



HOME / WHO IS HARRIET NAYLOR ANYWAY?

Who Is Harriet Naylor Anyway?

Voices from the Past

October 2000

If you are a volunteerism practitioner in North America, you have probably heard the name "Harriet Naylor" somewhere. The Association for Volunteer Administration has named its most prestigious award after her, as have several state associations.¹ She is frequently referenced as a pioneer and many of the current leaders in the field speak of her mentorship with fondness and respect.



Some of Harriet Naylor's Credentials

"Hat," as she was always called (in later years she frequently referred to herself as "old Hat"), was truly a seminal force in the evolution of volunteer management. Trained both as a social worker and then as an adult educator, Hat worked tirelessly to persuade both of these academic disciplines to recognize the importance of the effective leadership of volunteers. In the early 1970s, she was a key staff member of the National Center for Voluntary Action, from which the Points of Light Foundation eventually evolved more than twenty years later. In 1973, she published *Volunteers Today* (Dryden Press), the first real book written about volunteer program management. It was Hat who coined the word "volunteerism" in a booklet she wrote in 1969, in order to differentiate it from "voluntarism" and "voluntary."²

Most importantly, in the mid-1970s she was hired by what was then "HEW"--the former United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare--to become the first-ever national Director of its Office of Volunteer Development. Consider this in light of the fact that no similar position currently exists in today's Departments of Education or Health and Human Services.

Her Role in Recognition of Our Profession

Hat's national visibility gave her a platform that she used ceaselessly to advocate both for volunteers and for those who coordinated their efforts. One of her most tangible accomplishments

was to fight for recognition of our field as an occupation with its own career ladder. Before 1977, the U.S. Labor Department's influential *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* did not include any mention of volunteer program management as a distinct type of work. The absence of this title made it difficult if not impossible for federal and state government agencies to create paid positions for this function. Moreover, many private industries followed the Labor Department's guidelines. So Hat tackled the U.S. federal bureaucracy and made a difference. The Summer 1977 issue of *Intergovernmental Personnel Notes* announced the following:

Headline: *Professionals Manage Volunteer Services*

The latest edition of the U.S. Department of Labor's Dictionary of Occupational Titles has included a new career ladder and occupation: Supervisor, Coordinator, and Director of Volunteer Services. The Dictionary classifies the new positions as "professional, technical and managerial."

Offering Hat's name and contact information for "readers seeking information on ways to upgrade positions in volunteer services," the article further said:

Recent surveys have shown that, for many of these positions, salaries are low and turnover is consequently high. However, it is in the interest of State and local governments to hire and retain skilled volunteer personnel administrators to encourage participation and program enrichment services.

We could wish for more progress in educating officials since 1977.

For the record, Hat's achievement in obtaining this recognition for our work did have a down side. In order to show that our field was comparable to other professions listed in the Dictionary, Hat had to use terminology that borrowed from existing career ladders in other fields. And in so doing, she "codified" the titles of "coordinator" and "director," only adding fuel to the fire of "Who are we?" and "What should we be called?" Obviously, we haven't managed to resolve these questions as now, 23 years later, they are the main focus of many of the contributions to this issue of *e-Volunteerism*.

Advocacy for the Value of Volunteers

Hat often addressed conferences of executives and therefore used the power of her podium to stress the value of volunteers within a system, especially within government. For example:

There's no better way to learn about the value and impact of services than as a volunteer. An ideal "laboratory for learning decision-making" exists in the volunteer world, in advisory groups, staff and volunteer meetings -- the whole program development process, from needs determination to evaluation. Volunteering is experiential education in its most realistic form. Free to choose what (s)he will do, the volunteer is also free to concentrate on one person (staff member or client) and seek understanding of his(her) situation in depth. Simplistically, (s)he can ignore technical labels, such as disease names, or offense categories, get to know victims as persons and see cause-and-effect relationships in real situations. This interest and concern is not only therapeutic to the unfortunate victim, but becomes a motivating force to the volunteer's desire to change intolerable conditions. The energizing effect on the volunteer is reflected in volunteer/staff relationships. The new perspective which volunteer participation brings to the service delivery system energizes the people around him (her). Change agency could be said to start right there. Executives have persuaded me that standards are raised just by the expectation of the volunteer presence in the environment.³

