



Citizen involvement in this country is on the rise, several prominent leaders in the volunteer field agree. They explain why in

The Volunteer Leader Interviews

with Tish Sommers, Brian O'Connell, Sara-Alyce P. Wright, William Aramony, Marta Sotomayor, David Cohen, Polly Sowell, Barbara Mikulski

Tish Sommers

Tish Sommers is the president of the Older Women's League Educational Fund in Oakland, California, which she founded in 1978. As an activist on behalf of women and aging, she has served on the national board of the National Organization for Women, coordinated NOW's Task Force on Older Women, chaired its Task Force on Volunteerism, founded the Alliance for Displaced Homemakers, chaired the Western Gerontological Society's Task Force on Older Women, testified at local, state and national hearings, and helped plan the White House Mini-Conference on Older Women that took place last October in Des Moines, Iowa.

She is the author of The Not-So-Helpless Female (1973) as well as numerous articles on older women, aging and displaced homemakers (a term she coined).



I AM A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER and have been for most of the past twenty years. I feel very lucky to have that option, which is mine by choice. A volunteer can create her/his own job, take vacations at will, choose priorities, work on causes of deep concern, and select tasks for self-actualization. My volunteer position has the job

title, "Freelance Agitator," a joyous occupation. Among the jobs I've had as a volunteer are volunteer coordinator for City of Seattle Human Rights Department, California Commissioner on Aging, legislative advocate, writer/lecturer, organizer, advocate, board member. My role is a fluid one, since I am self-directed. When there was a need, I helped create organizations, worked with them and then moved on. The issues themselves were the determining factor.

As chair of the NOW Task Force on Volunteerism, I helped challenge the traditional role of women in volunteer jobs. In those days the attitude toward women was, "You don't need to work, you're supported by a man. If you take paid employment you'll be taking a job away from someone who really needs it. If you want to get out of the house, you can volunteer for something." Women volunteers were taken for granted. But for the past ten years the huge pool of housewives for volunteer recruitment has been dwindling, as women have gone back to school or work. Volunteerism had to adapt or decline.

While working on the "displaced homemaker" issue, I helped create (with Caroline Voorsanger at the Displaced Homemaker Center in Oakland, California) a volunteer contract to help homemakers displaced by widowhood or divorce use volunteerism as a stepping stone to paid employment. This contract, or a similar one, is now used in many of the 400 displaced homemaker centers throughout the country. If properly used, volunteerism can be an excellent job readiness and job training program, but to make

it really effective, the volunteer must be treated like an employee. A contract is drawn up between the volunteer and the appropriate agency, complete with job title, monetary value placed on the "in-kind service," and responsibilities of both parties clearly defined. At the end of the stipulated period of service (usually three to six months), the host agency provides an evaluation, job reference and assistance in seeking employment. Where possible, out-of-pocket expenses of the volunteer are borne by the agency. This type of volunteerism is a *quid pro quo*. The agency receives a highly motivated and disciplined trainee in exchange for helping a former homemaker move into the labor force.

I have also challenged the exploitation of older persons as volunteers. To encourage people to volunteer because they are systematically excluded from paid employment has an element of exploitation in it. On the other hand, involvement in non-paid activity to improve the conditions of one's peer group or others can be a rewarding fulfillment in later years, if that is a matter of choice and not necessity. It would appear that those who are younger are stronger supporters of volunteerism for the elderly than are seniors themselves.

I believe volunteerism is on the rise today, but this presumes that the organizations promoting volunteerism or using volunteers become real advocates for the interests of their free laborers. For example, the IRS rule permitting only 9 cents per mile for use of a car as a charitable donation could be changed if they get behind that issue. Also, expecting volunteers to use their own gas these days will soon lead to a greater fall-off of recruits. Next year's budget should include some expense money for volunteers.

When voluntary organizations recognize that their own survival rests upon advocating in the interests of their volunteers, when they begin to treat them on a par with paid workers, when they insist upon recognition of comparable unpaid work on job applications, they will find volunteers flocking to their banners, and the quality of service will be correspondingly enhanced.

Brian O'Connell

Brian O'Connell is the president of INDEPENDENT SECTOR, a national organization created in 1980 to preserve and enhance our national tradition of giving, volunteering and not-for-profit initiative. Previously (1978-80), he served simultaneously as the president of the National Council on Philanthropy (NCOP) and executive director of the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations (CONVO). INDEPENDENT SECTOR is the successor organization to NCOP and CONVO.

