

## Marlene Wilson: Reversing the Resistance of Staff to Volunteers

Marlene Wilson presented the following challenge to the participants of VOLUNTEER's 1980 Frontiers Conference in Estes Park, Colorado. It is only part of a speech entitled, "Impacting the Future: Are We Ready for the '80s?", the complete version of which was reprinted in the fall 1980 issue of Volunteer Administration. A copy may be obtained for \$2 from the Association for Volunteer Administration, PO Box 4584, Boulder, CO 80306.

I CAN ALMOST HEAR THE GROANS as you say, "Not that again!" We have been hashing that over for 10 years. It is one of those things everyone talks about—but very few really have done much to change the situation. It is almost like it has been a comfort to have a common enemy: THEY (reluctant staff) versus WE (volunteer directors/volunteers).

We must look at this again, for it was, in my opinion, the number one problem in volunteerism nationally and in Canada in the '70s. And it will escalate to become a critical, survival issue in the '80s for volunteer programs in agencies and organizations. I agree with Ivan Scheier when he writes:

The next decade ('80s) will either see a decisive improvement in the helping establishment's treatment of volunteers or it will see a parting of the ways after a half century of imperfect alliance.

He believes these volunteers from institutions will simply quit, or move on to neighborhood and self-help groups to "do their thing."

I think one of the most difficult aspects of this challenge is that it has been around so long; we are tired of it and we have had more failures than successes in dealing with it. I would urge us to deal with our own attitudes again.

A dear friend of mine, who happens to be a quadriplegic, has a motto: "Never stumble on anything behind you!" Just because we have tried and failed in the past, let's not let that keep us from trying again. Instead, let's carefully and honestly reexamine some of the "why's" behind staff resistance and see if we can suggest a few down-to-earth approaches to deal with each:

### 1. Lack of staff involvement in planning for volunteers.

*Suggestion:* Involve staff in both planning and defining the job descriptions for volunteers.

### 2. Fear of losing control of the quality of services when these "free people" get involved. (This stems from the belief that staff cannot supervise, evaluate or ever fire a volunteer.)

*Suggestion:* Help staff consider volunteers as "non-paid staff." Hold volunteers accountable; never lower standards for them.

### 3. Staff's fear for their jobs, afraid of being replaced by volunteers (especially in times of tight budgets).

*Suggestion:* Help staff realize that volunteers make great advocates in the community for services they believe in and are involved in delivering. They become enlightened voters and help tell your story to others. Volunteers historically have created jobs for professionals—not taken them.

### 4. Lack of staff training to understand and work with volunteers as team members.

*Suggestions:*

- Better staff orientation and training regarding working with volunteers (including attitudes as well as skills).
- Team training regarding volunteer management seminars as suggested earlier.
- Professional schools (education, social work, health, seminars, etc.)

*Marlene Wilson is an internationally known authority and trainer in the field of volunteer/staff management. She is the author of The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs (Volunteer Management Associates, 1976) and Survival Skills for Managers, (VMA, 1980).*

must start including this in ongoing curriculum as well as short refresher workshops. (We keep churning out new classes of professionals each year who perpetuate the problem!)

### 5. Lack of apparent rewards for staff for utilizing volunteers well. (We have not dealt honestly with the critical question—what's in it for them?)

*Suggestions:*

- Get top-level executive and board commitment to the volunteer program.
- Then, include appropriate staff members in recognition ceremonies as team members with volunteers.
- Include a place for rating "use of volunteers" on staff performance evaluation forms.
- Include letters of commendation in staff personnel folders for exceptionally fine utilization of volunteers.
- Learn from Dr. Jackson Grayson of the American Productivity Center:

The only way to keep jobs in this country is with higher productivity. ... The growth in real wages in the U.S. during the past 20 years tracks almost exactly with the productivity rate. (During the past few years, the productivity rate in the U.S. has been at zero or below—and real wages are also at zero or minus level.) The only way for people to increase their paychecks is to improve productivity ... and it is absolutely essential that workers should share in the benefits that accrue from productivity improvement.

He states this is as important in non-profit and government agencies as in industry.

We believe volunteers improve and extend services (when utilized well). How do we make this pay off for staff—in jobs and paychecks? I do not know, but I think our field ought to challenge Dr. Grayson and his Productivity Center to find out. ♥

**D**URING MY SEVEN YEARS as coordinator of volunteers in first, a psychiatric facility for teenagers, and second, a home health care program for advanced cancer patients, I have found the issue of professional staff/lay volunteer relations to be of great concern. In analyzing the problems I've encountered and working toward their solution, I have reached some conclusions I'd like to share with other volunteer program administrators.

I believe there are several keys to the development of good volunteer/staff relations; the attitudes of staff toward volunteers in general, the expectations and needs of both volunteers and staff, the supervisory situation itself, and the climate of the entire organization. Looking carefully at each of these factors helps us find the source of any problems we're having in this area.

