



NICOV takes a look at . . .

ADVOCACY VOLUNTEERING

With this issue, the National Information Center on Volunteering (NICOV) becomes a regular contributor to Voluntary Action Leadership. NICOV will continue the in-depth analysis of volunteer-related issues and concepts contained in its former journal, *Volunteers in Social Justice*.

The potential for advocacy volunteering, including the role of the individual in opening new doors for our disadvantaged citizens, is explored in NICOV's inaugural feature. The following articles, excerpted from the final issue of *Volunteers in Social Justice*, begin with a look at the possibilities for involvement in citizen advocacy by Harriet Naylor. Ivan Scheier illustrates how advocacy volunteering need not clash with service volunteering; he believes the two roles are compatible and complementary. In the third article, Ira Schwartz suggests that some choices need to be made between the two. He builds his case by referring to the criminal justice system—one of the hardest leagues of all for the volunteer.

Advocacy—Fringe Benefit To Volunteer Services

By Harriet Naylor

The possibilities for strengthening programs through volunteer advocacy are growing out of the experience of community action programs and governmental services as well as more traditional voluntary agencies. The volunteer advocate or interpreter serves clients directly, helping them obtain needed services and mobilizing resources on their behalf.

In all the human services, the volunteer serves as advocate for people and their families from the earliest prevention level of treatment, and continues to help those persons

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gain confidence and competence throughout the rehabilitation process. The advocate articulates the needs which the victim of unfortunate circumstances may not be able to express, and interprets the nature of services and intent of providers of services. In this way the volunteer can maximize the impact of the needed service.

Volunteer advocates can also extend staff outreach efforts in the community. By persuading families to use services which may be new or offered outside their immediate community, the advocate helps insure the early use of preventive services—before situations become aggravated or chronic. The staff sees the advocate as the key person whose approval is essential before a service is accepted by his or her neighbors.

In addition, volunteers can play a crucial role in allaying the fears of clients and their families when a program is initiated. For instance, they can offer reassurance in a stressful situation when the paid staff is too busy to attend to feelings. An ex-client is particularly valuable in this assignment, since firsthand experience as a consumer gives his or her testimonial authenticity. Free of clinical or job objectives, the ex-client/advocate is perceived by the current consumer as more credible.

As advocates, volunteers persuasively recruit people as both staff and other volunteers for their cause. The network of connections most volunteers have provides opportunities for telling their relatives, neighbors and fellow members the values and gratifications in being a volunteer. Their method may take the form of public education for their service club, fellow church members or a coffee klatch. But coming from someone already known and accepted, who has firsthand experience and observations, the message is much more likely to be accepted.

Volunteer advocates, too, may present the culture and tradition of a community to staff who may not have roots there or who is unaware of what has gone on before there. Sometimes cultural patterns determine attitudes toward a service which may block effective use of that service. Staff may jump to the conclusion that parents are not interested in their children when they do not follow their progress by visits and seek consultation. A volunteer can explain how difficult it is to obtain transportation or to

come at times when staff is available for consultation. He or she could suggest adjusting staff time to the cultural patterns of an area.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of volunteer advocacy comes at the social action level. Defined as "class advocacy," these volunteer activities can impact community priorities and mobilize constituencies in support of special needs. This may mean expressing needs of persons in such a way as to persuade service professionals to make themselves available and tailor their service to those needs. This may mean persuading budget makers and decision makers at local, state and even national levels that services are needed and deserve budgetary support.

We on staff have a tendency to present our best side when 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. Volunteer advocates can often be more direct than paid staff. They frequently cut through protocol, red tape, 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 in 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.

Advocacy Vs. Service Volunteering

By Ivan Scheier, Ph.D.

The following is a summary of an address delivered to the Jubilee Convention of the Association of Volunteer Bureaus, May 4, 1976.

Free associate the word "advocate" and there are sure to be connotations of a certain excitement, both loaded and clouded emotionally. To clarify, check the dictionary and you find "plead a cause," often but not always "on behalf of another." Take some liberties with Webster, and a general definition emerges: *to take a position on an issue or problem in such a way as to influence others.*

According to this definition, all of us are advocates in some way, and the broadness of the definition permits advocacy to be indirect as well as direct. It even allows "unconscious advocacy": standing for something in such a way as to influence others, without really being aware you are doing so.