In the same presentation, Hat goes further in describing how volunteering and citizenship intertwine and how the role of a volunteer differs in critical ways from that of other components of the system:

Citizens with volunteer experience have an important perspective on goals and plans which it is their democratic right to exercise. The role of the volunteer administrator is to alert citizens to opportunities to influence the future, and to give them confidence to speak out where their opinions will be important. Citizens need accurate, appropriate information as a basis for their opinions.⁴

The providers of services have their own perspectives: as humans, they tend to perceive needs in terms of what they know how to do. For example, educators want more education, and social workers more social services, not simply in self-interest but because those are the needs as they see them. Volunteers take a more humanist view, a vision of "how it ought to be" which cuts across discipline, departmental or agency lines to the people involved. They help translate technical language, and bring community wisdom into consideration.

But as consumers, people have quite different perceptions. They know what they want, which is not necessarily what the "experts" think they need. It takes a lot of skill to reconcile wants and needs, and that is often the mediating role of the volunteer. In bald political terms, this may very well mean (s)he really holds the balance of power. Consumers need volunteers as allies with power to change priorities.

This argument holds as much passion today as it did when Hat made it--and we still have a long way to go before volunteers (and volunteer program managers) fulfill this potential. Hat went further in developing her position on the importance of volunteers, formulating arguments meant to change the perceptions of paid staff:

We on staff have a tendency to present our best side when we are interpreting our services to the public. If we really want to enlist volunteers as advocates, it is essential that we also share our problems and our aspirations with citizens so that they understand what our needs and frustrations are, as well as our tangible accomplishments. Through our risking such trust in volunteers, they take on our staff goals and objectives when they have a voice in formulating them. Work by volunteers can be more direct in ways closed to paid staff. Volunteers frequently cut through protocol, red tape, the limitations of position on a structure chart, right to the people who can effect real change in a community, or who control support for the provision of services.

The volunteer represents a source of strength in gaining public support for services, in insuring that services are designed realistically and relevantly for needs, and persuading the target group to use those services. Training for staff in enlisting volunteer advocacy is crucial to enjoying this fringe benefit of volunteer services. 5

Some readers may be feeling that Hat only represented the human services volunteer program. Of course her job at HEW required her to focus on that. But she frequently took pains to mention the entire scope of volunteer activities, including the arts and recreation. For her, the common denominator was community improvement of any sort. Hat's words always revolved around the interconnection of volunteering and effective citizenship:

We are seeing a reversal in accountability in this country from upward to the federal government to outward to the voters. Not all of us as private citizens are prepared for the decision-making opportunities we could use. Volunteering is one of the best ways to find out what's going on: Where the gaps and duplication are, and what are the emerging needs in a shifting economy where services are becoming more usual occupations than manufacturing or farming. 6

To Hat, it was self-evident that "citizen participation" and "volunteering" overlapped and she often urged others to end the artificial separation between the two. In another speech, she said:

But these problems could be worked on and perhaps solved if citizens perceived governmental services as their own responsibility and a privilege, instead of passing the buck to the bureaucracy and then attacking bigness as though smallness would solve everything. 7

Emphasizing the Importance of Effective Management

As an experienced practitioner, Hat always stressed the importance of understanding how to involve volunteers effectively. After she acknowledged how crucial volunteers are, she often added: "Crucial to volunteer development is the Volunteer Administrator...[who] protects the rights of consumers and paid staff as well as volunteers, matching people to people with complementary needs, and maintaining a support system for all as they work together.⁸" She was one of the first people to proclaim the key maxim: "[I]t is keeping volunteers, not *recruiting* them, which is the hard part of volunteer administration."⁹

She expressed practical advice about such things as the need for training, staff/volunteer relationship issues, and separation of roles. For example, here's something she said about training:

The *right* to volunteer offers a challenge to public administrators. It's important to citizenship education to bring reality into classroom theory, and much more vivid to the learner. With that right comes the responsibility voluntarily to learn through orientation and training how to apply his experience and wisdom and how to work in partnership with paid staff to accomplish shared goals. The one-to-one partnership is freely chosen by both partners, and that right of choice extends to clients, patients, or whatever you label your consumers of services....¹⁰

Hat tried to show that all too often service recipients and providers are inhibited because of real or perceived risks that do not affect volunteers:

People who don't have service at risk, who are not parents or potential or actual consumers are needed. For example, many parents of retarded children in state institutions fear "I can't say anything . . . they might take it out on my child." Now I don't think for one minute, knowing a lot of conscientious staff members, that that is likely. But of course, if you feel that it might happen, you wouldn't want to be responsible. So there is a risk involved in being candid in the planning process if you are actually a consumer. And if you are a provider there is a risk involved, because you might displease your boss or lose your job. The balance of power may well rest with volunteers who have neither risk. The volunteer with freedom to speak without much risk becomes the decisive factor in the decision-making process, within an agency, or out in the community advocating new services, and in mobilizing the support of powerful decision-makers who control purse strings....¹¹

Volunteer service not only lends itself to freedom, but also to creative ways to approach a need or problem. Hat urged this type of creativity in the involvement of volunteers, whether formally or informally. Consider one example she shared in a speech (and note the early recognition of family volunteer work):

A Commissioner of Welfare in West Virginia took a different strategy, harking back to the "general welfare" in the preamble to the Constitution. He threw his support behind a young enthusiastic Director of Volunteers who didn't know what couldn't be done, and went ahead and developed team services in an impoverished part of Appalachia. . . . She organized task forces to meet people needs through 27 area coordinators, for home repairs, transportation, congregate and meals on wheels nutrition programs--to name a few neighbors helping neighbors. In kind contributions and seed money started barter programs, food and clothing exchanges, tutorial centers - no one worries too much about eligibility requirements. If people need help, or could give it, they are matched and work out how together. The volunteer of the year was a two year old who visited lonely oldsters with her AFDC mother. A lot of caring and some imagination have developed services which fit each situation, and no one is too hung up about whether services are public or private Everyone focuses on what needs to be done, rolls up his sleeves and sets to it.

12

Fighting Government Regulation of Volunteering

As might be expected, Hat was often under pressure to use the status of her office in controlling or directive ways. Here is one of her responses:

[I]'ve been concerned about the desire of some . . . for the Office of Volunteer Development to regulate volunteers. I have been saying to the 383 program directors and their staff (which includes no volunteers by law!) that they can't *regulate* volunteers, either! If you do, you'll knock all the...spontaneity and compassion out of them...13

Hat's Vision of the Purpose of Volunteer Administration

If you still doubt the visionary thinking that Hat challenged in her audiences, let me close with part of the speech that she gave--in 1974--to what was then the American Association of Volunteer Services Coordinators, the direct predecessor of AVA:

[P]rofessional discipline demands that we test our assumptions, validate our information, and make decisions based on facts, as much as possible, not hunches or prejudices. The real pro recognizes how many differences there may be in the way people see the same thing, and takes responsibility to clarify these differences, instead of glossing them over. Who knows? What we believed to be true yesterday may be proved untrue tomorrow--we must be open to new ideas and information, and not guided by obsolete assumptions. . . .

What are the common goals of volunteer administration? I believe they must be important to our country and to all people, not just ourselves, or just volunteers. If doctors are concerned with health, and lawyers with justice as their ideal, then I believe our potential profession is concerned with freedom of choice, by definition We have not always behaved this way—we have knuckled under to our bosses, to staff pressures, to powerful volunteers. If you doubt what this means, how many recipients of volunteer services have been given a choice? How many of our manuals or bylaws for auxiliaries have mentioned freedom? Yet, I believe *freedom* is our responsibility, else we are vulnerable to charges of "using" volunteers, of band-aiding serious community needs.

If we are to deserve the privilege of being entrusted as professional persons, we shall have to take a deeper and broader vision of the significance of volunteer work to the volunteer, to the recipient, to the agency, and to the whole community. We ought to be leaders in the community, not simply suppliers of free labor. We could be developing volunteering as a route out of powerlessness for our recipients. We should defend the right to volunteer, and work with our fellow coordinators to find the broadest possible range of choice for volunteers, in the kinds of work they could do and the influence they could have on new programming and policy development . . .

