NICOV takes a look at . . .

PEOPLE APPROACH

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In the past few years, the reader may have encountered several new words in the volunteer lexicon: NOAH, MINI-MAX, SHAH. These represent abbreviations for three of the People Approach strategies developed by NICOV and cooperating practitioners.

This article expands what's been written on this topic in three ways. It begins with a more intensive definition of People Approach. Then, some of its implications for directions in volunteer leadership are traced. It concludes with the most detailed description to date of a newer strategy, Self-Help and Helping (SHAH).

NICOV hopes this progress report will be of use to practitioners—particularly if it stimulates similar commentary on which progress with People Approach has been based so far. This column, then, represents an invitation to partnership in the future development of the People Approach concept and its practical applications.

WHAT IS PEOPLE APPROACH?

People Approach is a set of broad assumptions about helping and volunteering. The basic assumption is that volunteering will be reinvigorated by a closer approach to people's natural styles and inclinations in helping. From the perspective of *giving*, this means making the minimum change in what people want to do and can do, which will have the maximum positive impact on other people. From the perspective of *receiving*, it requires clear identification of people's needs for help as the primary guide for design of any helping—volunteer or paid. Our particular preferences in style of *delivering* services are strictly secondary.

The basic idea is to get closer to "where people are at" in the building of volunteer efforts. This idea is a simple one, and certainly not a new one. All NICOV has done in the past three years is to attempt to get back in touch with it, rearticulate it, reexamine its relevance to modern volunteering, and begin applying the idea. As a basic concept, People Approach embraces many aspects of volunteerism today:

• *Subsistence reimbursement* for volunteer work-related expenses, or reimbursement's equivalent in services, e.g., transportation, baby-sitting, meal tickets. This approaches and realistically addresses the life conditions of people who could not otherwise be involved, e.g., low income persons, senior citizens, minority groups, and students. By contrast, the "Lawn Tennis Association" point of view protects the "pure" amateur status of volunteers, leaving no room for any financial reimbursement. This is a people avoidance position, threatening a financially exclusionary recruitment policy.

• A *neighborhood-based* or *storefront volunteer program* is literally and physically a People Approach. It moves the program to people and their needs.

• *Self-help efforts* reach out to needs or problems close to home—one's *own* needs or those of one's own group. People Approach recognizes that the motivation to help is often not "purely" altruistic; rather it is *self*-help, individually and collectively.

• *Self-interested motivation* as distinct from "pure altruism" is generally accepted in People Approach thinking. Our primary concern should be whether that motivation will also power the person for consistent, effective help to others. Among most volunteer groups we increasingly find individuals who have "selfish" motives, such as desire for learning and on-the-job experience accreditation; gaining credibility and training for crossover to paid positions. The principle is to *build on the motivation and skills the person has, not the motivations and skills you think they ought to have.*

• Closely related to self-interested motive for one person is the sum of it for more than one: *helping conceived as a reciprocal or mutual benefit process.* We have perhaps permitted too much "martyr" volunteering when barter volunteering might be beneficial for all concerned.

• *Program diversification* promotes People Approach. The more volunteer jobs you have to choose from, the greater the likelihood of finding the particular job for which any individual person is a "natural." Community or university-wide clearinghouses for volunteer involvement,

e.g., VACs or Volunteer Bureaus, are in the most favorable position here, in range of offered options.

• Any *sensitive interviewing* which concentrates on the person and probes his/her capability for contribution is People Approach. The contrast is loading the interview with what you want them to do, or what you think they ought to do.

The reader will be able to think of many other People Approach possibilities in volunteer leadership today. NICOV's specially developed strategies are designed to supplement and extend them.

IMPLICATIONS

One method of seeing the difference in emphasis in the above examples is to distinguish between "People Approach" and "job approach."

People Approach fits the job to the person, rather than the person to the job. When we approach Mary Doe, we try not to have a job(s) in mind; we have only Mary in mind. We ask not if she wants to be a volunteer probation officer or a meals-on-wheels volunteer or a library aide. We ask only what she likes to do, can do, might be able to do. Only then do we think about building a volunteer job around her intrinsic capacities and concerns. If she happens to enjoy gardening and is good at it, we start from there. We try to find where this skill might be useful in the community or within our agency.

