

"TRAINING DESIGN FOR VOLUNTEERS IN JUVENILE COURT SERVICES"

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This article is intended to serve as a practitioner's model of a training program for volunteers working with juvenile delinquents. It is hoped that persons or organizations interested in forming or improving a volunteers program of this type will be able to draw upon this model to fit their own local needs. The program described below is currently in operation in suburban Washington, D.C. and some 150 volunteers have participated in this form of training.

Goals of Training

Volunteers are called upon to communicate with and relate to delinquents, who are persons probably very much unlike the average volunteer. Scheier (1968) noted that "volunteering today is overwhelmingly an upper-middle-class phenomenon, as is suggested by the average volunteer's income, education, and occupational status."¹ It is commonly held that delinquency knows no class lines, but that in an urban community it is frequently a function of the disadvantaged classes. It is easy to see how communication between volunteers and delinquent clients can be a problem, one that training programs should try to deal with.

A Louis Harris & Associates survey in 1969 concluded that "the volunteer will have to learn to listen to the offender he will be serving."² The study further suggested that training should give a volunteer a chance to "examine his experience and test his perceptions."³ Jorgenson (1970) stated that "training programs must impart knowledge, deal with attitudes, and develop skills."⁴ Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1971) feel that "most potential volunteers need help in clarifying their future roles or in understanding other people's roles."⁵

The basic thrust of this design is that volunteers need experience in the skills of communication in a helping relationship. The design provides communication training that is more introductory than complete. It is primarily a design for training young adults to work with delinquents, but may be modified to fit other volunteer or client populations. It tries to maximize trainee participation in the learning process with an

action-oriented approach and an emphasis on application. It is presented here as both macro and micro design, in that a total program is described, but with emphasis on individual pre-service training sessions.

The Probation System

The Maryland suburbs of the District of Columbia are divided into two large and populous counties, Montgomery and Prince George's. Juvenile delinquency is a serious problem in the area, as evidenced by court statistics. For calendar 1971 there were 5800 juvenile delinquency complaints in Prince George's and 5600 in Montgomery. Typical delinquent offenses include breaking and entering, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, or the non-delinquent offense of being beyond the normal control of parents. First offender delinquents or ungovernable children are usually placed on probation by the juvenile court.

Probation for juveniles in Maryland is a period of time during which an offender under the age of 18 is exposed to rehabilitative treatment by a probation worker. Probation is customarily ordered by the court to be for an indefinite length of time and the child is counseled rather than punished. Most probationers stay under the jurisdiction of the court at least six months and termination of probation is made only after the child has indicated a willingness and an ability to function normally in the home and community.

Juvenile offenders in Maryland are supervised while on probation by the professional staff of the Department of Juvenile Services. Each probation worker is assigned 30-40 cases to supervise and is responsible for planning and implementing a rehabilitative treatment plan for each case. Such treatment is based on individual needs and may include psychological testing, counseling, restrictions, career planning, remedial skills instruction, etc. The emphasis is on child development and family support and the probation worker is seen as a change agent. The probation worker serves as counselor and coordinator, as well as authoritarian, to each case in varying degrees.

Function of Volunteers in the Probation System

Volunteers are seen as a support service for probation workers and have the full backing of the court and the department. Volunteers normally function as counselors or tutors for one or two clients, who also receive normal probation services. Certain volunteers may assume nearly professional responsibility for a case and work as an intern probation worker. Some volunteers specialize in certain areas, such as drug abuse or job placement, while others serve as recreation aides at the local juvenile detention facility.

Most of the volunteers currently at work in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties are college students from the University of Maryland, College Park or other area schools. The use of student volunteers has wide acceptance, as pointed out by Arffa (1971).⁶ In addition to the student volunteers, there are a number of private citizens involved in the program, many of whom are federal employees or educators. Over 95% of the volunteers are white and the mean age is around 21 years old. The age range is 18 to 65.

Intern or assistant probation workers are senior criminology majors at the University of Maryland, enrolled in field placement or practicum. The course allows students interested in probation as a career to receive practical experience in the field. After training, the interns are assigned to three probation or aftercare cases to supervise for one or two semesters. Some interns work in the intake section and handle informal 45-day supervisions. Cases for interns to supervise are selected by workers and their supervisors and professional workers maintain close contact with the interns. Therefore, since interns function practically as probation workers, they require training that approximates the professional levels.