For 12 years O'Connell was the national director of the Mental Health Association, prior to which he spent a dozen years with the American Heart Association in Pennsylvania, Maryland and California.

He is the author of *Effective Leadership in Voluntary Organizations (1976)* and *Finding Values That Work (1978)*.



WHEN I WAS WITH THE American Heart Association, it was simply a group of very inexperienced young people surrounded by physicians who weren't interested in fundraising or community organization or administration. We were trying to figure out whether to sell valentines or to go into the United Way

as our basic approach to fundraising. It was an absolute scramble to get a toe-hold because heart disease was invisible, unlike physically crippling diseases and all of the other causes that were raising money then.

It was gradually building the commitment of volunteers in first the larger metropolitan areas, then the middle-sized cities, then the rural areas, that gave the AHA the vast network of volunteers it has today. Many who started as fundraisers are now not only leaders of the Heart Association at different levels, but they also have assumed major leadership positions in other voluntary organizations. The AHA provided a growth channel for people who came into it simply because somebody asked them to ring doorbells.

I have always emphasized the role and responsibility of volunteer leaders, and I believe passionately that it is the staff's role to develop the volunteer face and force of an organization. I've always worked hard for the development of more voluntary initiative, including both giving and volunteering. INDEPENDENT SECTOR will focus on the national climate for personal participation as well as the participation of corporations, labor unions and foundations.

The first level on which we are working is simply making sure that our freedoms of religion, speech and assembly are not too narrowly defined and thus begin to leave out the groups that may not be too popular in 25 or 50 years.

We are also very much involved in training member organizations with enormous dependence on volunteers. Our training is oriented towards how a citizen's organization can be an effective advocate, whether it's for improvement or change in the way a school committee does its business or for more influence on the local, state or federal legislature.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR has the leadership responsibility for what is known as the charitable contributions legislation, which would increase personal giving by more than 10 percent. We think that kind of expansion of the capacity of volunteer organizations is one of the best examples of how we can help all organizations. Once that legislation is passed—and we believe it will pass in 1981—it will mean that arts groups, minority causes, religions, education, national voluntary organizations all will have a greater opportunity to raise more money.

The state of volunteerism today is alive, healthy and getting better. Look at the number and kinds of people willing to get involved today—young, old, poor, Hispanic, Black, gay. People are finally recognizing that they can't wait any longer for officials to take action on the way their neighborhoods and communities are operating.

In terms of their orientation, I find that people say, "Well, when I think of volunteering, I think of people doing good for others, not worrying about their own neighborhoods, their own rights." But that fails to take a realistic view of the past. These same people will often point to the minutemen as their example of volunteers, but the minutemen were protecting their own communities. While a good deal of volunteering is out of the goodness of people's hearts, some of it very naturally is related to people's awareness that they've got to stand up and be counted for in their communities and their rights.

Sara-Alyce P. Wright

Sara-Alyce P. Wright has served as executive director of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America since 1974, the highest professional post in the national YWCA. Wright's leadership role extends to the more than 400 community YWCAs in this country serving 2-1/2 million women and girls and to those active in more than 80 countries worldwide.

The YWCA has a local, national and international program of service to women and girls. Wright says major goals are to aid individual personal development and to help women and girls "make their full contribution to a society where freedom and justice, peace and dignity for all people shall prevail."



I HAVE BEEN INTERESTED IN the opportunity for volunteer activity for a long time. Somewhere along the line I was taught that it was an essential element of citizenship in a democracy.

I believe volunteer participation by citizens of all ages is essential to the total well-being of our nation and to the advancement

toward its goal as a democratic society. It has been so since the earliest days of our history and must continue to be so. Today there is a new awareness of the value of the work of persons who serve as volunteers, whether as members of policy-making bodies, as program or service volunteers, or as advocates for issues of deep concern. Volunteer opportunities are expanding and there is recognition of its multiple benefits to individuals being served, for community betterment and in the life of the volunteer as an individual.

Today there is increased recognition of the value of the volunteer experience for those served as well as for those who serve. Many persons have found new careers as employees through volunteer opportunities; others have developed creativity and expertise in areas of interest discovered through volunteer activity.

