

*Of Course Training The Volunteer is Important, But . . .*

# WHAT ABOUT THE STAFF?

**By Elizabeth M. Cantor  
and Margaret R. Pepper**

**V**olunteer services are often regarded as the spontaneous expression of community good will, easily integrated into agency programs that always need extra manpower and resources. The importance of planning and sound administration of volunteer activities frequently goes unrecognized. Professional schools of social work, nursing, medicine and teacher training seldom include reference to techniques of working with volunteers. Yet most staff in human services will have opportunities to supervise or work with volunteers. They need to develop the skills necessary to operate effective volunteer programs so that the full benefits of volunteer skills and talents can be realized.

In the Social Rehabilitation Administration of the District of Columbia Department of Human Resources (formerly the D.C. Department of Public Welfare), experience in working with volunteers goes back over twenty years. At that time volunteers were invited to participate in the service-giving divisions of that multi-service agency. Their mission was to supplement but not to replace staff, to enrich the lives of clients and to interpret to the rest of the community the needs and problems of these clients. An additional benefit developed: to offer career exploratory opportunities for people preparing to enter human service professions.

This D.C. sponsored volunteer program progressed slowly

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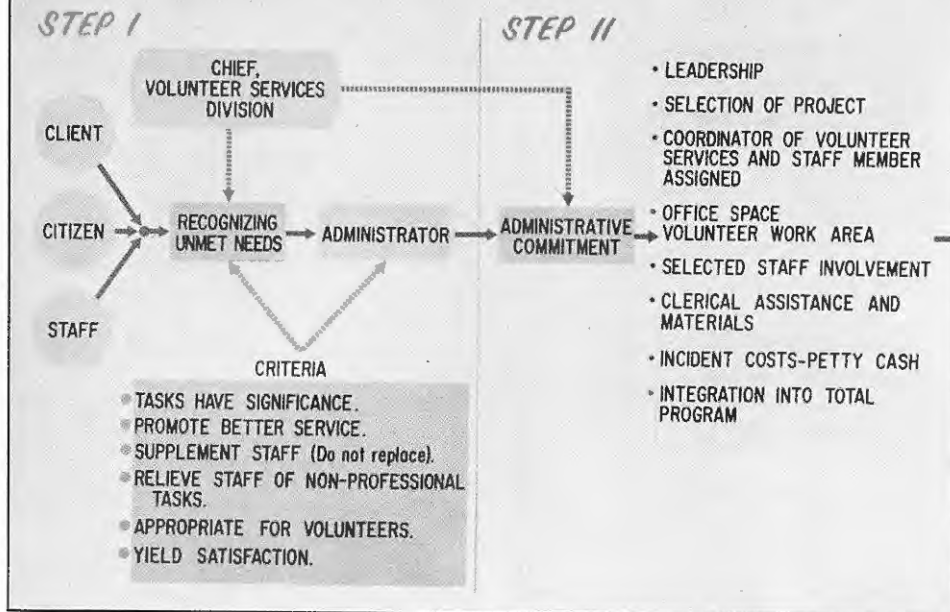
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and with mixed results for ten years. Then, in 1963, a crisis developed when local newspapers investigated the overcrowded, understaffed conditions at Junior Village, D.C.'s home for homeless, dependent children. The descriptions of the children's desperate need for attention touched many people in the community, and volunteers turned out in large numbers to offer their services. The Junior Village staff was not prepared for this sudden influx of well-meaning citizens and chaos ensued.

This crisis made it possible to secure a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to study the impact of an organized, structured volunteer program upon the child-rearing functions of an institution for children. The Junior Village Volunteer Project continued for two and a half years and provided many lessons about the management of volunteer services. The over-riding finding of the study was the need for strong supervision and involvement by staff in the volunteer activities. Previously, staff tended to withdraw upon the arrival of volunteers, and many viewed them as intruders or as nuisances, necessary for public relations purposes only. According to the reports of the project, a good volunteer program depends upon the degree of development of the staff members involved. Since many of the problems that hampered the progress of the volunteers stemmed from faulty staff-volunteer relations, the project team concluded that further progress would require training of staff to work with volunteers.