The alternative—job approach—is fairly dominant in volunteer programs today. Ordinarily we come to the potential volunteer recruit with some notion of what we want that person to do; indeed, we often take pride in the very specificity of our volunteer job description. The person must then fit into that mode(s) of service, or he/she cannot serve.

Job approach appears to be one legacy of a powerful trend in volunteer program leadership: adaptation of concepts and methods from the paid work world. To our credit, we are willing to learn and apply what can be applied from other fields for the advancement of the volunteer effort. Yet, it may be time to pause and reconsider whether we are copying the paid work world too much, and in so doing, losing something of our own special genius.

Job approach is usually necessary as related to paid work. Restricted by budget, the employer can usually afford only to pay those willing and capable of providing the specific service needed by the company or organization. An applicant may have other tremendous capabilities, but a paid job opening may simply not exist for those skills.

Volunteerism, fortunately, is not bonnd by budget lines and does not have to lose the service of those individuals. The People Approach volunteer model is flexible—it can build a job around a person. By doing so, we are capable of motivating people without money, in the spirit of volunteerism.

Indeed, we see a future in which corporations will actively copy volunteer leadership. The best paid worker does more than he/she has to, because he/she wants to. This is the volunteer attitude toward work. More of this type of worker is needed. We are the experts in motivating people without primary thought of financial gain. Suddenly, we become no more the museum custodians of an archaic fragment of the work world; we are pilot testing the work model of the future.

In the future, if and as we approach the affluent society or some other framework which affords a minimum level of comfort to every individual regardless of his/her paid employment, people will work for reasons other than money. The arrival of this situation may be one reason that recreation is a multi-billion dollar industry today—more leisure time to do with as one likes. Not incidentally, volunteering today is running a poor second to recreation in the competition for the free time of people. We believe this is because recreation involves far more People Approach than volunteering does. In a sense, it involves so much more that people frequently pay for the privilege of doing recreational work. As paid work begins to "copy" us more, we should begin to copy recreation as a way of involving people.

Helping can be fun. It's better when it's fun. It's our job to design helping for enjoyment. The finest comment NICOV ever received on a People Approach presentation was this: "I came away with the vision of a community enjoying themselves helping each other."

If "fun" is too much for you at this point, try "satisfaction." Some may worry about a hedonist theory of helping,

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especially since we later argue for including self-help in the overall framework of volunteering. People Approach may indeed succeed in translating some kinds of "hedonistic" motivation to non-hedonistic purposes. Yet, if helping can be a joy, that does not mean all joy is helpful. The distinction is between mere self-gratification and naturally-motivated help. People Approach is not complete until what a person wants to do is target-connected to positive impact on real needs. That is not hedonism in our view; it comes closer to everyday ethics.

Basically a "motivational theory," People Approach is not the typical one encountered today. That is, it does not attempt to identify and analyze the basic motivation prompting people to volunteer, e.g., altruism, affiliation, etc. Rather, it begins with what we might call "preferred-activity resultant" of any set of more basic motivations. It then attempts to determine where that resultant can be most productively engaged in helping. The same preferred activity resultant may be caused by different combinations of basic motivations. (Theoretically, too, different resultants may be caused by the same or similar motivational sets.)

Some will object to a failure to deal with these causes. In reply, we plead pragmatism; we think it is more effective to deal with visible, stable resultants of motivation rather than, what are at least in part, theoretical underlying ones.

Let's take the motivational argument back more specifically to volunteering. The term "self-directed" essentially translates to "intrinsically and strongly motivated to do what one is doing or is asked to do." We talk about self-directed volunteers as if they were rare jewels. But the point is, EVERYONE IS SELF-DIRECTED AT SOMETHING(S). Our job is to discover that self-direction in each individual and then find a place where it can be used, positively, to impact other people. Everyone has something to give; our job is to help them find a way to give it.

