

Job Sharing, Part II

'One Job, Two Contented Workers'

By Nona P. Gregory and Priscilla B. Schueck

The following article continues the presentation of successful job-sharing experiences in the volunteer administration field that began with "Job-Sharing: Benefiting the Employer and Staff Involved, But Most Importantly—the Volunteers and Agencies Served" in the fall 1986 VAL.

The fall 1986 issue of *Voluntary Action Leadership* was read again with renewed interest in 1988 by the Voluntary Action Center (VAC) of the Lehigh Valley because it was on January 1, 1988 that the Lehigh Valley VAC began its own job sharing of the executive director position.

There are many similarities and yet differences between Ann Armstrong and Bev Farrell who described their Bloomington, Indiana VAC job sharing experience in the fall 1986 issue and our current job sharing experience. We differ in two major areas: First, no real training period was necessary because we had worked together in the same office for two years prior to sharing the executive director position. Our skills and interest areas were clear to one another; we simply reorganized responsibilities accordingly.

Second, Ann and Bev divided the work week between them. In contrast, we divide the work day between us. We work in shifts. Priscilla works from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and Nona works from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We have found this to be the best schedule for us. We also have found the overlapping hours of 11:00 to 3:00 to be invaluable for exchange of information, since we are not sharing a job but the many varied duties and responsibilities of a position.

Responsibilities

Our job sharing proposal was submitted to the VAC Board of Directors as soon as it became apparent that the position of executive director was open. The proposal was based on the job description of the executive director, and the responsibilities

were divided according to areas of expertise with some overlap and some administrative creativity.

Priscilla had been the VAC's administrative assistant. Her skills, interests and expertise converted into the following responsibilities: resource/fund development, fiscal management, board/committee support, personnel administration.

Nona had been the VAC's program director. As a result, her current responsibilities as a job sharer include: program planning, delivery and evaluation, public/community relations; board/committee support; personnel administration.

Age

Today, a woman's age should not be an issue. We feel that we should highlight our ages because it is becoming apparent that the disparity in our ages has become a benefit to the agency as well as to ourselves.

Priscilla is 37 and Nona is 57. The 20-year difference is what makes the schedule what it is. Priscilla has a young family. She wants to be home to meet the school bus.

Nona's four children are grown—college expenses are over. She can easily assume responsibility for the office at the end of the day. She does not want to work all day every day as she did when college expenses were a major part of the family's budget.

Negative Reactions

There were some negatives expressed when we submitted our proposal. Where does the buck stop? Won't support staff become confused as to who really is the executive director? Will two executive directors confuse Board members and the community? Our proposal was a tough sell to the Board. They agreed to it, but adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

So far, none of the negative concerns have become a reality. Priscilla and I are two very different people with very different skills. The areas of expertise have been well defined. Staff, board members and the community at large are increasingly becoming more clear as to whom to ask when an answer is required.

As of this date, we have received raises, a rating of "commendable" and a clear mandate to continue. Priscilla and I are beginning to feel that we are at the right place at the right time.

There have been some surprises along the way. Priscilla's interest in school age children attracted two new programs: National Honor Society summit meeting with a goal of stimulating honor society students to volunteer and a sixth-grade teacher who feels that her students should be exposed to the world of volunteerism as early as 11 years old.

My social work background and interest in the problems of the "over 40" population were helpful in absorbing 400 retired volunteers from another organization which was assimilated into the VAC this past summer.

Despite the fact that we are the "new kids" on this job-sharing block, we were asked to be the presenters on the topic of job sharing at the October meeting of the Society of Volunteer Administrators of the Lehigh Valley.

The preparation for this meeting yielded very interesting results for all concerned. First, we were able to use the valuable job sharing experience of the Bloomington, Indiana VAC as a resource. Second, *Newsweek* cooperated by publishing an article in August on job sharing in business, "A Glimpse of the Flex Future."

These articles would have rounded out any job sharing presentation, but the best was yet to come. One week before our presentation, Joan Lunden of "Good Morning America" did a segment on job sharing and *U.S. News and World Report* (November 14, 1988) published an article on "One Job, Two Contented Workers."

Our job sharing experience is individualized and unique in its characteristics, but this is what is common among all job sharers: They are working it out, and it can be done. There must be a congenial and compatible relationship to begin with. The administrative details can be creative and effective. We feel that job sharing can benefit business as well as nonprofit organizations and the best part is "one job, two contented workers."