In an effort to implement these recommendations, a search was made for appropriate material to prepare staff to undertake sound supervision and management of volunteer services. This investigation revealed a wealth of information

# PROCESS GUIDE IN DEVELOPING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM



in the areas of training, recruitment and history of volunteerism and various volunteer activities. Little was available, however, that dealt with the skills and techniques of working with volunteers. Most material began with recruitment and did not include planning and preparation or retention and supervision of volunteers. Since the guidelines needed were not available, it would be necessary to develop them.

The first step was to review and analyze a number of volunteer projects from various divisions. Those which had succeeded were compared with those that had failed and the steps leading up to each enumerated, in the hope that certain common denominators or patterns would emerge.

Volunteers, volunteer coordinators and staff supervisors all participated in an analysis of the procedural steps involved in preparing and operating a variety of projects. They found that the inclusion of certain factors definitely enhanced a project's chances for success.

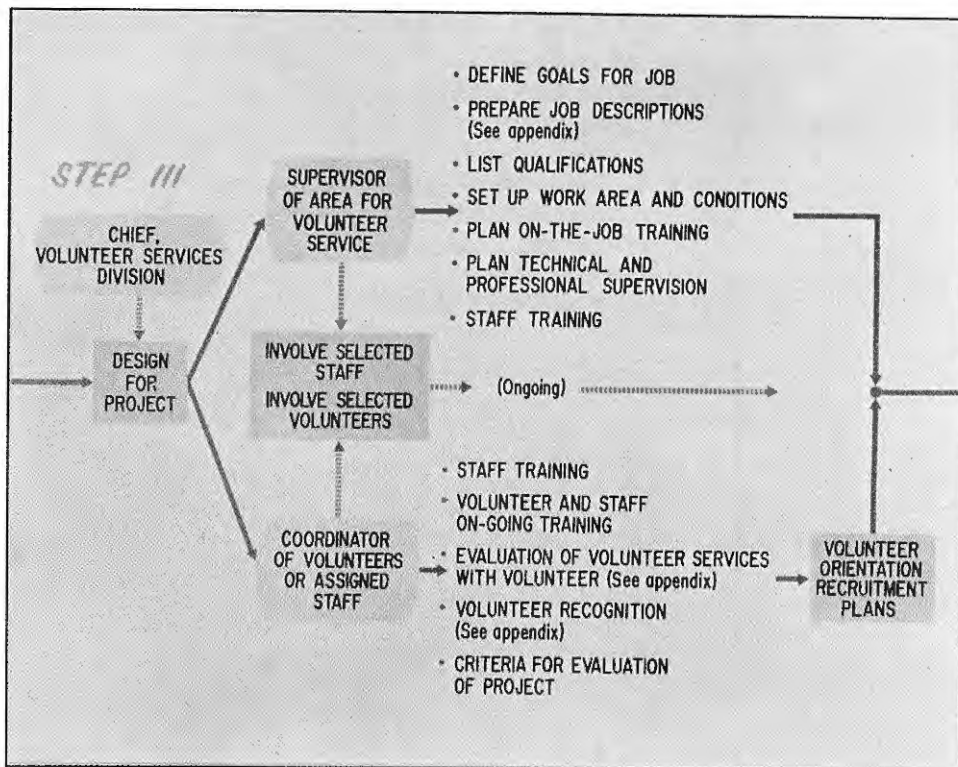
Those factors which seemed essential and recurred regularly were then further refined into the following seven-step process:

- I. Identification of needs appropriate for volunteers to meet
- II. Securing administrative commitment through all levels
- III. Designing of a project including goals, job descriptions, qualifications of volunteers, training, supervision and evaluation
- IV. Recruitment, including publicity, screening, placement and scheduling
- V. Implementation, including supervision, orientation and training
- VI. Evaluation at regular intervals

## VII. Recognition of staff and volunteers, both formal and informal

These steps were briefly defined and described in a manual called *Guide For Staff Who Work With Volunteers* and a visual-aid chart. These materials were tested in a series of eight one-hour workshops in which staff supervisors, volunteers and volunteer coordinators from various settings participated actively. Each session was carefully evaluated and recommendations incorporated in ensuing workshops. Reactions of clients, recipients and residents were carefully considered. The purpose of the workshop was to clarify the roles of the volunteers, staff and coordinators, to improve communication, to pinpoint responsibility and to promote mutual respect and satisfaction.

