in selected program areas. For example, a staff psychologist teaches a volunteer how to administer basic psychological tests, a social worker trains a volunteer to function as an aide in social work or a teacher trains a volunteer to work with residents in the classroom as a teacher's aide. Also, there are some volunteers who have become sufficiently proficient in certain areas that they inturn teach other volunteers. An example of this would be in teaching the techniques of programmed instruction to another volunteer.

Prior to the implementation of this project, volunteers generally limited their services to residents as friendly visitors on and off campus of the institution. They took them shopping, donated clothing, gifts, goodies and made available many other valuable services. These needed types of services are increasing and continue to be provided by volunteers who contribute their time, talent and money; however, they do so under a less structured program and consistent time schedule than is necessary for volunteers involved with the Project.

Why Such A Project:

It is a recognized fact that there exists today a shortage of professional manpower in many fields, especially in the area of mental retardation. It appears that the current rate of training professionals in the field of mental retardation will not satisfy the growing need (President's Panel on M.R., 1962). Based on this probable shortage, it is apparent that professionals must change their roles of functioning. Rather than provide limited direct services to the many institutionalized retarded, it was recommended in the volunteer training grant proposal that professionals serve in the capacity of consultants and trainers to sub-professional staff and volunteers. The use of professional

staff in this manner was put into effect by the Volunteer Project and has resulted in a significant increase of direct services to residents by volunteers. Volunteers are now more closely associated with professional staff and are involved to a greater extent with meaningful and responsible types of work. The volunteers seem to be highly motivated and the professional staff (as well as other staff) is very much aware of the valuable services trained volunteers offer. This is evidenced by their echos of praise and appreciation and their increasing requests for additional volunteer assistance.

Volunteers as Extensions of Professional Staff

This project, during its period of operation, has successfully demonstrated its chief goal that selected volunteers can function as extensions of professional staff. This goal became a reality through the wholehearted efforts of the project, institutional and volunteer services staff, the volunteer services council and strong support of the administration.

An effective program such as this Project requires the following:

1. a public relations approach that will enable the Project to obtain qualified volunteer prospects,
2. effective screening of volunteer applicants,
3. carefully planned programs structured toward developing interest on the part of all involved staff in the training of volunteers,
4. opportunities for volunteers to receive continuous training,
5. effective communication with both volunteers and staff,
6. consistent coordination and follow-up.

Dissemination of information concerning the Volunteer Training Project initially was accomplished through speaking engagements to civic, educational and religious organizations within the community. The newspaper, television and radio media were used for interpretation of the aims and purposes of the Project. It appears now after nearly three years of operation that the most significant communications media is by word-of-mouth from experienced volunteers who share their experiences with others in the community.

For the most part the School's Volunteer Services Department conducts the initial screening interview with the prospective applicant and in turn refers those selected to the Project. Volunteers are assigned to specific training programs based on their interests and ability after completion of an application form and interview with the Project staff.

Since the implementation of this grant in 1966 and up to the present, 375 volunteers have been trained to work directly with residents as extensions of the institution's professional staff.

Training of Volunteers

Provision is made for all volunteers to receive on-the-job training and supervision in programs concerned with direct services to the resident. Volunteers also are afforded the opportunity to participate in special curricula made available by the School's Department of Inservice Training. Some of the workshops are conducted primarily for volunteers; others are planned for employees, but volunteers are also invited and do attend when applicable.

During the initial phase of this Project's operation, workshops or training sessions for

volunteers were conducted in speech therapy, programmed instruction, working with atypical children, basic psychological testing and orientation in mental retardation. As the project progressed and new volunteers were recruited, new areas of service were explored. If these areas seemed feasible, programs were initiated and volunteers were provided the necessary training to equip them to work effectively in their assignments.

The staff of several departments is involved in the training of volunteers. These include the following: Departments of Inservice Education, Psychology, Social Service, Academic School, Physical Education, Physical Therapy and Recreation. Also knowledgeable staff from outside the institution has participated in several workshops involved in training of volunteers. Staff members from the Texas Schools for the Blind and Deaf and The University of Texas Department of Special Education have participated and shared valuable information in their specialized fields. This special training has proven to be most helpful to those volunteers involved in treatment and training programs for handicapped residents. A great deal of emphasis on adequate training of volunteers was given during the early stages of this Project and continues to be an important concern. The Project staff, supported by Administration, stressed to other institutional staff members the importance of providing volunteers a meaningful on-going training program. Effective communication, both verbally and written, between the Project staff, professional and other institutional staff is essential in order to make progress. This was especially true during the early development of the Project.