The larger portion of volunteers are not interns, but may well be college students nonetheless. Non-intern volunteers primarily work in conjunction with routine probation services in the counseling, tutorial, or more specialized capacities. In the bi-county areas there are about 40 interns per year, and in excess of 100 regular volunteers.

Probation staff considers the volunteers program as a way of providing needed services or as another resource in the community. A probation worker observes in his or her caseload a need that the worker cannot fulfill for a particular client. The worker consults with the coordinator who classifies the need in terms of volunteer jobs. The coordinator periodically recruits and trains a group of volunteers to fill the needs of staff. The coordinator then matches the volunteers to the needs after again consulting with staff. The individual worker calls the volunteer and discusses the case history and treatment plan. The worker and volunteer jointly decide on each other's role in the treatment and the volunteer sets to work.

Training the Intern Probation Worker

The coordinator conducts preservice orientation and training for interns in three evening sessions early in each semester. The first session is a group discussion of individual perceptions of the roles of actors in the probation system. Communication or the lack of it with other human service agencies, the police, judiciary, etc. is brought out for the group to consider. The concept of treatment as the function of

a probation worker is presented and debated. Departmental objectives and goals are summarized in a handout⁷ and translated into operational definitions by group synthesis. Communication exercises are used as needed to facilitate the group's work on the issues. The interns themselves as a group are responsible for making the session work, as well as getting to know each other, while the coordinator/trainer is responsible for facilitating the learning process.

The second session is more structured and begins with a sketch of a client. The group is encouraged to act out their stereotypes of police, blacks, addicts, freaks, parents, judges, etc. in an attempt to explode some mythology and to point out individual differences. Handouts on court procedure, including a chart tracing a delinquent through the legal system, are distributed. Role playing is introduced as a learning technique and the group is free to negotiate its relevance and use. If participants agree, a role-play of an intake hearing is fish-bowled by the coordinator and a volunteer trainee. The roles to be portrayed are flexible, but a frequently used starting point is to have the volunteer put himself in the role of a first offender at an intake hearing for shoplifting. The trainer plays the intake consultant and for about three minutes the other participants observe the behavior of the two actors. At the conclusion of the role play, participants are invited to ask questions of the actors in and out of role, to get a better understanding of how they felt and what words or actions affected them.

The group next proceeds to dyadic role play among themselves in similar scenes: a hearing, a meeting with parents, a conference with the arresting officer, a meeting with school authorities, etc. Each dyad is asked to share its experiences and happenings with the large group and processing of the data is carried on informally. Comparisons of the group scenes with those in actual field situations are drawn and participants are made aware of the distortions and false impressions that might arise.

In session three a case study is presented for the group to work on. Copies of the case history are distributed at the end of session two and participants are asked to consider questions of treatment. The group shares their individual responses to the study questions as a way of getting into a discussion of how a probation worker affects treatment. The group notes inputs from actors in the case history and decides what events have true causal relationships to improvements in the client's behavior. Role playing is used if the group gets stuck. The session ends with a lecturette on report writing, general supervision techniques and accountability.

After the last session, interns contact the probation workers they will be assigned to and plan to meet their clients. Within two weeks the

group reconvenes to share experiences and problems. Specific and general topics for discussion in later group meetings might include how to handle a hostile client, problems with schools, when to terminate a case, or the like. The group is also required to attend a communications skills lab and a cross-cultural or racial awareness lab, facilitated by professional consultants. On-going dialogue between staff using interns and the coordinator is maintained and the course instructor and the coordinator lead the biweekly group meetings.

Training Regular Volunteers

Training for regular volunteers is conducted monthly as needed in a day-long Saturday session. Interested persons are recruited and registered for the next volunteers orientation and training session by the coordinator or volunteer assistants. As participants arrive at the session, they are given handouts on communication, the department's history, objectives and goals, lines of problem-solving within the program, and general information and phone numbers of key personnel. They are also asked to fill out a two-page application form and are assigned to one of five groups. Each small group (10-20) is facilitated by a volunteer trainer or the coordinator. Trainers are usually experienced volunteers who have themselves been involved in training for trainers. Training of trainers is discussed by Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1971).⁸ As participants find their small groups they are encouraged to introduce themselves and check out with their neighbors some motivations for being here. The session officially begins with introductory remarks as trainers join their groups. Each trainer presents a case study he or she has actually been involved in and the group analyzes it. Questions of input, like what techniques are working with that child, what are the parents doing well, how does the child demonstrate his unfulfilled needs, etc. are considered. The trainers move the group to a discussion of the role of volunteers in probation treatment and have the group examine the effectiveness or advisability of a volunteer entering the case being studied. After an hour the small groups share their impressions in the large group. Since each group's case was unique, the total group gets an exposure to several types of clients and several styles of probation work.

