

DYNAMICS OF VOLUNTEERISM IN HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION

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Five years ago, in an address to ASPA I called for administrative leadership for volunteers in government, then primarily in service roles, where they could bring community resources to bear and mobilize support for adequate staffing, and furnish some things which no budget could include. There were inflation and unemployment then evident, but the depression was just beginning to be felt. The discontent of consumers whose 1960 expectations were not being met was felt, but not well articulated, and we were just beginning to see the potential in volunteer advocacy.

Then, as now, the separation of government from the voluntary sector was more mythical than real, although there are still persons claiming independence and autonomy for human service agencies whose programs and very existence depend on tax monies for survival. Subsidies take the form of fees, purchase of services, tax exemptions, or grants. A few very courageous leaders like Brian O'Connell of the National Association for Mental Health have engaged in a hard struggle to maintain independence enough to continue the traditional watch-dog of government and public policy influence which the so-called private sector has almost lost in the scramble for public funds. He appreciates the value of pluralism and "the freedom which prompts it," with vision of how things ought to be which motivates innovation, and sees the value of voluntaryism in its capacity to press for improvements and implementation of ideals.

Many of us in the governmental sector are equally concerned with the survival of freedom and the improvement of services. Particularly important is the accuracy of delivery systems which require help from volunteers and voluntary agencies to facilitate and maximize the use of services. Equity has come to have geographic as well as economic and social implications, so that transportation is becoming one of the most urgent human needs: to deliver people to service centers, and deliver services to people where they are. The great monuments of architecture to hold services are so expensive to maintain that they have become ends in themselves instead of the primary means to deliver services. A mobile society

needs mobile services, and the energy crisis may force limits on use of services because transportation is becoming so expensive. Again, the poor, finding that deprivation is devastatingly inconvenient as well as uncomfortable and unhealthy, are the most vulnerable.

But these problems could be worked on and perhaps solved if citizens perceived governmental services as their own responsibility and a privilege, instead of passing the buck to the bureaucracy and then attacking bigness as though smallness would solve everything. A Commissioner of Welfare in West Virginia took a different strategy, harking back to the "general welfare" in the preamble to the Constitution. He threw his support behind a young enthusiastic Director of Volunteers who didn't know what couldn't be done, and went ahead and developed team services in an impoverished part of Appalachia, (before coal came back in style!). She organized task forces to meet people needs through 27 area coordinators, for home repairs, transportation, congregate and meals on wheels nutrition programs to name a few neighbors helping neighbors. In kind contributions and seed money started barter programs, food and clothing exchanges, tutorial centers - no one worries too much about eligibility requirements. If people need help, or could give it, they are matched and work out how together. The volunteer of the year was a two year old who visited lonely oldsters with her AFDC mother. A lot of caring, and some imagination have developed services which fit each situation, and no one is too hung up about whether services are public or private, or whether volunteers are helped to exercise their right to be givers, or not. Everyone focuses on what needs to be done, rolls up his sleeves and sets to it. Volunteers enjoy meeting real, important needs, and they are acutely aware that they may also be holding down governmental costs, and their own taxes in the process.

The right to volunteer offers a challenge to public administrators. It's important to citizenship education to bring reality into classroom theory, and much more vivid to the learner. With that right comes the responsibility voluntarily to learn through orientation and training how to apply his experience and wisdom and how to work in partnership with paid staff to accomplish shared goals. The one-to-one partnership is freely chosen by both partners, and that right of choice extends to clients, patients, or whatever you label your consumers of services. To the consumer, the volunteer personifies community as well as individual concern, and he grows in self respect and confidence. This fringe benefit from volunteering is important to volunteers, too: they learn skills, enjoy appreciation and client volunteers come to see

the paid staff in a new light when they experience success as volunteers. Best of all, no one is better qualified to plan services and receiving systems than an experienced user of those services, offering a resource for testing ideas and program impact from within the system in the program planning and evaluation processes.

Developing volunteers from within and involving other citizens from outside brings face to face people with a shared goal who might otherwise never meet. The "outside" volunteer comes from a network of connections which can bring in resources and influence public policy in a world of changing values and escalating costs. The Council on Wage and Price Stability a year ago pointed out that while the Cost of Living Index rose 2.4%, health costs rose 14% and Hospital service costs 20.1%. No one needs advocates more than health care administrators do, and no group of volunteers is more able than health volunteers to interpret the needs for services and their costs. Volunteers require an initial investment, but the long range impact of their improvement of services has tremendous implications: one child diverted from a life time of institutional care will save the tax payers a half a million dollars for custodial care alone.