Training, as provided by the professional staff, has helped volunteers to (1) reach learning

objectives necessary to perform tasks expected of them in their work assignments, (2) understand the philosophy, purpose of the Project and its goals and objectives, and (3) develop a self-concept as being a part of the program and the institution.

The Programs

A brief summary of the program areas in which trained volunteers serve as aides or instructors is described below:

(1) Training for Blind Retardates -- Volunteers instruct residents on a one-to-one basis or in groups of two or three. The major responsibilities in working with blind residents are to: establish a friendly relationship, encourage them to become more independent, assist them in orientation and mobility training and stimulate their senses of touch, smell, taste and hearing.

(2) Social Work Aide -- Volunteers, under the guidance of a social worker on the staff, learn to answer routine correspondence regarding the resident's welfare within the institution, conduct tours for parents, visit residents in their dormitories and review folders for follow-up services on residents.

(3) Instruction to Deaf Retardates -- Deaf residents are taught by trained volunteers the basic sign language, lip reading, hand signs using picture or object illustrations and appropriate social behavior. As with the blind, the deaf are taught on a one-to-one basis and in small groups.

(4) Psychological Testing -- Volunteers, serving as assistants to staff psychologists, learn to administer basic psychological tests such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary, Vineland, Bender and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children.

The staff monitors the psychological reports and teaches the volunteer the proper way to compose reports and administer tests.

(5) Classes in Grooming -- Instruction to residents in acceptable dress, manners, care of face, hair, nails as well as appropriate behavior is provided by volunteers in a classroom setting under the guidance of a teacher on the staff. Both male and female residents are included in this training program.

(6) Operant Conditioning -- Techniques of behavior shaping are taught selected volunteers interested in this type of work by a training specialist in the Inservice Training Department. The volunteer inturn trains small groups of young severely retarded children in using the "potty", correct eating habits and other self-help skills through the use of positive reinforcements and rewards.

(7) Arts and Crafts -- Demonstration and simple directions for helping residents construct objects of art are provided by volunteers. The purpose of this activity is to motivate small groups of residents to work with their hands as well as provide a source of enjoyment in this form of therapy.

(8) Teachers' Aide -- The purpose of this activity is to permit qualified volunteers to serve as extensions or assistants to the teacher in a classroom setting. The volunteer helps the teacher instruct preschool, trainable and educable residents. With the help of volunteers more students are reached and receive closer attention.

(9) Music Therapy -- Volunteers, who are interested and enjoy music, work with young children in small groups or individually if needed in

rhythm band and other music related activities. Training for volunteers is provided by a staff psychologist knowledgeable in Music Therapy.

(10) Programmed Instruction -- Instruction to certain residents using programmed materials is provided by trained volunteers on a one-to-one basis. "The basic idea is that the most efficient, pleasant and permanent learning occurs when the student proceeds through a course by a large number of small, easy-to-take steps." (Teaching Materials Corporation, Division of Grolier Incorporated) This particular program is being successfully used to teach older residents who have not been in academic school or have been dropped from special education classes.

(11) Remotivation -- The primary purpose of this program is to provide stimulating activities to older residents so that they might live more meaningful lives in an institution. The aim is to expose them to the world outside through group discussions on topics of interest, pantomiming, simple acting, singing, games, etc. Volunteers bring the outer world into the institution on a different basis, and the residents are the recipients of the much needed stimulation, warmth, understanding and personal interest.

(12) Physical Therapy -- The purpose of physical therapy is to help handicapped residents correct or reduce their physical problem by application of various treatment techniques. The Physical Therapy Center staff trains volunteers to perform in certain areas of treatment under their guidance. This particular program has proved to be a popular area for high school and college students, especially during the summer months.

(13) Speech Therapy -- Volunteers work under the supervision of a speech therapist and help residents to improve or correct their speech

problems. This is a newly developed area for volunteers but appears to be a feasible type of service for volunteers, especially college students in the speech therapy field.

(14) Sheltered Workshop Operation -- This is a newly developed rehabilitation program within the institution. Plans are established for volunteers to serve as assistants to instruct small groups of residents in molding, painting, furniture refinishing and other creative types of work. Volunteers will assist in supervising residents involved in contract work such as assembling parts of products, sanding and finishing articles of wood, etc. It is felt that as this program unfolds, volunteers can provide a valuable service.

(15) Physical Education -- The objectives of this program are to develop motor coordination, improve physical fitness and to provide enjoyment for the residents. Young volunteers seem most enthusiastic about this program, and reports from the physical education staff indicate they have performed very effectively. It appears that young people confide and trust other young people, and as a result of this, high school and college students can break through barriers to obtain rapport, friendship and produce participation of the residents in physical education activities.