Dr. Scheier is the new president of the National Information Center on Volunteerism. He served as its executive director for ten years.

The issue for us is: do we want to include the volunteer as advocate in our domain of endeavor, as part of a total package of caring and helping? Or do we want to remain safe, comfortable, tight and controlled, with our current narrower vision of formal, structured volunteer service programs? The issue is part of a running battle these past five years between "inclusionists" and "exclusionists" in the volunteer world. Earlier incidents in that dialogue included such questions as:

—If a person receives subsistence or enabling funds, is he or she a "pure" volunteer?

—Are students receiving credit for volunteering?

—Do we accept the challenge of self-help and of informal voluntary action as within our purview?

I believe the inclusionists or expansionists are steadily winning, and I hope they win on the issue of volunteer advocacy. The advocate must first address some stereotypes, largely but not entirely the legacy of the 1960's. My main point is that much if not most of advocacy is unpaid, unshocking, and inseparable from service.

True, there are a number of paid advocacy-type positions in our society; for example, lawyer, labor leader, lobbyist, public relations and advertising persons. There are volunteer activities paralleling these with even these people sometimes contributing as volunteers. But, as always, volunteerism is more than a shadow equivalent of the paid world. More than an aid to the paid, it is far more varied and pervasive.

How much were you paid last time you voted or participated in an issue-oriented group—local or national, formal or informal? What fee did you receive last time you signed a petition, wrote a letter to the editor, or argued your position on a policy board? Interestingly enough, the volunteer sometimes pays for the privilege of joining an issue group, a kind of super-volunteering. Indeed, even sincere affiliation with a church or synogogue tells others where you stand on a set of values. It is a voluntary advocacy, a pervasive part of *all* our lives. It is not ordinarily exotic, dangerous or dramatic. It is not only acceptable; it is a positive evolutionary contribution to the well-being of community and society.

Service volunteering has no monopoly on respectability. The acceptable-unacceptable dimension runs through both service and advocacy volunteering. The decision as to when the activity is acceptable enough for us to work with is essentially the same for both. That does not mean it is always easy. True, service volunteering does tend to have a more generally acceptable image today. But even here, there are ways in which service volunteering is or can be engaged as advocacy.

In the first place, no one has demonstrated to my satisfaction that service and advocacy volunteers are ineluctably different types of people. I'd be surprised if many service volunteers weren't turned on to issues in their service area by virtue of their direct experience. More directly, the volunteer in service to a client may act as a model simply by being herself/himself. This can be indirect and perhaps unconscious advocacy of a life-style or set of values, but no less powerful because it is indirect.