Recently organizations in the voluntary sector have been much involved in clarifying their role and function. Government funding and the utilization of the volunteer concept in various government programs has required that the nature of voluntarism be understood and accepted so that the freedom to be creative and the importance of self-determination in that process be protected.

Because of the possibility of the transfer of skills, new

dimensions in volunteer leadership development are being explored by the YWCA as are many other organizations. Efforts are being made to develop training for volunteer responsibilities on a scale similar to that provided for staff.

Recognition of the significant contributions of volunteers is evident in one of the objectives adopted by our 1979 National Convention, namely, a very strong emphasis was placed on the importance of utilizing volunteers in the overall work of the National Board YWCA. We have also produced several new publications on the role and relations of volunteers and staff and the components of volunteer training.

The introduction to volunteer opportunities in community service for young women in their teens will be one of the emphases of the YWCA's Centennial Celebration of its work with teens.

William Aramony

William Aramony is national executive of the United Way of America, the national association of local United Way organizations. The United Way is the largest mobilized network of voluntary, federated, fundraising, planning and allocating organizations in the world involved in community problem-solving and supplying human service needs.

Aramony began his United Way career on the planning staff in South Bend, Indiana, moved to Columbia, South Carolina, as its executive, and returned to South Bend as the United Way planning and fundraising executive.

As South Bend's executive, Aramony attracted national attention to the United Way through an innovative project which retained and reemployed older workers who were unemployed due to the closing of the community's largest company.

Under Aramony's direction, United Way of America has witnessed major changes. Some of these include changing the name to "United Way of America," developing the Standards of Excellence for Local United Way Organizations, establishing four regional offices in San Francisco, New York, Chicago and Atlanta, inaugurating a four-year, \$4.2 million Personnel Development Program for professionals and volunteers; publishing the first universally applicable service classification system in the health and welfare field ("United Way of America Services Identification System"), and the first accounting guide for local United Way organizations and not-for-profit human service organizations as part of a comprehensive "house of accountability" program, and launching the largest public service media campaign ever conducted in the nation on behalf of local United Way organizations and their member agencies.

In 1976, United Way launched a new Program for the Future, which included the National Corporate Development Program designed to help United Ways triple their fundraising over a 10-year period from \$1 billion to \$3 billion; increase the voluntary sector's impact on public policy; improve provision of services to people, and maximize the use of communications media for voluntarism. Pioneering work in adopting long-range planning methodology to not-for-profit organizations was

developed and implemented. Culminating a two-year effort, the Long Range Planning Report, which outlines major program objectives in five key areas was approved on December 1, 1978.



I HAVE TRIED TO BE AN organizer, motivator and talent scout. If there is leadership in such activities, it is only bringing good ideas and good volunteers together.

[United Way has] increased dramatically the training available for volunteers at all levels, particularly training for those who serve on the boards of charitable agencies. We have a wider mix of women and minorities on our boards and committees than ever before and are pledged to an affirmative action program. We have done it to make our actions more responsive to community needs and more representative of the American public. We have expanded very substantially the opportunities for volunteer involvement in program policy development.

Volunteerism today, according to our figures, has increased significantly. Our research shows that in 1976, 19 percent of a sample of all Americans said they had volunteered during the preceding 12 months. By 1979, it had increased to 26 percent. This figure excludes volunteer work for churches or synagogues.

I feel this increase is because in a largely impersonal society, it is one area in which the influence of a single individual, giving of his or her time and effort, can still make a difference.

Marta Sotomayor

Marta Sotomayor, board member of VOLUNTEER, is the acting director of the Office of Public Liaison, Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, Public Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services.

Throughout the '70s she also was actively involved in the National Council of La Raza, an organization dedicated to improving the social, economic and political well-being of Hispanics. A member of the board, she recently completed a two-year term as chairperson.

She has written a number of articles in the areas of human services, minorities, higher education and women.



FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS now, I have been involved as a volunteer representing, in a number of instances, the Chicano community. That group in many ways remains apart from the mainstream of American life. This situation stems from discrimination and lack of knowledge about this group which goes back many, many years, and those years of lack of communication have taken their toll. Many in the Chicano community today still

feel that there is no real desire on the part of most of America to include them in the mainstream of community activities. As it specifically relates to Chicanos in the volunteer field, this feeling is projected not only from individual attitudes, and the lack of interest expressed by the major voluntary organizations for the concerns and needs of Chicanos, but also from the programs and funding patterns of the federal government and private philanthropy that for the most part have neglected this ethnic/linguistic group.