The volunteer coordinators who had shared in the development of the *Guide* were instrumental in applying it in various settings, testing and refining it. They found it to be flexible and effective in Child Welfare, Public Assistance and institutions for the retarded, delinquent and aged — both in crisis and long-term projects. Analysis and evaluation of new projects continued. When pressure of time or emergency forced the omission of some steps, the project often proved disappointing and sometimes failed completely. Fears that the process might prove too time-consuming were dispelled as thinking in these terms because standard procedure for volunteer coordinators in helping plan and develop volunteer activities. Because of the enormous complexities of the agency, constant reorganization of the department and the enormous pressures in the Social Service area, many staff members could not be included in the training of staff. Some who had been enthusiastic were transferred or left the agency; yet



acceptance of the seven-step technique continued to grow gradually and served to fortify volunteer efforts.

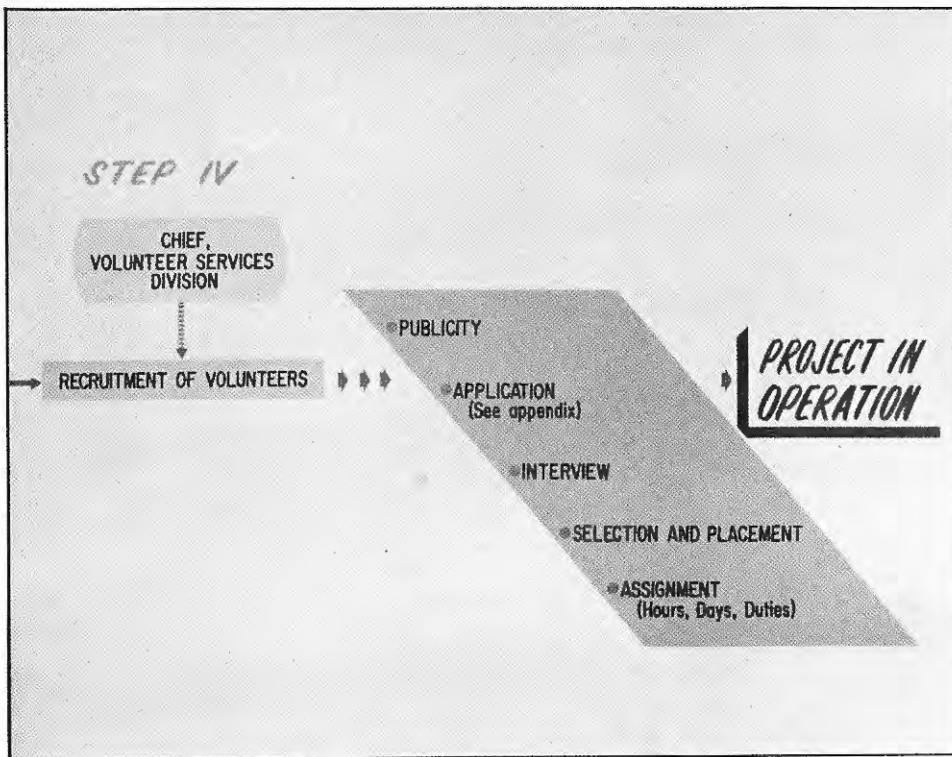
When Medicare was established, a crisis developed when Public Assistance workers were unable to reach all elderly clients to sign up for health benefits. A hurried call to the Volunteer Office alerted us to the fact that only ten days remained before the cut-off deadline. Word needed to reach clients or they would have to wait another year. A conference with the Chief of Public Assistance and the staff responsible for serving clients over 65 resulted in their commitment to provide all the necessary information, tools and supervision needed to enable volunteers to reach the clients. Staff defined exactly what jobs volunteers would be asked to do; what type of person would be most suitable for the job; what information, direction and training would be needed; who would prepare the material, train and supervise the volunteers; and what forms, maps, transportation and communication would be needed. Having decided that volunteers would be more effective visiting clients in teams of two, staff worked overtime dividing cases by census tracts and neighborhoods and making up kits for each team.

Plans called for a volunteer team to see each client, to explain Medicare benefits and help them sign the appropriate forms. This task required experience, maturity and tact; therefore volunteers currently involved in Department programs and other community agencies, such as the Red Cross, were borrowed for this short-term urgent activity. Within a day, thirty volunteers had been found. They attended a thorough briefing and training session and were out in the field visiting clients the following day.