Each person *is* a collection of "jobs" which he/she can and wants to do. People Approach seeks only to discover these "jobs" and then to find a place where they can be used to benefit others. There is a direct implication for motivation-retention of volunteers. Retention occurs because people are doing what they want to he doing. Volunteer attrition and turnover occurs largely because people are not involved in an activity which they enjoy and really want to do. People Approach is a necessary medicine for

the otherwise mortal disease of volunteer programs—high turnover and attrition. Recent surveys confirm older ones in stating that this is one of the principal problem areas of the volunteer program.

Loss of volunteers may be even more serious in the future, as more programs compete for the available pool of volunteers. From our own study and impressions, we believe this pool to be only 10-15% (recently confirmed by the ACTION survey, *Americans Volunteer, 1974*) of the total population of a community, if the pool is defined as people continuously involved in relatively formal volnnteer programs. The ceiling threatens to lower on any single program, competing as it mnst with an increasing number of other groups for the available volunteers.

We cannot afford to be satisfied with this 10-15%. Modern volunteer leadership aspires to engage "the other 90%" by considering their capabilities, their desires, their time, resources, and style of helping.

The underlying hypothesis can be diagrammed as follows, where Circle A represents things people want to do and do well, and Circle B represents things which need to be done to help people. At present, some volunteer help needed and given overlaps with what people naturally wish to be giving and are capable of giving:

Circle A   **Circle B**
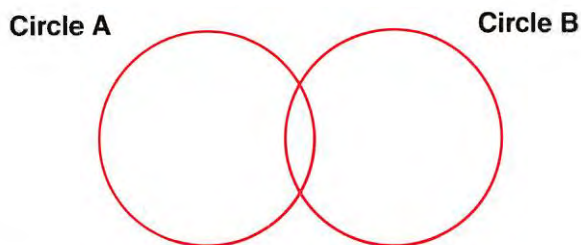
Through People Approach this overlap can be increased considerably:

Circle A   **Circle B**
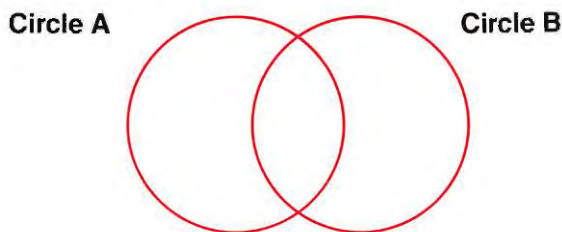
There is a vast area of discovery possible in B, of the things people want to do in A. The overlap represents not only a greater total of help given, but more effective help as well. The assumption here is that people perform better and more reliably when involved in tasks which conform to their natural skills and which they want to be doing.

There will still remain some A which is not B and some B which is not A. The latter represents the helping area which either must be paid for or which, paid or unpaid, must be tackled out of stern duty and obligation.

STRATEGIES

NICOV has done developmental work on nine applications of the People Approach concept. Some, such as Need Overlap Analysis in the Helping Process (NOAH) and MINIMAX* have been widely used in the field and may be familiar to many of you. Others will be available shortly in published form from NICOV. Presented here is one strategy which has been developed, with considerable input from the field, over the past eighteen months. This strategy is Self-Help and Helping, abbreviated throughout as SHAH.

Self-Help and Helping (SHAH)