The table below summarizes the contributions of volunteers during the past fiscal year. In comparing the previous years of operation, each year reflects an increase of programs, volunteers and number of hours of service contributed. During the fiscal year ending August 31, 1966, 42 volunteers contributed 4,508 hours of service; 146 volunteers contributed 7,129 hours in 1967; for the same fiscal year period in 1968, as reflected in the table, 203 volunteers contributed 9,874 hours.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Number of Volunteers</u>	<u>Number of Hours Contributed</u>
Aides to Teachers	32	750
Arts and Crafts	10	183
Case Aides	12	400
Instruction to Blind	11	353
Instruction to Deaf	11	545
Instruction in Grooming	4	129
Instruction of Pretrainables	4	40
Motivation	4	194
Music Therapy	7	194
Operant Conditioning	7	373
Physical Education	19	1499
Physical Therapy	38	1558
Programmed Instruction	25	1533
Psychological Testing	20	1827
Recreation	3	74
Speech Therapy	2	30
Social Work	4	192
TOTAL: 17	203	9874

Highlights

During the summer of 1968, one of the volunteers, a retired person, produced an 8 mm color movie with sound depicting the services provided by volunteers in the various programs. This is a very good film in that it vividly tells the story of how volunteers help residents in many ways. Also, it is the work of a volunteer who conveys the message in his own way and not commercially. The film will be most helpful in orienting the public, volunteers, staff and prospective candidates for volunteer services.

A special program of the Youth Service Corps sponsored by the American Lutheran Church provided volunteers to the Austin State School during the summers of 1966 and 1967. The Youth Service Corps consists of high school graduates, juniors, seniors and college students from Lutheran and other denominations who are interested in serving others in need. During ten weeks of the summer in 1966, ten young women, ages 16 to 19, served as volunteers. These dedicated girls came from Iowa, Colorado, Kansas and Texas. Eight were Lutheran and two were members of other denominations. Again, in the summer of 1967, 5 Youth Corps young men from Texas and Louisiana served most enthusiastically as volunteers to our residents. This particular program proved to be a very fruitful experience which greatly benefited both volunteers and residents. Plans are presently underway for an even greater Youth Corps volunteer program beginning in June 1969.

Since the Project was implemented and up to the present time, forty-five student volunteers have changed their majors from other areas of academic interests to fields of study related to mental retardation.

Responses, both verbal and written, as to the value of the Volunteer Project have come from volunteers, residents, staff and others. The following excerpts of statements by volunteers reflect the many mutual benefits:

"Tommie was not a pretty picture to look at. Her head was shaven because of sores making her protruding ears look even worse. She had a constant runny nose and small slits for eyes. Her movement was very slow and she wasn't toilet trained, nor could she talk. Tommie was no bigger than a three year old, yet she had reached the age of fourteen years. She was never taken outside by volunteers because of her undesirable looks. One morning I finally had the courage to pick her up and hold her on my lap. When she took my hands in hers and slowly pulled my arms around her, I took a new look at myself. I was realizing what it was to give love to the unlovely. I rocked her in the rocking chair until I saw a big tear form in her eye and quietly roll down her cheek. No crying, no noise, just a tear."

"To walk, Linda needed a leg brace. I have a strong determination, and I wanted to see that child walk. My aim was to see each person on that unit who could do something about promoting her brace.

"With the use of a mirror Linda has learned to imitate me and say a few words."

"My first reaction towards them (residents) was that I would never be able to help them, having never worked with the blind (retarded) before. But after getting to know them, I found it very easy to work with them. I found that what they needed most was love and attention. I made a completely new world for them so that they could also know happiness that I know. No longer did they just sit in the unit doing nothing.

"To teach Ronnie how to swing, I sat him on my lap, wrapped his legs around mine, letting him feel the movements of my legs pushing the swing. After a week or so, he was able to swing by himself.

"Ronnie is not potty trained at all. He would just go any ol' time, no matter where or what we were doing. To train him, I would sit him on the potty every hour for ten minutes.

"While working with the children we attended a Child Behavior Modification class. Here we learned how to work with the children. We learned all about positive reinforcement which is rewarding responses which are steps toward progress in learning the desired behavior. At first I just tried using this (token reinforcement) on Ronnie to get him to clap his hands on command. He has learned to do this very well. Now I am working on him to come to me when I call his name, this being very hard for him because he is blind.