As a result no clients failed to sign up because they did not know of the opportunity or because they did not understand the benefits. Volunteers found this a rewarding experience, and staff who had never cared to work with volunteers began to see them as valuable allies in the struggle to give good service. One Administrator who was frank enough to admit that prior to this demonstration he had viewed volunteers with a jaundiced eye, afterwards became a booster for volunteer participation.

Another project, not as successful, developed in response to the need to speed up the interminable process of food stamp certification. Volunteers were asked to assist certification officers in securing and verifying information for eligibility. Because of the pressure of the work, understaffing and low morale, we failed to secure the commitment of staff to share the work with volunteers. Even though the volunteers were enthusiastic, committed and willing to take detailed, laborious training, staff were not able to accept them as members of the team. Whenever the workload slowed up, volunteers were left with nothing to do and staff gave them the unspoken message that they were not really needed. Many subtle factors were operating; had we recognized and dealt with them in advance, this project might have succeeded. Instead, the volunteers gradually withdrew with sadness, having wasted much time and effort and recognizing that the client problems were still unsolved.

One positive aspect of the *Guide* is to enable staff to know when to say "no" – the project is not feasible. One such situation occurred when a sincere and well-meaning gentleman reported that dry-cleaners would gladly donate unclaimed ar-

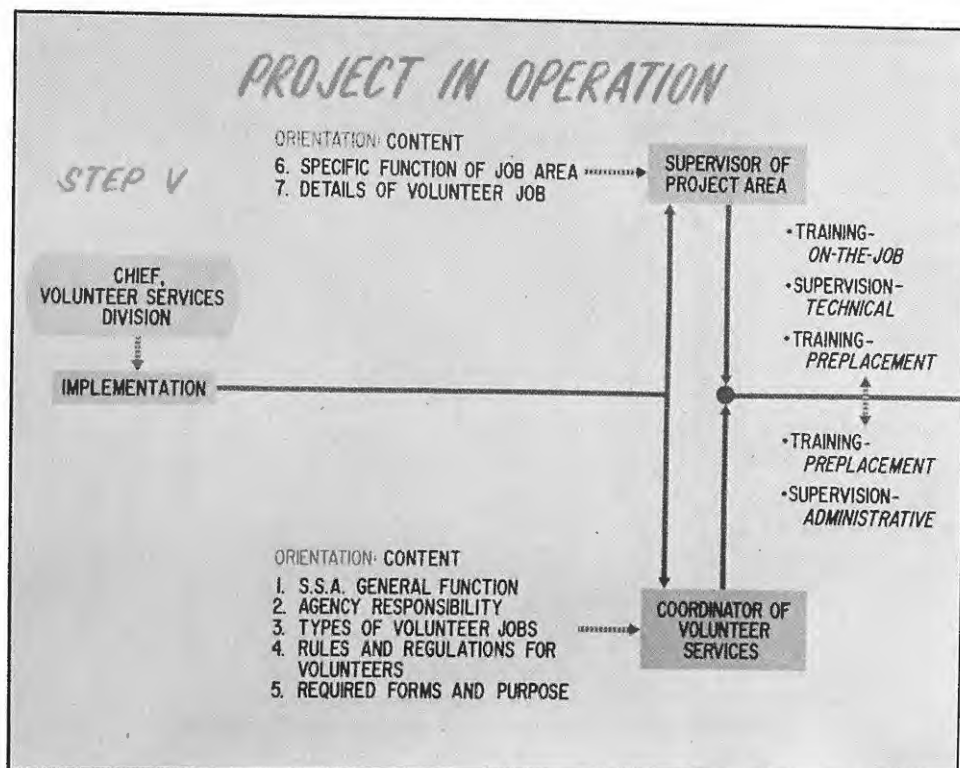


ticles of clothing. Our staff already knew that cleaners usually sell these garments that are saleable and only donate the remainder. Our experience had taught us that the time needed to collect and sort and distribute these donations was not worthwhile. The volunteer pressured the Chief of Social Services to use our precious transportation facilities for this purpose and, in spite of the protests of staff, this was done for a short time. Results were disappointing and the project was discontinued. Had we followed the *Guide*, much wasted time and hard feelings would have been avoided by recognizing that the plan was not sound to begin with.