The SHAH concept relates to Need Overlap Analysis as one intensified method of getting primary client input from the "third circle" of NOAH, the client circle. If followed faithfully, this strategy produces essentially client-designed volunteer programs, with client-selected volunteers. Many agencies are possibly not ready to take client wishes quite that seriously. Still, SHAH is valuable as a consciousness-raising exercise on what can be done, as an approach to the ideal. Rarely do we find anyone who has done a complete SHAH "by the numbers." Equally rare are people who fail to recognize in their experience something similar to a part of the SHAH process, especially if they have had experience with a Community Action Program, Model Cities, or viable self-help groups.
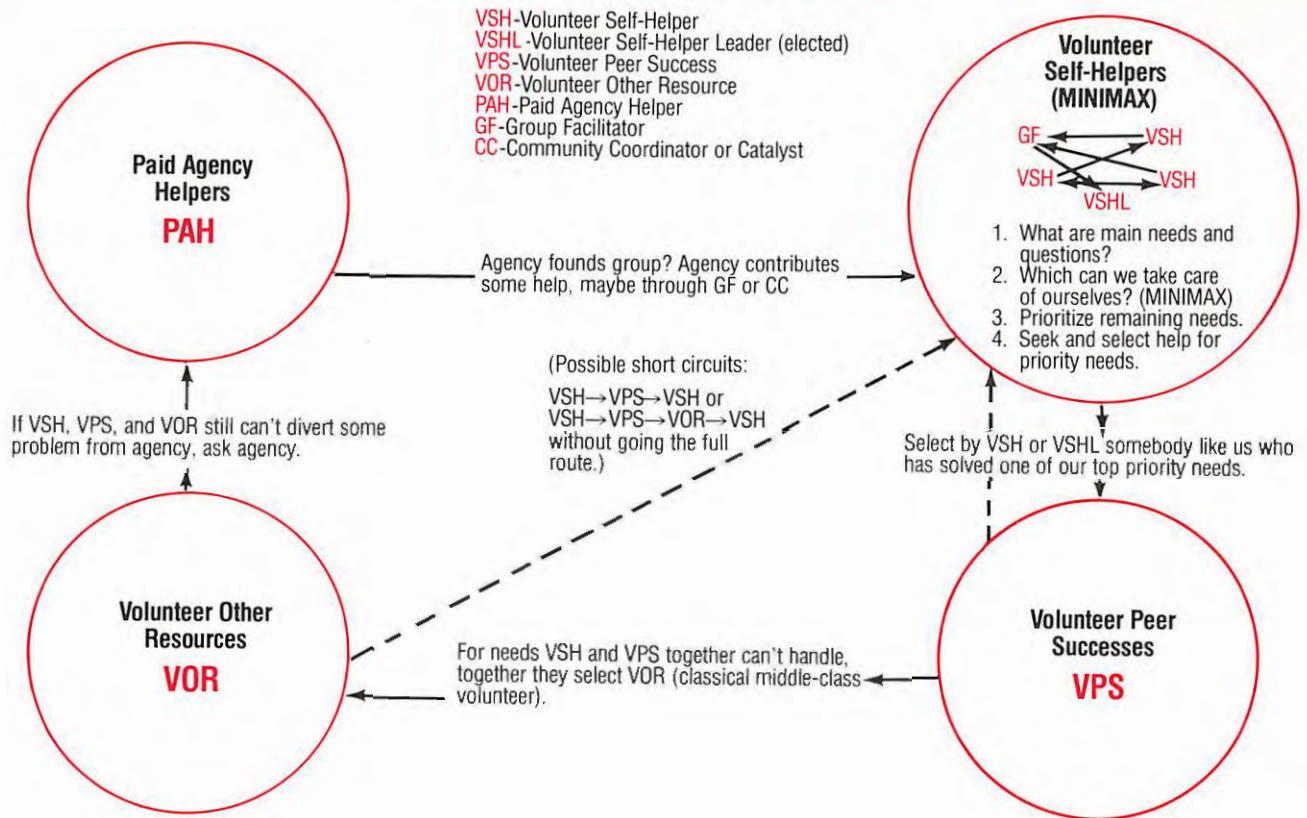
SHAH identifies self-help as a prime example of People Approach volunteering. It assumes that healthy people are vitally interested in helping themselves, either as individuals or groups. SHAH further assumes self-help is a form of volunteering in which it just happens that the volunteer and the client are one and the same person or group. But self-help volunteering also frequently requires some volunteer help from outside, an engaging or catalyzing of resources or skills not available to the self-help person or group. The problem is that self-help volunteering sometimes tends to exclude other helpers. Conversely, the traditional volunteer program model of help delivered by others to a client tends to overlook self-help potential. Many of us have had occasion to caution volunteers against encouraging the continuing dependence of the client on them; even some professional individuals and agencies appear to have that problem.

Self-Help and Helping attempts to integrate self-help and other-help models of volunteering. It does this in a way which assigns primary weight to self-helping in the planning and design of volunteer services.

Self-Help and Helping is integrative in other senses, too. Group and individual volnnteering are intermingled, as are service and advocacy volunteering as facets of the same helping process. Thus, SHAH is part of the "inclusionist" thrust to volunteering, in which the volunteer workforce includes self-helpers as well as those who help others, advocates as well as servers, and informal as well as formally-programmed helpers.

