

WORKING TOGETHER



...IN HARMONY

VOLUNTEER/
MANAGEMENT/
UNION/
GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

WHY GUIDELINES?

In February 1985, the Volunteer Centre, Community Services Council, sponsored a forum on the issue of Volunteer/Union Staff Relations. As a result of this forum, a follow up committee was established with representation from the voluntary sector, the labour movement, and management. The purpose of the committee was to establish guidelines which would help organizations in Newfoundland which have, or might potentially have, problems between their unionized staff and volunteers. This brochure is a result of the work of this committee and has been published with funding from the Department of the Secretary of State.

WHO SHOULD USE THE GUIDELINES?

The guidelines are meant as an aide to volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators, shop stewards and union reps, and to management people and administrators in organizations such as hospitals, senior citizen homes, schools, correctional institutions, etc., where volunteers and union members share the work place.

HOW SHOULD THE GUIDELINES BE USED?

The guidelines are exactly that - they are meant as an aide for organizations to use in an area that, without proper attention, could be problematic for workers and volunteers. Use the guidelines as a means of checking the volunteer union climate in your own organization and for suggestions on handling current problems or preventing future ones. **They are not necessarily the complete positions of each participating sector but they do reflect considerable effort and a working through to a general consensus by the three interest groups concerned.**

PREAMBLE GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER/UNION RELATIONS

The issue of volunteer vs union is of major importance to the voluntary sector in Canada in the '80's. From the rumblings of discontent in the late '70's to increasing expressions of concern by the labour movement throughout the '80's, it is clear that the voluntary sector, and government organizations which utilize volunteers, should have a clear understanding of how they should relate when they come together in the work place.

There are two main issues in this area, nationally. The first is that of contracting out by government to the voluntary sector, services previously provided by the public sector. This issue has come to the fore in Canada because of the United Ways which, in

some areas, provide funding to the same organizations which labour has come to perceive as taking over their jobs. This is part of the extremely complicated question of privatization which is currently being debated at a national and international level. The second issue is the relationship between paid employees and volunteers as they try to work together to provide services for clients in a time of retrenchment. It is this second issue which is addressed by these guidelines.

In the spring of 1986, a major report of five Ontario unions was released through the Labour Council of Metro Toronto which call volunteers an "invisible army". It states: "Governments in many jurisdictions are quite prepared to openly undermine the public and voluntary sectors by reducing financial resources and, in turn, placing greater emphasis on the good will of individuals to deliver and provide vital service," Labour does not berate the individual volunteer but places emphasis on governments' willingness to exploit a volunteer's good will in order to further reduce spending and provide services cheaply. Labour has, however, been reluctant to be too critical of volunteerism because it recognizes the similarities between voluntary organizations and labour unions.

The voluntary sector has responded by admitting that tension has increased because of the slowing of economic growth and "the accompanying policy of restraint on the part of all levels of government." (Gordon Cressy - Executive Director, United Way Toronto in "The Public Employee", Winter 1987.) It has tended, in response, to lay emphasis on the number of problems and "unmet needs" in society and "a shortage of adequate services" which, without undermining public sector jobs, still "allows space for public voluntary effort." (McGill Policy Analysis Group). Both sectors, however, in admitting the problems, have tried to hi-lite the need for "mutual support" and an understanding that both, when it comes right down to it, are striving for similar goals of social justice and a better life for people everywhere.

Here in Newfoundland, as elsewhere in the country, there are concerns among labour about the roles of volunteers. Primarily, these concerns have surfaced as there have been increasing constraints in government spending which have, in turn, led to job losses among public sector employees. Both C.U.P.E. and N.A.P.E. have formally expressed concern about volunteers. C.U.P.E., indeed passed a resolution condemning volunteer work in publicly funded organizations such as hospitals and schools. N.A.P.E., in turn, endorsed the 1984 emergency resolution of the 15th

Constitutional Convention of the Canadian Labour Congress which called for withdrawal of support from charitable appeals by organizations, which do work previously done by the public sector.

The voluntary sector in Newfoundland has tended to ignore potential problems in the hope, perhaps, that by doing so they will not materialize or will go away. The individual member of a union is perhaps only concerned with the issue when he or she feels that there might be some impact on his or her job security or that of other union members, or when some crisis arises, such as a strike. The individual volunteer is even less aware of the question and will probably remain so unless he or she faces hostility in the work place. The working committee which drafted the following guidelines has placed great emphasis on the need for open communication between unionized staff and volunteers and between them and management which deals with both. This committee feels that ignoring the problem is no solution.

Indeed, the goal for which to strive, is an atmosphere in which unionized staff welcome volunteers, understand their role, and do not feel their livelihood threatened by them, and in which volunteers understand the boundaries, and feel accepted by staff as part of a team.

It is hoped that the following guidelines will contribute to such an atmosphere.

GUIDELINES

- 1. "Any change in the level of voluntary service should be preceded by full consultation among all interested parties."**

Because local situations vary enormously, full consultation between management, union, staff organizations, representatives of volunteers, coordinators of volunteer service programs and, where appropriate, through established channels for representatives of those receiving the service, should take place. In this way decisions on the nature and extent of voluntary action can take into account the interests of all concerned, and will result in better all round service.

The importance of effective communication cannot be overemphasized in the above process. Ideally, all staff and volunteers in facilities should receive orientation and training regarding the relationship between the role of staff and volunteers.

- 2. "Agreements on the nature and extent of additions to voluntary activity should be made widely known to interested parties at all levels."**

The methods of communication can vary widely (written or spoken word) but well thought out agreements will founder if all the people associated with the representation, and representatives reaching the agreement, are not clear on its nature, extent, and practical application.