A more successful application took place at the Receiving Home, a detention center for children awaiting Juvenile Court Hearing. One day the court requested data on every child admitted during the past year. This meant extracting information from two sources, the Admission Office and Social Service, records concerning 3000 children. To take staff time would have deprived the children of their services. Again a group of experienced, knowledgeable volunteers was drafted, in this case four retired school principals already doing administrative volunteer jobs in the agency. The Administrator and his staff met with the volunteers and explained the problem, answered questions, selected a room for them to work in, made files available, assigned an assistant administrator for consultation. Together they worked out a format for retrieving the information and tabulating it for reporting to the court. This project took four weeks and the deadline was met. Again resistance to volunteers was reduced and the acceptance of volunteers moved forward.

Casework agencies have attracted many prospective volunteers, but the roles for them are not as easy to identify as in institutions where resident needs are much more obvious and accessible. In involving case aides in our casework agencies, the *Guide* has served quite well. They are recruited and trained on an individual basis rather than in groups. Any worker interested in having a volunteer may request one for a specific set of tasks. After conferring with the supervisor and identifying a chair, desk, telephone or transportation necessary to do the job, the worker can spell out the goals, job description and qualifications. Recruitment is then directed toward a particular kind of person. When successful, these jobs invariably expand in scope and depth; but volunteers must be clear initially about what they are expected to do. This prevents the great problem of not having enough work for the volunteer to do, because the staff supervisor will have thought it through in advance. These expectations will change and grow as they should, but the caseworker is spared the panicky feeling of wondering what to have the volunteer do each day. The volunteer will be spared the frustration of reporting for work and being told, "Sorry, we have no work for you today."

When the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation combined with Social Services under the Department of Human Resources, new opportunities opened up. Many rehabilitation workers are themselves handicapped people. Supervisors requested aides to help visually impaired workers with office work, filing, reading of reports and other tasks requiring eyesight. Three such workers have regularly scheduled aides who have been dependable and resourceful. These



volunteers have been rewarded with a sense of fulfillment in helping the worker to give better service.

Throughout the Social Rehabilitation Administration, new roles and assignments for volunteers have been tried and tested according to this method. Some projects produced the desired results and others fell short of the goals. When the system did not work, problems usually stemmed from the following errors:

1. The need could not really be met appropriately by volunteer services.
2. The administrative commitment came only from the top and was not shared by staff down the line.
3. Failure to think through the goals, job descriptions and qualifications of the volunteers.
4. Volunteers were under-qualified or over-qualified.
5. Training was insufficient, inappropriate or not shared by staff supervisors.
6. Recruitment methods were ill-chosen and too many responses generated. Interviews may have failed to give fair and accurate information.
7. Staff was not prepared to accept responsibility for supervision, training and evaluation.
8. Lack of recognition of volunteer contribution made volunteers feel they were taken for granted or merely tolerated.

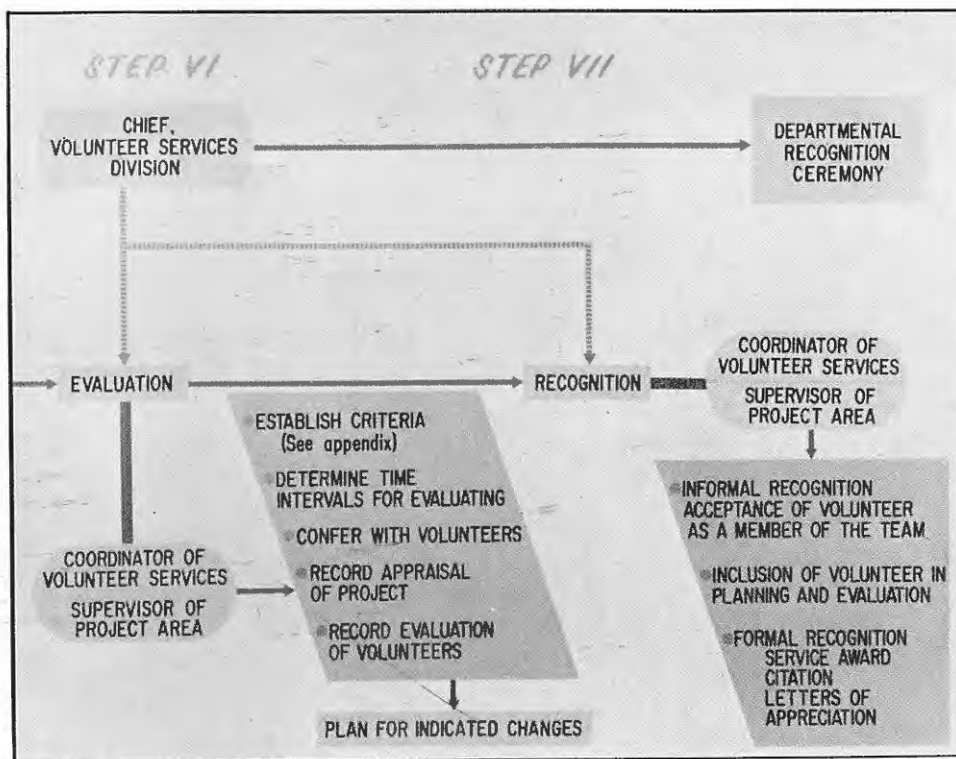
The *Guide* has attracted much interest, not just in our agency but in other agencies and other communities as well. Apparently we had found something that was widely needed. A