To be successful, a volunteer program must have the commitment of staff behind it; staff attitudes, however, can get in the way of this commitment. Staff sometimes feel that volunteers are free labor and that any old job can be dumped on them. Other staff members don't think that the jobs volunteers do in the organization really have much value. And some staff seem to be threatened by volunteers, either because they're afraid of losing their jobs to a volunteer or because they recognize that volunteers can give something to clients that staff can't—love and attention not compensated by salary or restricted to the workday. For example, some staff counselors at the psychiatric facility where I worked found it hard to share their clients with volunteers even though the volunteers expanded the services offered by the organization. Furthermore, certain staff members had had bad experiences with volunteers in the past and were lukewarm in their enthusiasm for working with volunteers now.

Unrealistic expectations on the part of both staff and volunteers can also cloud their relations. If volunteers have not been carefully screened and selected for their jobs, they may be seeking something the job doesn't offer. I remember from my elementary school teaching days, for instance, that volunteers wanting to work with children often ended up running the ditto

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*Kathleen Brown is the coordinator of volunteers at the Hospice of Marin, San Rafael, California.*

**Kathy Brown:**

## What Goes Wrong and What Can We Do about It?

*In the last two VALs (winter '81 and fall '80), we have dealt with the future of volunteering as well as the challenges that confront the volunteer community in the years ahead. With this issue, we begin to bring you a different view of those challenges—that of the practitioner who must cope with them on a day-to-day basis. Here, Kathy Brown writes from her work experience on the relationship between paid staff and volunteers.*

*Other readers are invited to share their experiences in coping with inflation, paid staff resistance, volunteer demands for empowerment, the energy crisis, the relationship of government and corporations to volunteering, and other issues and problems facing the volunteer movement in the '80s.*

machine for hours. If staff members want someone to do office work, that should be made clear in a written job description so potential volunteers can say no if they want a different kind of job. Careful job design, recruitment, selection, and placement are thus keys to clear expectations and smooth volunteer/staff relations.

Written policies and procedures for volunteers (covering things like confidentiality, what to do if you're going to be absent, which meetings volunteers should attend, etc.) also help make expectations clear. I give a copy of these policies and procedures to each volunteer and each staff person so everyone knows what is expected of volunteers in the organization. As for what the volunteers expect, we should be finding that out in our initial interviews: Does the volunteer want job experience, training, social contact, or just to keep busy? Knowing what a volunteer wants from the job helps us put that person in the right placement.

Sometimes volunteer/staff problems occur because no one is clearly designated as the volunteer's supervisor. For a volunteer placement to work well, the volunteer needs someone to report to, get direction from, and feel needed by. This will only happen if the staff member really wants to work with the volunteer and accepts the fact that supervising volunteers takes time and energy. Even if the staff member wants a volunteer, he or she may not want *this* volunteer, and such personality clashes need to be resolved. The volunteer/staff supervisory situation, then, needs to be clear and positive for both.

Organizational climate as a whole also affects volunteer/staff relations. Is there staff coherence and is the agency's program working? Is staff morale high or low? Does the organization as a whole value the contribution of volunteers? Does the organization consider the volunteers' work an integral part of its services or a frill without much real value?

All of these factors have a subtle effect on the satisfaction volunteers get from working in the organization. If the program isn't working and morale is low, staff have little to give to volunteers. If the organization doesn't value the contribution of volunteers, staff who work with them subtly convey that message. Organizational climate is an elusive dimension, but a favorable climate is

vital to good volunteer/staff interaction.

Now, given all these factors to analyze, what do we do next if we feel there are volunteer/staff problems in our organizations? I suggest talking first to staff. Find out what their attitudes and expectations are, and find out which staff members really want to work with volunteers and which don't. If you find that the staff as a whole really wants to work with volunteers but doesn't know how to use them effectively, you can do some staff training in this area. If staff expectations are unrealistic, you can redesign volunteer jobs so that placements will be more attractive to potential volunteers. If some staff members say they no longer want volunteers assigned to them, you can reassign any who presently are working with them or try to save the placement by some other intervention. And, if staff as a whole doesn't seem to recognize the value of volunteers, you can remind it of all the things that wouldn't get done and all the services the organization could no longer provide if volunteers weren't involved.

What if particular volunteers are causing problems for the staff and thus undermining the entire program? The first step is to talk with these volunteers and find out what's wrong from their point of view. If they don't find the job satisfying, perhaps you can reassign them or suggest that they volunteer at some other organization which would have a job more appropriate for their needs. If they have disagreements and clashes with a particular staff member, you might want to assign them to someone else. If their attitudes or capabilities just don't fit your organization, you may have to counsel them out (not fire them but help them see that the situation isn't working out and neither they nor the organization is benefiting). That's a very difficult thing to do, but it's preferable to having someone jeopardize staff commitment to the entire volunteer program.

If organizational climate is a problem, you may not be able to do much to improve volunteer/staff relations until the climate improves. Perhaps the only thing you can do in a bad situation is stop placing volunteers until the organization can utilize them well. I did this with one unit in the psychiatric facility where staff repeatedly forgot to let volunteers know that the kids the volunteers were working with were on restriction and couldn't see them; the volunteers would arrive

only to be turned away. I believe that sometimes we as directors of volunteer programs must stand up for the volunteer's right to be carefully placed, well supervised, and genuinely appreciated for their contribution to the work of the organization.

