

Volunteerism, Volunteer Coordinators and Continuing Education

By George M. Kreps, Ph.D.

The new role of volunteers is bringing about changes in the concept and practice of volunteerism. This situation calls for volunteer coordinators with the appropriate training and the management skills to assist volunteers to apply their talents to a wide variety of tasks. Continuing education provides the means for an effective in-service training program which is adapted to the particular skill level of the volunteer coordinators.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss in detail the new dimensions of volunteerism except as they relate to functions of volunteer coordinators. For a detailed presentation on volunteerism, the reader is referred to Jon VonTil's excellent article, "In Search of Volun---ism," Volunteer Administration, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Summer 1979.

For the purpose of this article, a volunteer is defined as, "The person who freely contributes his/her service without remuneration commensurate with the value of the services rendered to public or voluntary agencies engaged in preventing, controlling or ameliorating the effect of social problems experienced by individuals, groups or the community." (Source unknown)

The new thrust of volunteerism is channeling the efforts of volunteers in new and more effective ways. Today's volunteers can and should expect a rewarding experience. Four key examples of volunteer rights (out of 13) (1974: Responsibilities and Rights in Volunteer Relationships):

Kreps is an assistant professor of Social Science at the Agricultural Technical Institute of Ohio State University, Wooster, Ohio. He has been involved in the management of volunteers from several cultures and linguistic backgrounds, and has served as a consultant on volunteer management for both public and private agencies.

- . . . Be assigned a job that is worthwhile and challenging, with freedom to use existing skills or develop new ones.
- . . . Be provided orientation, training and supervision for the job he/she accepts; know why he/she is being asked to do a particular task.
- . . . Expect that his/her time will not be wasted by tasks of planning, coordination and cooperation within the organization.
- . . . Know whether (his/her) work is effective and how it can be improved; have a chance to increase understanding of self, others, and the community.

These examples describe the major thrust of volunteerism as defined in this article. This new volunteerism is a significant factor in the need for well-trained, capable, and enthusiastic persons as volunteer coordinators. This function of coordinating the volunteer effort has been described by Harriet Naylor in several HEW publications and by the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 187.162-022, 1977 Fourth Edition. Coordinator, Volunteer Services (social ser.) volunteer coordinator.

Coordinates student and community volunteer services programs in organizations engaged in public, social and welfare activities: Consults administrators and staff to determine organizational needs for various volunteer services and plans for volunteer recruitment. Interviews, screens, and refers applicants to appropriate units.

Orients and trains volunteers prior to assignment in specific units. Arranges for on-the-job and other required training and supervision and evaluation of volunteers. Resolves personnel problems. Serves as liaison between administra-

tion, staff, and volunteers. Prepares and maintains procedural and training manuals. Speaks to community groups explaining organization activities and role of volunteer programs. Publishes agency newsletter and prepares news items for other news media. Maintains personnel records. Prepares statistical reports on extent, nature and value of volunteer service.

The coordinator of volunteers is a key link in the system of enabling persons to volunteer their time, talents and resources in a meaningful manner for the client, the agency, the volunteers, and the community.

Harriet Naylor, Ivan Scheier, and Marlene Wilson have all written extensively on training and management practices for coordinators. Their writing, it seems to this author, grows out of the basic premise that *coordinators are trained, not born, and that training can enhance the effectiveness of the coordinator as well as the personal satisfaction received from doing a job well.* The following examples highlight the need as well as the opportunities in the training of coordinators. (Wilson: 1976)

Dr. Tess Okin, professor of the School of Social Administration at Temple University, says, "Modern volunteers are a unique breed whose ancestors helped build this country. Their potential is incalculable. Key persons on the American scene, closely involved with the volunteer citizen in action are the directors (coordinators) of volunteers, a group moving toward professionalism. The largest impact on masses on citizen volunteers may be had appropriately training directors of volunteers." (1976: 22)

"Dr. Ivan Scheier, instructor, consultant and author, recently stated that volunteer program administration is just emerging as an exciting profession which partakes of many traditional disciplines, though it is owned by none." (1976: 22)

"If we can learn how to recruit good volunteers, design meaningful jobs for them to do, interview and place each one carefully and create a climate in our agencies that allows them to function effectively and creatively, just think of the astounding inroads we can make into the problems that confront our communities today." (1976: 22)

These references illustrate the need to help volunteer coordinators prepare themselves for the challenging task of channeling volunteer resources to aid in the solution of the social problems of today, along with helping volunteers enlarge their own potential.

This brings us to the main point of this article, the training of volunteer coordina-

tors. The majority of volunteer coordinators in this writer's experience have a wealth of life experiences which they bring to the position, but often very little specific formal training as an administrator, recruiter, PR person, trainer, and personnel counselor. Also, many coordinators are fully employed which limits their opportunity for additional training to in-service and continuing education types of training. Therefore, the continuing education approach provides a way for the coordinator to participate in training, while continuing to work full time.

The following is a definition of continuing education or, as it is sometimes called, "adult education." It consists of a combination of on-campus and off-campus courses of instruction which focus on work-oriented learning activities. These activities, according to Lauffer (1977: 3), have become increasingly important in human service agencies as vehicles of providing individual learners with means for expanding knowledge and skill-increasing opportunities for career and occupational mobility and improving job satisfaction, raising professional standards, protecting or expanding the domains of existing occupational groups, and bringing non-professional and sub-professional personnel into the system of service delivery.