listing in the NCVA Clearinghouse Portfolio prompted over 350 requests from 37 States and from Guam and Australia. Many people reported that the system had worked in public and private agencies; in large and small towns; and in a variety of settings including community action programs, group health, halfway houses, schools, court-related programs and churches.

The workshops planned for staff in the Department of Human Resources also attract attention in other agencies, and requests to participate in training sessions are numerous. These staff and volunteers are welcome. Each Workshop includes participants from different services and, while the guidelines are followed, contents and responses change constantly. The use of variety of training methods such as role playing, buzz groups, triads and team problem-solving demonstrate the concept in specific, practical operations. Often strong feeling about volunteers and the need for more administrative support are expressed and discussed.

The fold-out chart which accompanies the *Guide* serves as a valuable workshop tool as well as a checklist or reminder to help staff form the habit of following the various steps in preparing, planning and implementing volunteer activity.

It must be pointed out that the seven steps are over-lapping and on-going. A need apparent one day may no longer be necessary one month or one year later; administrative commitment may be lost when personnel changes. Goals must change and with them job descriptions and training needs.



Recruitment methods must change as the community changes. Currently with recession and unemployment many factors affect the availability of volunteers. In implementation, training and supervision are inseparable. Training capabilities for staff may be extended to include volunteers. When staff meetings include training, volunteers may be included. As a volunteer's supervisory skill increases, so should opportunities to supervise. The Civil Service credits volunteer work as valid experience for employment and promotion. Supervising volunteers is good training for prospective new supervisors.

The evaluation of volunteer performance and progress, whether individually or in groups, is of great importance. Volunteers and, whenever possible, clients or recipients of service should participate as well as staff. Too often volunteers are taken for granted, everyone assuming that they are satisfied and performing well. They have a right to grow as conditions constantly change. Evaluations are useful only if resultant recommendations are put into action.

Recognition for both staff and volunteers must be constant and on-going. All people, whether paid or unpaid, need to feel that they are members of the teams and that their efforts are important. Routine jobs must ultimately be related to long-range goals if they are to feel satisfaction in their achievements.

The proponents of this *Guide* are well aware that it is not a panacea, but rather a problem-solving technique designed to

forestall many of the obstacles hampering the progress of volunteer activity everywhere.

Most agency staff and most volunteers believe that their agency is uniquely resistant to accepting volunteers. They believe other agencies are delighted to include additional helpers with their work. This *Guide* has served us as a useful tool in improving the climate for volunteer services in expanding opportunities for people of all ages, skills and socio-economic groups, and in reducing the natural hostilities of staff. It has also reduced the shocking waste of time and talent caused by inadequate preparation and inadequate understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both volunteers and staff. The goals desired are better understanding and better communication wherever volunteers and staff have opportunities to work together.

The consensus of evaluations by participants of Workshop sessions suggests that this training should be given to all staff in service-giving units.

The following comments are quoted from their evaluations:

"The Workshop enhances knowledge of volunteer programs"

"Breaks down stereotyped conceptions"

"Helps people deal effectively with one another"

"Gave me a clearer understanding of what to expect from volunteers and in turn what volunteers expect of me"

One veteran institutional counsellor summed it up when he said:

"Volunteers are human after all." ■