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*An explanation of Need Overlap Analysis in the Helping Process (NOAH) is available in its entirety in *Frontier 13*, NICOV, 1974 (price $2.00). MINIMAX is a process designed to make the *minimum* change in what people *like* to do, and *can* do, which will have the *maximum* positive impact on other people. MINIMAX facilitates and demonstrates the potential of this principle in a "game process," matching skills with needs, for groups of eight to ten people.

SELF HELP AND HELPING (SHAH)

VSH-Volunteer Self-Helper
VSHL-Volunteer Self-Helper Leader (elected)
VPS-Volunteer Peer Success
VOR-Volunteer Other Resource
PAH-Paid Agency Helper
GF-Group Facilitator
CC-Community Coordinator or Catalyst

Paid Agency Helpers PAH

Volunteer Self-Helpers (MINIMAX)

GF ⟷ VSH
VSH → VSH
VSHL

1. What are main needs and questions?
2. Which can we take care of ourselves? (MINIMAX)
3. Prioritize remaining needs.
4. Seek and select help for priority needs.

Agency founds group? Agency contributes some help, maybe through GF or CC

If VSH, VPS, and VOR still can't divert some problem from agency, ask agency.

(Possible short circuits:

VSH→VPS→VSH or
VSH→VPS→VOR→VSH
without going the full route.)

Select by VSH or VSHL somebody like us who has solved one of our top priority needs.

Volunteer Other Resources VOR

For needs VSH and VPS together can't handle, together they select VOR (classical middle-class volunteer).

Volunteer Peer Successes VPS

The SHAH Process

In the large circle in the diagram, Volunteer Self-Helpers (VSH) represent any type of group. For example, they could be a group of adolescents, delinquency prone, without jobs; a neighborhood group in a trailer park who wants a playground for their children; or a group of artists who want to start a gallery. The group may be self-formed or may have been formed by a community coordinator who has identified and catalyzed those with a common need.

Through MINIMAX or any similar process, Volunteer Self-Helpers meet regularly until they have worked through the following process: (They may or may not have a group facilitator. If they do, the person should facilitate, not direct.)

• What are our main needs or questions as a group (as distinct from principally individual ones)? As noted above, the primary need which brings the group together may have already answered this question.

• Which of these needs or questions or what part of the overall problem can we take care of for ourselves? (MINI-MAX could be used here.)

• Among remaining needs, questions or parts of the overall problem which we don't think we can take care of for ourselves, which are the most important for us to focus on (need prioritizing process)?

• For the highest priority needs and questions, the group then takes the initiative to seek and select relevant help.

Let's say the priority problem has been defined as "finding jobs." Moving to the lower right circle, the Self-Helpers reach out to Volunteer Peer Successes (VPS), defined as

similar kinds of people who have recently had a similar type of problem and who succeeded in solving it. In this case it might be youth from the same neighborhood who didn't have jobs last year but have them now. These Volunteer Peer Successes might, for example, tell the Self-Helpers how to work the system to get a job—cut your hair, improve attitude, speech, etc. But these Volunteer Peer Successes might not actually be able to *provide* jobs. At this point (lower left circle), some Volunteer Other Resources (VOR) would be selected by the VSH-VPS team from a community skillbank of volunteers (job finders, volunteer employers). Such a skillbank may have been formed by the local VAC or Volunteer Bureau or a national organization such as Volunteers in Technical Assistance. These Volunteer Other Resources might not only have skills; they might also be valuable for their connections, clout, and knowledge of where to find help. They might be the kind of middle class people who are often associated with formal volunteer programs. But here, they would fill the role of on-call, occasional special-service resource people doing what they can do well, and want to do. We believe such service is congenial to many middle class people who do not sign on for a longer hitch of service not in their natural aptitude area. Similarly, Volunteer Peer Successes in the SHAH mode will often be precisely the kind of "indigenous" people we can't recruit "from the top" for jobs *we* define as significant. They *can* often be recruited by the volunteer self-helper, as friends or peers. The recruiting is personal and the task is an immediately understandable one—a problem which they have previously succeeded in solving.