Human beings have a way of escaping into technical discussions when the subjects at hand become too uncomfortable. Surely we can meet some learning needs of new practitioners at our meetings through seminars and workshops. But if we are to become a respected professional association, we shall have to face squarely some of the criticism being leveled at volunteering, instead of just hoping it will go away. In times of rising prices, the time and efforts which we direct . . . become more valuable than ever, and waste more serious. To me, our responsibility is very, very serious. We are the gatekeepers for one of the last places in our society in which it is ok to be compassionate, to express sympathy and concern. . . . We used to worry about "letting volunteers get too involved." Now we know that it is their very involvement which makes the difference, their compassion (their feeling *with* the other fellow) which restores. . . self respect and motivation to overcome [the] problem. This is an awesome responsibility, but one which makes life worth living.¹⁴

As we move forward and outward in our work, let's remember that we represent a philosophy of life as well as a field of work. Hat would have marveled at the capability we have today to interact on a global scale. But I'll bet she would have continued to prick our consciences at the most personal of levels.

Footnotes

¹ As I wrote this, I realized that this issue of *e-Volunteerism* may have involved the largest number of AVA Harriet Naylor Distinguished Member Service Award recipients ever in one publication! The list includes Ivan Scheier, Betty Stallings, Jane Justis, Winnie Brown, and myself.

August 2016 addition: Thanks to colleague Jayne Cravens and the historical treasure trove of [Web Archive](#), we can still find the names of all the AVA Harriet Naylor Distinguished Member Service Award winners, even though AVA itself is no longer around. We're pleased to keep this history alive with this list:

- 1981 Marion Jeffery
- 1982 Carol G. Moore; Marlene Wilson
- 1983 Eva Schindler-Rainman, PhD
- 1984 Ivan H. Scheier, PhD
- 1985 Harriet Naylor; Sarah Jane Rehnborg, PhD, CVA
- 1986 Sue Vineyard
- 1987 Joanne Holbrook Patton
- 1988 Winifred Brown, CVA
- 1989 Susan J. Ellis
- 1990 Christine C. Franklin, CVA
- 1991 Nancy Jane Barker
- 1992 Laura Lee Geraghty
- 1993 Caroline W. Todd
- 1994 Billie Ann Myers
- 1995 Katherine H. Campbell, CVA
- 1996 Jeanne Bradner
- 1997 Jane Leighty Justis
- 1999 Betty Stallings, MSW
- 2000 Kathy McCleskey
- 2001 Jackie Norris, CVA
- 2002 Suzanne Lawson, CVA
- 2004 Jeffrey L. Brudney, Ph.D.

2 Referenced by Hat herself in a speech entitled "Strengthening Voluntarism from the Public Sector" given on December 4, 1975 to the National Council on Philanthropy Conference. Hat first proposed the word and in 1970 Ivan Scheier first put it to public use when he renamed his Boulder, Colorado organization "The National Information Center on Volunteerism" (NICOV). For those keeping score, NICOV merged with NCVA in 1979 and therefore was also one of the forerunners of today's Points of Light Foundation.

3 Harriet H. Naylor, The National Conference on Citizen Participation 1978, Briefing Paper for General Issue Workshop 8: "Volunteering as Citizen Participation," p. 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Harriet H. Naylor, Policy Background Description: "The Volunteer as Advocate," Office of Volunteer Development, HEW, 197?.

6 1975 Speech to the National Council on Philanthropy Conference,

7 Harriet H. Naylor, "Dynamics of Volunteerism in Human Service Organizations," Speech given at the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, April 1, 1977.

8 Harriet H. Naylor, "Volunteering Is Different Now," *Options*, July, 1978.

9 Naylor, 1975 speech to the National Council on Philanthropy Conference.

10 Naylor, 1977 ASPA speech.

11 Naylor, *Options* article.

12 Naylor, 1977 ASPA speech.

13 Naylor, *Options* article.

14 Harriet H. Naylor, "On Becoming a Profession," speech to the American Association of Volunteer Services Coordinators annual meeting, Denver CO. September 1974.

Susan J. Ellis



Susan J. Ellis founded Energize, Inc., a training, consulting, and publishing firm that specializes in volunteerism and assisted clients throughout the world (23 countries) to create or strengthen their volunteer corps. She has an international reputation as a passionate advocate for the power of... [Read more](#)

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Martha J. Martin, M&M Consulting, Southfield MI USA

Tue, 10/10/2000

Thanks for the history. We need to know where we came from. We can continue to follow the stars, the guidelines and goals, of our birth. Harriet Naylor's words are still inspiring when it seems that we have barely moved from "using volunteers" to full citizen participation. Hope all our new-to-the field folks take the time to appreciate those who enabled us today to proudly say, "I'm a professional volunteer program director."

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