Closely allied with this definition of a functional continuing education program is the utilization of the methodology based on andragogy to train adults. "Andragogy" can be defined briefly as *the art and science of helping adults learn based on their own prior experience.* (1970) A continuing education program for volunteer coordinators based on the methodology of andragogy will:

1. Recognize and use the varied life experiences of the coordinators.
2. Structure training experiences around the coordinators and how they perceive their learning needs.
3. Develop learning experiences which relate to the problem and concerns of the person-learner rather than to impersonal academic subjects.
4. Plan for active and productive learner in the learning process.
5. Recognize that the coordinator is making a considerable contribution of time and energy and money to the training experience and, therefore, is ready and eager to learn.
6. Foster a spirit of equality and individuality.
7. Recognize that the learner-adult and the instructor are equally responsible

for the outcome of the training.

In 1972, a group of volunteer coordinators in which the author participated decided to develop an in-service training program for coordinators. The geographic area was central Ohio, with Columbus as the largest city where many volunteer coordinators were located. Columbus as a metropolitan area and the surrounding communities have a large number of social service agencies, both public and private, many of which have volunteer programs. There is a potential group of 100-120 coordinators of volunteers in this area.

The training needs of volunteer coordinators and directors were identified in several ways. The local Volunteer Action Center, the Division of Continuing Education of Ohio State University, and its Citizens Advisory Committee and the core group of 8-10 coordinators worked together to identify training needs and propose specific programs.

The first training opportunity was a series of five sessions on the basic elements of volunteer management over a six-month period.

The same course was repeated a half-year later for another 20 persons. These two initial training sessions identified several factors. The first was that there was a sufficient number of coordinators interested in training. Second, it was a way to bring coordinators together from a wide variety of agencies, both public and private. There were coordinators from the public school system, private and public hospitals, crisis intervention centers, settlement houses, mental health and mental retardation facilities, public welfare, child welfare agencies, and churches. Third, these meetings also provided the initial thrust to what eventually became a regional association for volunteer coordinators called the Mid-Ohio Association of Volunteer Coordinators. Fourth, these sessions further identified the type of training needed and the educational methodology of andragogy as an appropriate teaching approach.

The result of the preliminary effort was the organization of the Volunteer Management Certificate Program through the Division of Continuing Education of Ohio State University. This program was designed to assist volunteer coordinators to broaden their understanding of the management of volunteer programs, and to expand their use of basic management skills. The six sessions were divided into the following subject areas:

1. How to Succeed with Volunteers

This introductory session surveys the field of volunteering in general and volunteer management in particular.

2. Planning and Evaluating Volunteer Programs

Participants learn to assess the volunteer needs of their agency, design systems to meet these needs and develop evaluation tools to measure their effectiveness.

3. Developing a Functional Volunteer Recruitment Program

The following essential components are examined: needs assessment, job descriptions, and recruitment techniques for specific recruitment efforts.

4. Designing a Creative Volunteer Training Program

The components of planning, designing and executing a training program are combined to make an effective program for orientation, on-the-job training and continuing education training.

5. Human Relations and Personnel Practices

Theories and practices are presented to design a program based on why people volunteer and how to keep them.

6. Advanced Topics in Volunteer Management

Topics include: types of management, types of organization, integration of volunteers into the agency service delivery systems.

A number of observations grew out of this volunteer management program during the past four years.

1. *The presence of coordinators from a variety of social service agencies enriched the flow of ideas and discussions.*

2. *The discussions, coffee breaks and luncheon time were utilized to exchange ideas and "how to do things," on a personal, one-to-one basis.*

3. *The interchange of persons from a variety of situations helped to highlight the commonality of certain problems (in recruitment, turn over of volunteers, recognition) and also fostered a kind of esprit de corp among the participants which carried over into their daily work contacts. They would call each other to discuss specific problem areas.*

4. *There was the opportunity to exchange information about other training opportunities and about possible job openings. Several participants utilized the sessions for their own career orientation. It gave them some ideas about what a coordinator could do.*

5. *There is a need to better identify the level of training desired by the parti-*

participants. There were several in each session who were either overwhelmed or bored by the level of presentations. A more adequate training device is needed for participants so that the level of training is more precisely identified.

6. Participants requested homework assignments via their regular evaluations. However, when these were given, only a small percentage responded favorably. The reason for this needs to be analyzed more completely.
7. There is a need to develop a second and a third round of more specialized or advanced sessions to supplement and build on this volunteer management training program.
8. A follow-up review needs to be done of the 87+ volunteer coordinators to learn from them the effectiveness of the training they received as they now perceive it one, two or three years later.

In conclusion, it appears that a start has been made to provide an entry-level training program for volunteer coordinators within a continuing education format. More needs to be done to provide for on-going education efforts. More needs to be done to identify the specific training needs both of new coordinators as well as those who have job experience and who have completed the initial certificate training program.

The use of the continuing education format permitted persons who were full-time coordinators to attend the sessions, since the sessions were one day per month over a period of six months.

The granting of continuing education units and the certificate were useful because they provided verification of the courses taken to the agencies of the coordinators. It also gave them something tangible to add to their resume and, just as important, it signified that the University considered their training of sufficient importance to recognize it.

This author also wants to emphasize that the andragogical method as used in the certificate program is an effective way to train. It stresses the knowledge and experience that the adult learner brings to the

educational experience and that this is the base upon which the training effort was carried out. Many times, the instructors were used more as discussion leaders and conveners of the session, rather than the primary resource persons. It provided for a more stimulating learning experience for the participants and gave them additional support to use the same approach with their own volunteer programs.

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