The Volunteer Peer Successes have previously succeeded in solving the problem. Their "recruiter" has the problem and a direct understanding of what it takes to tackle it. The latter point applies equally to comhined Self-Helper and Peer Success recruiting of Volunteer Other Resources.

The Peer Success-Other Resource combination is a potent one in solving the Self-Helper's problem. Both have key portions of the relevant needed knowledge. In addition, Peer Successes have especially good natural communication and empathy with the Self-Helpers, while Other Resources bring unique skills, contact, and power to the Help-Self-Help team.

There might remain parts of the problem the entire VSH-VPS-VOR team cannot handle. They would then go to the Paid Agency Helpers (upper left circle). If necessary, the Other Resource can often provide some front-running or advocacy for the VSH-VPS team. In the example mentioned above, let's suppose that the VSH-VPS-VOR team has succeeded in setting up good jobs for teenagers, but there's a legal wrinkle, deterring their employment around certain kinds of machinery. Perhaps there is a legitimate way paid professionals can be of help here. Or perhaps there is some other specialized professional skill, not yet available, which they can contribute to the Self-Help team.

If the Paid Agency cannot or will not help, Other Resources might know some other agency or group who would, or they might help form such an agency (advocacy again). The continual cycling of SHAH which could occur in a community might provide a summative read-out on the relevance of Paid Agency Help. If, after continued SHAH cycling, Paid Agencies continue to remain irrelevant to the remainder of Volunteer Self-Help needs, they or their staff should be reoriented or retrained. The same may be said for responsive on-going realignment of the Other Resources with the community.

Finally, the Paid Agency may complete or continue the cycle by helping to form new groups of Volunteer Self-Helpers; by contributing community coordinators or group facilitators to the process; by reorienting itself; and by recruiting new volunteer skillbank people. The latter would be in response to emerging needs for which present paid or volunteer resources are irrelevant or insufficient.

But the line from Paid Agency (upper left) to clients (upper right) is not the agency line at its worst: deciding wbat is good for clients and forcing it on them. And the line from Paid Agency to volunteers is not the traditional volunteer program mode, in which tbe agency plans, manages, and "owns" the volunteer program. In SHAH, the volunteer Help-Self-Help team decides what is needed from the agency, after they have done everything they can by and for themselves.

SHAH conceives of helping as a circular process, not a vertical one. To the extent that a group initiates and dominates the process, it is the Volunteer Self-Helper. This is the traditional client or consumer group, with perhaps some unexpected middle and upper-class self-helpers, too. Anyone can have a problem; anyone can choose to do as much as possible about it themselves, and with community colleagues, hefore putting the monkey on an agency's back.

The circular process is essentially clockwise, initiated by clients. This is basically different from fornal professional models of helping, in which primary control goes out in all directions from the helping agency as described above: clockwise to clients and counterclockwise as "ownership" of volunteer programs.

To the extent that SHAH is unidirectional, it can be considered a clockwise and need-filtration or agency diversion process. It attempts to ensure at each level that the maximum amount of self-help, help from peers, and informal community non-agency help will be applied to the reduction of need, before the problem is passed on to more formalized agency help. Quite possibly, a full SHAH process might divert as much as 90% of paid agencies' present "business," leaving them more free to concentrate on those things which only they can do, or do best.

Most important, ADAPT, BE FLEXIBLE.

The Self-Help and Helping process is not a rigid method; it is a series of potential options. For example, the dotted lines on the diagram indicate that SHAH can short circuit at any point in the process, without going the whole route from self-helper to agency or other outside group. The process can also reverse to counterclockwise (not diagrammed). Also there could be several or many self-help groups; this could be anywhere from a very small group to a quite large one, with a few representing the many. Self-Helpers, Peer Successes, and Otber Resources can be anywhere from essentially unorganized collections of individuals to highly organized groups.

Finally, you may be able to use some parts of SHAH and not others. You may only be able to approximate any part of it. Indeed, for some of us who work in traditional helping agency structures, consideration of SHAH may only raise our consciousness of tomorrow's dream and of our resolve to approximate it wherever possible today.