Within the Chicano community itself there is a great deal of volunteering, although it's not called "volunteering." Often times the Chicano doesn't look at himself or herself as a volunteer. Unlike the highly structured volunteer world we usually think of or refer to in the broader community, in the Chicano community the idea of participation in the helping process has remained more spontaneous. It can be best described as a "self-help" activity. This, of course, can contribute to a vicious circle.

Feeling that their energies and talents are more wanted within their own community, Chicanos continue to direct their "helping" toward their own group. There are fewer opportunities to make the contacts necessary to expand and become involved in the broader community. However, the energy and talents are there to make an incredibly significant contribution to American life, but they have yet to be tapped.

It is important to note that the experiences of the Chicano community are still tied very closely to those of Mexico due to geographical proximity, common culture and language, the influx of immigrants and constant communication. Relationships remain very close between Chicanos and Mexicans, who in many instances have close relatives on both sides of the border. It might be important that we not restrict our view of the "volunteer community" only to the United States, but that we look at the broader picture, that of volunteering in activities that consider international concern. It is for that reason that I am particularly interested in my current role as the representative of the National Council of La Raza to the U.S. Commission to UNESCO. I feel that that experience will be extremely beneficial to me in whatever work I do within the volunteer community here in the States.

For a number of years I was one of two women on La Raza's board of directors and was elected as its first woman chairperson of the board. I served two terms in that capacity. I believe that one of my most important accomplishments as chairperson was the change in the organizational bylaws that now mandate that the board be comprised of 50 percent women.

David Cohen

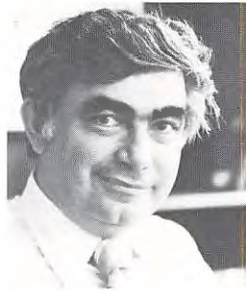
David Cohen is the president of Common Cause, the nation's largest public interest lobby with more than 200,000 members and volunteers. He has been Common Cause's chief executive officer since April 1976.

Cohen joined the Common Cause staff in 1971 as director of field organization. He later served as vice president for operations and executive vice president before becoming president.

As a public interest lobbyist, Cohen has participated in

numerous issues battles, including civil rights, consumer affairs, urban affairs, anti-poverty and end-the-war legislation.

He has published numerous articles on the need to revitalize Congress. His "Party Leaders in Congress" is a case study which has appeared in a college text. An essay on public interest groups is included in American Democracy, the Third Century by Kraemer, Noelke, Prindle and Moody. Cohen also contributed a chapter entitled "The Public Interest Movement and Citizen Participation" to Citizen Participation in America, edited by Stuart Langton.



[People] are volunteering because they want to be part of something that is not just limited to their own lives. They want to be part of having some sort of communal involvement. People do it only if what they are doing satisfies them. It's a way of being connected, of having relationships, and in that sense, it is the essence

of democratic practice.

One of the reasons [Common Cause membership] is stable and trending slightly upward is that people want to make things work, they want to make things fit together, they want to be part of a whole. We've gone through a very negative period in American politics. I think Common Cause tried to be, and largely succeeded in becoming, an affirmative force. That's not to say we're not critical of wrongdoing as we see wrongdoing. But it's getting away from a crisis atmosphere to a recognition that citizen participation—citizen action—has to be a permanent ingredient in American politics.

[At Common Cause] we have two broad groups of volunteers—retirees and students. The retirees, I think, lend a balance to everything we do. They add a richness and flavor we wouldn't have. You see it best in the midst of a big battle, whether you win or lose. If you win, they know it's not the panacea, that you've not reached that final stage of perfection. If you lose, they know you'll be back there to fight again.

It's important to be inclusive in what we do. When we hold an office briefing here, it is not just for the staff but for everybody. If a speaker comes from the outside who is going to converse on the issues, volunteers are also invited. So there are a lot of things that are not that different between staff and volunteers. The other side of it is that there has to be some fixed staff responsibilities, for basic accountability, whether it's our cash flow or making sure that our membership renewal rate is up.

I think we're helped by the fact that Common Cause is a movement and by its being a movement, there are no lifetime peerages here. That recognition means there is no proprietary right to the job. That attitude is important to keep up front because I think that reduces the turfdom between staff and volunteers.