After lunch the coordinator charges the group to break into trios and introduces the listening exercise. The triads are asked to designate each member as a speaker, listener or referee. The referee is to select one topic from a list of value statements about voluntarism. The statements are actually local or national criticisms of volunteers. Typical topics are: "A volunteers program which uses whites to work with blacks is a form of institutional racism;" or "volunteers often make kids dependent on them to fulfill their own needs;" or "Volunteers get more out of their work personally than their clients do."

The speaker is asked to communicate his feelings on the subject in two minutes to the listener. The listener must summarize what was said in one minute without adding his personal feelings. No one may take notes and the referee is allowed 15 seconds to critique the effectiveness of the communication process. When the round is completed the participants change roles until each member has taken all three parts, each on a different topic.

Time for each triad to process its own activities is allocated and a brief talk is given by the coordinator on application of learning in the exercise to real-life probation situations. The next exercise is to have the several triads observe the trainers in a role play of a court hearing. The scene is that of a young offender, his parents, the judge and a probation worker, planning for the youth's probationary period. Triads act out certain scenes of probation after the observation and discussion. Examples of scenes used are: the first meeting of a volunteer and client; the volunteer accidentally interrupting a family argument; a jail scene after the volunteer had done quite a bit of work with the client; a revocation of probation hearing in court, etc. Each scene needs to be clearly introduced by trainer staff and should be kept short. At this point trainees are asked to return to their original groups for an evaluation and question session. Volunteers leave the session with the understanding that the coordinator will refer their names and applications to staff needing volunteer services. On-going training by way of discussion groups is offered for the volunteers and interested volunteers sign up for specific areas they feel weak in. Such topics might be court procedure, juvenile law, community resources, crisis intervention, drug information, etc. Lectures or films on these topics are scheduled as needed and the volunteers are invited to attend.

Conclusion

Subjective feedback on the results of this training has been obtained from the volunteers themselves. By and large they indicate approval of the techniques used and the material presented, and call for more of the same. A small number of volunteers have been disillusioned by the training and withdrew from the program before being assigned. Their response was that they felt very uncomfortable talking with persons like the ones portrayed in the role plays and were afraid they could not be of any help to certain of those people. These volunteers were contacted about performing other kinds of volunteer service and several assented. The large majority of the volunteers stated that they had begun to think in terms of communication as a system and felt they were more conscious of their personal counseling approaches now than before training. Many agreed that they had noticed several of their own myths about delinquents and courts being exploded and felt this was enlightening.

Exercises such as role play or listening topics are not a training end in themselves. They must be considered tools to help trainees expand their participation and awareness. A combination of traditional didactic techniques and the more experiential approach provides for trainee internalization of concepts and responsibilities. The application of learning must be the chief objective of the design if the volunteer's training is to be a positive factor in the quality of his service to clients and agencies.

FOOTNOTES:

1. I. H. Scheier and L. P. Goter, *Using Volunteers in Court Settings*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of H.E.W., 1968), p. 24.
2. "Volunteers Look at Corrections," *Report of a Survey by Louis Harris and Associates*, (Washington, D.C., Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, 1969, p. 27.
3. IBID, p. 27.
4. J. D. Jorgenson, *Volunteers! and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders Conference Report*, (Detroit, 1970), p. 35.
5. Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, *The Volunteer Community*, (Washington, D.C., Center for a Voluntary Society, 1971), p. 75.
6. Marvin S. Arffa, "Student Volunteers Make a Difference," *Volunteer Administration*, vol. V, no. 3, Sept. 30, 1971.
7. McTeague, Elizabeth, ed., "Maryland's Approach to Juvenile Problems," *Maryland's Health*, vol. 1, no. 2, March-April 1971.
8. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt, OP. CIT., pp. 84-100.