3. "The roles of volunteers and staff should complement each other; they should not be threatening to each other in any way."

The relationship of volunteers and paid staff is a complex one, and can vary greatly from agency to agency. It is clear, however, that: paid staff should never have to feel a threat to job security due to the presence of volunteers; volunteers should be able to exercise their right to act voluntarily in areas that concern them, without confrontation from paid staff; volunteers should not be exploited to provide services that can only be adequately provided by qualified paid staff.

Clear-cut job descriptions which outline the volunteer's duties, roles, and responsibilities - particularly in organizations where they are in regular contact with staff - are recommended. This would be to the benefit of the volunteers and the staff with whom they are in contact, and serve to limit any areas of potential conflict between volunteers and staff. The differentiation between volunteer roles is not always an easy one and may vary from setting to setting (eg. volunteer firemen are an appropriate response in small communities, but totally inappropriate in large urban centres.)

Sometimes a situation will dictate very clearly that paid staff are the best and only means of providing service, or that volunteers are the best and only way of providing service. Most cases are less clear cut. These will need to be negotiated on an individual basis; but again, it should be stated that **communication** is the key to good relationships.

4. "The action of volunteers should not threaten the livelihood of paid staff."

There is a potential, where voluntary activity is implemented without proper consultation with paid employees, for staff positions to be threatened and/or for there to be negative repercussions on staff earning levels. This can only lead to a deterioration in industrial relations, potential conflict between individual volunteers and staff and, eventually, to poorer service for clients.

There may well be situations, however, in which new philosophies on care delivery may result in organizational changes, which involve the use of volunteers in ways which could affect the interests of groups of paid employees. (eg. New forms of

community care where voluntary groups develop small group homes for the psychiatrically ill or developmentally delayed. This may lead to the closure of wards in psychiatric hospitals or other institutions).

In such a situation, negotiations should take place with all unions and relevant staff organizations with a view to safeguarding their interests. In this way, all social policy initiatives advantageous to the client of a service can be implemented with a **genuine** commitment to protecting the livelihood of paid staff.

5. "Volunteer workers should not normally receive financial reward."

Although volunteer workers should not normally receive financial reward the group recognizes that in a number of situations it is common practice to pay out-of-pocket expenses to volunteers (eg volunteers receive payment for gas and expenses when travelling for an organization, or babysitting costs. etc.)

(a) It is recognized that the question of out-of-pocket expenses is a grey area, and may require consultation between interested parties in the agencies concerned. It should be noted, however, that provision of out-of-pocket expenses can extend the right to do volunteer work to members of society who might otherwise find it financially prohibitive.

(b) The question of out-of-pocket expenses for minor items is different from the concept of governments paying unemployed people supplements to their U.I. or welfare benefits to work in voluntary agencies.

To comment on the appropriateness of these programs is not within the scope of this committee. We would like to state, however, that such persons cannot be considered volunteers; rather they are placements in agencies under special programs. Voluntary groups who avail of these programs would be wise to distinguish between these placements and regular volunteers, because their billing as "paid volunteers" could serve to undermine the volunteer base of an organization.

It should be noted, too, that the U.S.A. seniors receive supplements to their social security if they volunteer under certain federally funded programs, such as the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (R.S.V.P.)

Again, these seniors are not true volunteers - although, for many of them, the extra money may make it possible for them to become involved in

volunteer programs that would otherwise be closed to them.

(c) Some consideration has also been by the committee to programs where individuals join up for an extended period of time to do volunteer work. These programs may be national or international in scope (eg. Volunteer Services Placement Program, Mennonite Central Committee, Canada Crossroads International). The length of time that the person is involved may be from three months to three years. Programs vary, but generally the volunteers will receive food and lodging plus a limited amount of spending money.

It is felt that these people can genuinely be considered volunteers because of the level of personal commitment and because of their conscious decision to disrupt education, career plans, etc., out of dedication to a particular cause or philosophy. Proper use of these volunteers should not threaten the job security of paid staff.

6. "There should be recognized machinery for resolution of problems between paid staff and volunteers."

Every organization that utilizes volunteers alongside unionized paid staff, should be aware of the potential for misunderstanding. It is an advantage to have an individual (either a paid volunteer coordinator or another staff with responsibility for the voluntary aspect of the program) to whom paid staff can refer in the first instance if they feel that guidelines are being overstepped. Normal negotiating machinery, such as grievance procedures and appeals, should also be available for settling problems.

Agencies which utilize volunteers alongside non-unionized staff should form a committee composed of management, staff, and volunteers to facilitate the relationship between volunteers and staff and to formalize written agreements, in this area, for their organizations.

7. "An agreement that will govern the action of volunteers in the event of industrial action should be in place before such a situation arises."

In general, it is suggested that the following would be included:

- (a) Volunteers should undertake no more voluntary work than they would in a normal situation.
- (b) No new volunteers from the general public should be recruited during industrial action to do bargaining unit work.

(c) Volunteers who encounter problems crossing the picket line should not attempt to do so, at that time, but should discuss the situation with their organizer of volunteer service, who should in turn, discuss it with union and management officials.

(d) All volunteers and unionized staff should be made aware of any agreement which governs the conduct of volunteers during a strike or lockout.

(e) Where the organization utilizing the volunteers requests that volunteers perform bargaining unit work during a strike or other duties over and above normal volunteer duties and work, it is suggested that the volunteer should refuse to perform the extra work and seek clarification from their organizer of voluntary services.

VOLUNTEER/UNION/STAFF RELATIONS

Follow Up Committee

Carole Barron
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Betty Burford
Community Services
Council

Dave Curtis
Nfld. Association of
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Ann Fagen
St. Clare's Mercy
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