The New York Times for March 13th cited how difficult it is to draw a line between government and the private profit making sector, just as it is in the private non-profit world of human services. So complex are the subsidy arrangements that the counterswing is toward block grants and accountability not upward toward the federal government, but outward to the public who select and influence the decision makers in allocating scarce resources. The role of the volunteer administrator then becomes that of a continuing educator, supplying progressively challenging assignment choices, and appropriate learning opportunities to produce an informed citizenry trained in the crucible of direct first-hand experience. Human services must be increasingly responsive to and anticipatory of a changing world:

- . The role and the capabilities of the family to prepare children for an adulthood which futurists can barely discern.
- . Agencies forced into collaboration, even cohabitation on issues of mutual concern which will affect everyone.
- . Increasing complexities of economic forces are impossible to comprehend fully enough to influence change. Even

human service plans are more reactive than creative: economists rather than humanists are calling the tune.

- . Fortunately, many people are more willing to continue learning rather than be obsolesced. A most important Life Long Learning Act was passed in '76 which finally concedes in law that learning can take place in many places other than the classroom. Implementation should increase levels of support for on-the-job or short-term opportunities to acquire new skills and broader understandings. (No one needs these more than board and advisory committee members who once regarded themselves as "educated" and "trained", but realize now how quickly they lose track of technological and economic changes which affect their agencies' strategies and goals.)
- . An increasing trend toward centralization in mergers and conglomerates, while a counter force toward decentralization is devolving decision making to the front lines of services at local or project levels, as Ronald Lippett has pointed out.
- . Collaboration is being forced by fiscal pressures in the voluntary sector, most notably the new Alliance for Volunteerism, sharing special skills and interests to avoid duplication and cut overhead costs, not to mention the Gestalt of working together to preserve volunteerism.

These inexorable forces can be channelled by breaking down some of the exclusiveness and internal defenses of human service organizations. Only by sharing resources and working collaboratively at every level can organizations continue to be effective, or new ones grow out of team approaches. Some examples are ACTION's plea for shared cost stipends for VISTA. We are hoping in health service planning and resource mobilization to find local persons who can organize a health planning group which will also tap the resources of rural development and our volunteer development services at HEW. It is already under way in northern New England. At the national level, middle management staff have chartered their own Interagency Council on Citizen Participation, and operated a learning conference last December. Their proceedings (soon available) are called At Square One, but we suspect that that is an over-modest title, from the wealth of information that was shared. Perhaps middle management can have more spontaneity than top, although we also see self defeating isolation, too.

The old statute forbidding volunteers in federal offices has been breached by over forty special legislated exceptions. General Revenue Sharing was renewed last year, and several special revenue sharing programs quickly followed the 1972 original Local Government Improvement Act: LEAA; Rural, urban development; CETA; and Title XX of Social Security to name a few. In each of these, local agency and interagency decision making calls for sophisticated combinations of experts, consumers, providers of services. Essentially, the neutral, disinterested interested volunteer holds the balance of power to prevent exploitation by special interests, if we give him the confidence to apply his wisdom and make his perspectives known. No longer satisfied with being a rubber stamp, he is insisting on being informed and given access to decision making where it counts.

Public administrators do not face a hostile volunteer world, but rather one equally concerned with raising the level of quality, willing to share training expertise and knowledge gained from experimentation. Last week we saw a National Center for Voluntary Action volunteer training administrator convene local Voluntary Action Centers, state offices of citizen participation, ACTION and HEW to describe their resources and functions so they could plan joint training for paid staff about working with volunteers, for volunteers about new program and research thrusts, and everyone about their communications networks to be linked as a continuing basis for sharing resources.

More than a third of our total population is involved in volunteering, not just a few privileged characters and a few victims of problems being served. The mix is varied, and so are the resources they can command and the skills they offer. To bring these valuable perspectives into planning goals and service receiving systems calls for the highest skills in the emerging profession of volunteer administration. Acceptance into "professional and kindred" occupational status is half the battle - use of our talents and enthusiasm to make volunteers in your programs meld into your programs is the purpose of the Volunteer Development System we distribute from HEW. Have a Volunteer Director for your community relations and volunteer coordination, and you'll multiply the effectiveness of your paid staff a hundred fold!