There's a tremendous amount of civic activity all over the country, and not just political or issue activity. Foreigners who come here and observe this country are constantly

marveling about it, whether they're members of the Japanese Diet or the Western Europeans. They're constantly amazed at that burst of citizen energy, an energy which I think helps put a greater sense of cohesion into the country.

There's an unsung hero in America and that's the volunteer, whether in service or advocacy activities. We're such a super critical country, I don't think we blare enough trumpets, and this is one of the things to blare a trumpet about.

Polly Sowell

Polly Sowell is the director of the Texas Governor's Office for Volunteer Services. Prior to assuming this position in 1979, she served as director of the voter identification program for Texans for Tower, consultant to the Clements for Governor Campaign, and executive director of the Republican Party of Texas.

Her diverse volunteer background spans many years of service, including five years' as vice chairperson of the Republican Party of Texas as well as involvement on the boards of local libraries, the Junior Service League, United Fund, Salvation Army, Planned Parenthood and several others. She also is the founder of the McAllen, Texas, Hospital Auxiliary and the city's Patron of Art organization.



I CAN REALLY ONLY SPEAK about volunteering in the state of Texas, where I would describe it as flourishing. Texas has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, but our volunteer population is growing at an even faster rate. That is true both for the traditional programs and for newer ones. One of our biggest problems

is simply creating enough opportunities for the volunteers to do meaningful work. The volunteers are out there in more than sufficient numbers; we just need to get our act together and find places for them.

Texas is filled with interesting programs for volunteers. We have a new Special Friends program for nursing homes, where volunteers are trained by professionals to give lay therapy to the mentally ill. They also seem to become advocates for their clients. In Dallas, volunteers are working as team members with social workers and court officials to determine foster home placements. In Houston, the Arco refinery has a program that encourages blue-collar workers to volunteer. Since they're shift workers, they can contribute time around the clock.

I think volunteering is about to explode in this country. The churches are becoming more involved, as they show that they are concerned about more than just their own membership. Corporations are becoming involved for much the same reasons. The press, which is always accused of printing only bad news, seems to lean over backwards to print a human interest story about volunteers. Everybody has to pay more attention to volunteers, because they are really the only hope we have of solving all our problems.

I see the role of government, and of our office, as one of helping to create more opportunities for people to volunteer and to remove any regulations or barriers that would inhibit volunteering. We can try to educate staff about the ways to use volunteers, and help them do it. We can encourage the use of volunteers through incentives, or we can push a little if we have to in state government. We just do whatever we can to get more people involved in doing good things.

Barbara Mikulski

Barbara Mikulski, a Democrat, represents the 3rd District of Maryland in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is the sponsor and primary spokesperson for legislation to raise the mileage deduction allowed volunteers on their income tax returns.



IT IS MY BELIEF THAT throughout history—certainly in this country but also throughout the world—that the very best ideas, the very best actions and the spirit of idealism always come from the bottom up. They never come from the top down.

Historically our country has shown that the American people always have been better than their leaders and their institutions. That's why we got rid of George III in what was probably one of the first citizen volunteer acts in the United States.

Knowing both the Congress and the executive branch as I do, regardless of who is president—Kennedy, Carter, Johnson, Nixon or Reagan—the big boys react to the people. It is important for people to set the agenda and the tempo. Most of all they have to say that we really *are* a wonderful country and that we want to live out that expression. So I think that rather than everybody wringing their hands, asking what the president is going to do, we need to take a look at what our own communities are doing and what their needs are.

I believe that citizen involvement and volunteerism will be even more critical now because it is the source of a spiritual revival. When people act on the world in a concrete way to improve it, that generates the kind of spiritual, idealistic climate we need so much in this country.

People are called upon to participate in their community in two ways—some in the actual delivery and facilitation of service and others in the area of advocacy. There is going to be a continued need for the wonderful kinds of services like meals on wheels, scouting and the like. At the same time, we need the kind of volunteerism that actually changes the world, that does not maintain but actually challenges the status quo. I would hope that the kind of advocacy activities that go on really deal with the fundamental issues that people are facing, like the high cost of food, the high cost of medical care. I hope that people will be willing not only to do volunteer work in hospitals reading to little kids who have cancer, but also to challenge the pharmaceutical industry and the multinational companies that are killing us with the kinds of inventions they come up with.