"I have grown to love these little boys very much, and I feel that they are my own. I feel that they know the world is no longer a noisy room with four walls where they just eat and sleep. Now they know what a flower is, the sweetness of its smell, the rough feel of the bark on the side of a tree and the singing of the birds. They know how it feels to stand out in the rain, beating softly against their skin, smelling the fresh air. They have learned many things, and I have learned much from them. I have learned to have patience, to take my responsibilities as they come to me. To know and to do my duties well. Being a volunteer this summer has truly shown me what I want out of life. It has helped me to decide what my career shall be.

"I will never forget the happy laughter of

Ronnie's voice ringing through the air. Nor shall I forget Billy's tight arm around my head, returning the love I have given him. It brings sadness to my heart and tears to my eyes to know that soon I will have to leave them and return home. But some day after I have finished college and have acquired the skill of teaching the blind, I will return to them for always."

"I can't work with these kids. I wouldn't know what to do for them were my first impressions when I was asked to apply for the Youth Corps. But now I know that I wouldn't exchange places with anyone this summer. This has been the best summer I have ever spent. It has not only taught me about this type of child, but I have been taught two other things I didn't even know I had -- patience and endurance.

"At the first of the summer I was full of pity for these children, especially Irma. Besides being retarded, she is blind and has cerebral palsy. When I first started working with Irma she could hardly walk. I had a talk with her teacher, and he suggested several things I could help her with. Now we take daily walks and she doesn't have to cling to my arm. She walks down the sidewalk with her head up and with a smile on her face. She has discovered that people's arms swing back and forth when they walk; that roses smell wonderful and that there are other students in the School other than the girls in her dorm. Teaching Irma to walk correctly was fairly easy, but teaching her to climb stairs was a different story. I tried everything I could think of to teach her, but nothing seemed to work. One day we heard a lecture on using 'positive reinforcement' to teach retarded children and so I decided to try it. And you know what? it worked! But I must warn you -- teaching retarded children is not a 'bed of roses'. There are many days when nothing will happen. Weeks may go by

where no progress can be seen. On these days you will feel very despondent and disappointed, but when success comes, it COMES! Every time I see some little thing I have taught my girls I feel like a million dollars. I feel like a new person, because I have done some little thing that will help my girls live better lives.

"Working with retarded children this past summer has given me a new insight into mental retardation. It will no longer be a dirty word to me. I have found my answer of what to be. Because of my experiences this past summer I have decided to go into Special Education."

"Each day I would take Donald for a walk. He was thrilled to hear cheery voices of birds and smell the fragrance of roses. To help him cope with his blindness, I began trying to teach him to distinguish objects by feeling them.

"It took days before Peter would not cringe when I walked into the room. Then one day he took my hand in his and lead me into the bedroom with him.

"Seventy-five little boys taught me a lesson I shall never forget. It is this miracle of love -- the thought of loosing myself to the needs of others -- that transformed a ten week summer job into one of the most meaningful experiences of my life."

"I was heartened when a girl in a wheelchair participated for the first time. She could hardly get her hands together. She said, 'Momie, I clap.'"

Similar responses have been related by many of the volunteers involved with the Project. The above quoted statements seem to reflect a general consensus of all the dedicated people who have contributed their valuable services in the area

of volunteering at Austin State School.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to summarize the experiences, activities and achievements of a three year federally funded grant. The purpose was to demonstrate that volunteers, through training, can function as extensions of the professional staff in a state residential facility for mentally retarded. It is the opinion of the project staff that this goal can be attained if concentrated efforts are put forth by those involved along with the strong support and cooperation of the administration.

No doubt there are many factors that have contributed to the success of this Project. The following guidelines in working with volunteers (probably not an innovation to the experienced volunteer services staff) are believed to have merit:

If a volunteer is expected to perform effectively in his assignment, he should have --

1. an acceptance that what he is doing has a real purpose and contributes to the welfare of those being served.
2. a sense of belonging -- a feeling that he is honestly needed in the area he is working and is considered a member of the team.
3. an opportunity to express his ideas for new and improved programs.
4. job responsibilities assigned according to his capability and interest.
5. a clear understanding of what is expected of him, limitations of his work and accepted

practices of the institutions.

6. recognition through award programs and offered simple expressions of appreciation -- (pointing out specific things volunteers have accomplished in working with individuals or groups.)
7. assurance that goals and objectives of programs are attainable or are worth trying to determine if feasible.
8. free access to volunteer staff, as needed, for conferences.
9. challenging assignments to motivate and maintain his interest.

The previously described programs provide specific types of professional treatment and training for the residents. The emphasis has been to discover and utilize talents and skills of volunteers and to direct these abilities into the appropriate program areas. This philosophy has served a dual purpose; volunteers find their services more meaningful and residents receive the benefits of more professionally oriented types of services.