To the extent that volunteers serve in policy develop-

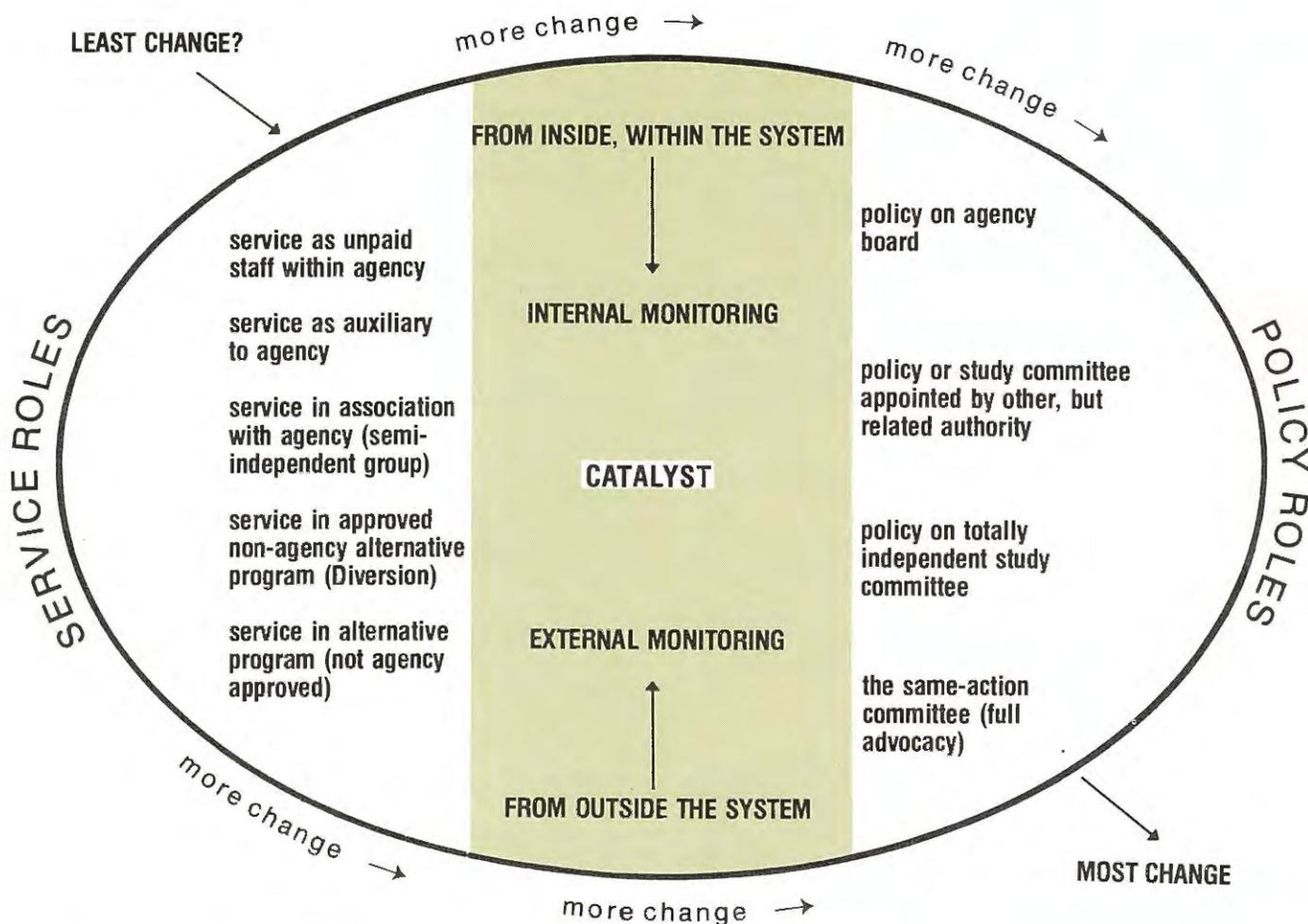
ment or policymaking, they serve as advocates along a dimension which extends from within-system to without the system. On boards and committees we have an intimate interface between service and advocacy in volunteers, for this is an "advocacy service" (see diagram).

Finally, there is a vision of distribution of service in a free society that has the impact of advocacy. Thus, let us hope that someday we overcome the professional staff or agency deterrent to the free flow of volunteers. On that great day—and as we progress towards it—volunteers will

of what it means to assist "yes" and "no" volunteer groups at the same time—e.g., pro-ERA and anti-ERA groups. Surely, in a pluralist society, the broader community should benefit by clearer definition of issues and more open dialogue. But there may even be benefits to the advocate protagonists. We can be mediators, with respect for differences, in the operation of non-zero-sum conflict resolution models.

I have no right to leave us hanging there, but I shall for now, with a promise to think much more on this with you.

VOLUNTEERING AND SYSTEM CHANGE



be able to speak with their feet, flowing freely to where, as citizens, they see the problem: criminal justice, environment, mental health, women's rights, or whatever. By so doing, they will not only add force to solutions; they will raise the national consciousness in regard to problems, issues and alternatives. So, let the volunteer as advocate, and service as advocacy, be included, along with service for its own sake, in our responsibilities as leaders of volunteers.

How shall we begin? We can seek cross-fertilization and more volunteers by "interchange recruiting": recruiting service volunteers from the ranks of advocates and vice versa in any given area of endeavor. We need more study

I close with the hope that, more and more, volunteering will become a way of "voting" in and for a free society. Indeed, it can be more than an extension of the ballot; it can be an alternative parallel to it, another dimension in participatory democracy. Thus, advocacy volunteering does not have to inpt to or terminate in a legislator's office; it can open up new paths for positive impact in a free society. Nor does voluntary action have to be seen any longer as merely a side-effect of freeness in a society. Rather, let us take the responsibility for seeing that it is a cause of it. We shall "plead the cause of freedom"; more than that, we can activate freedom by assisting advocacy volunteering.