These extreme situations aside, what else can we do to promote good volunteer/staff relations? I've found that including volunteers in case discussions is very helpful, since staff get to know the volunteers better and come to appreciate their insight. Inviting volunteers to staff in-service training is also valuable since learning together promotes better communication. In fact, the more common experiences volunteers and staff can have, the better. Including volunteers in staff parties helps too; it's good for people to get to know each other in social as well as business settings.

Making sure volunteers get the recognition and appreciation they need from staff is another way to promote good relations. I have found that doing formal performance evaluations on each volunteer accomplishes this as well as other goals. By asking staff for feedback on the volunteer as I fill out the evaluation form, then sharing that feedback in a meeting with the volunteer, I often pass on positive comments from staff that they have neglected to say directly. I also encourage staff to say thank you frequently and give appreciation for a job well done whenever it's due. When staff offer time to discuss a problem, listen to and accept a volunteer's suggestion, or seek a volunteer's input in decision-making, the volunteer also gets the feeling of being useful and appreciated.

Finally, I believe volunteer/staff relations are improved when the entire volunteer program is well planned and organized. We as volunteer program directors need to do our jobs well—to design jobs, recruit, select, train, place, and evaluate volunteers in a manner that shows our professional capabilities. If volunteers don't really know what they're doing or why they're doing it (a complaint I've heard from a number of former volunteers), then staff either will ignore them or resent them for being in the way. So the responsibility for good volunteer/staff relations ultimately rests with us, the directors of volunteers in agencies, as we develop and manage effective volunteer programs. ♡

Laurie Bernhardt:

## Improving Volunteer/Staff Relations in the Social Work Field

**V**OLUNTEERS LONG HAVE played an active role in the delivery of social services. In recent times, however, while volunteers have continued to serve in such traditional capacities as board member, tutor and aide, the social work profession has been resistant to using volunteers to supplement their own activities.

There are numerous reasons for this reluctance, ranging from job insecurity to prejudice of the volunteer's qualifications to a general lack of understanding of how to use volunteers. In most cases, this attitude can be traced back to the social worker's early training.

For more than a year, VOLUNTEER has been meeting regularly with five other national volunteer organizations to discuss this problem and how to use volunteers more effectively in the area of social service delivery. The other members of this inter-agency group are the Association of Junior Leagues, Family Services Association of America, the National Assembly of National Health and Social Welfare Voluntary Organizations, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Alliance for Volunteerism. These meetings produced a one-year project funded by the Lois and Samuel Silberman Fund. Called "Voluntarism, Volunteers and Social Work Practice," the project began last September.

"The goal of this project is two-fold," reports Project Director Florence Schwartz. "We hope to improve the attitude of the social work community towards volunteers and also to improve the structure of social service agencies to make them more viable for using volunteers effectively."

Schwartz, who is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Hunter College, explains, "Even though social workers have probably volunteered as students themselves, as professionals they do not value volunteer help. Either their own experience was not a positive one or the importance of the experience was minimized at the *Laurie Bernhardt is a frequent contributor to VAL.*

time and has long since been forgotten.

"Consequently, the best approach to changing these deep-rooted opinions is through greater emphasis on the importance of voluntarism in the educational system."

With this philosophy serving as a base, the task force selected six study sites. Each site includes representatives from the local members of the inter-agency network, interested volunteers, and a senior faculty member from the graduate school of social work from an area university. The participating schools of social work and sites are: The University of Atlanta/Atlanta, the University of Texas/Austin, the University of Maryland/Baltimore, the University of California/Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Area; Case Western Reserve University/Cleveland, and the University of Toronto/Toronto.

"These sites are a good sample of the existing 87 graduate schools of social work," explains Schwartz, "which is exactly why they were asked to participate in the project. These are schools located in both large and small cities, there are public and private schools, and there are schools with various ethnic and racial make-ups.

"However," Schwartz continues, "in each case, the school of social work has a good graduate program and the city has an active volunteer community." Also, in each case, the school expressed a sincere interest in the project, assigning a senior faculty member to participate, whether or not that school includes any attempt to educate its students about the use of volunteers in its existing curriculum.

The local units have 12 to 15 members, with one of the participating agencies serving as the convener for that site. In Atlanta, Baltimore and Toronto, the Junior League representatives are the site conveners. In San Francisco, the Family Service Association of America is the convener; in Cleveland, the National Council of Jewish Women; in Austin, the Governor's Office of Volunteer Services.

"The local task forces began meeting

in December," reports Schwartz, "and have been meeting regularly at four to six-week intervals throughout the winter and spring."

While the sponsoring inter-agency group developed a suggested guide for the network units, each site is encouraged to approach the problem from its own perspective and to examine solutions to local situations.

Final reports and recommendations from the project sites are not expected until the end of May, but at a March meeting of the six faculty representatives and Schwartz, general areas of agreement were uncovered.

"Social workers must see the volunteer as part of the team, and not as a replacement of the social worker," Schwartz states. "Volunteers are best used as an extension to what social workers can offer their clients."

Structural recommendations for agencies include developing a well-organized, systematized volunteer component. Schwartz warns that the position of volunteer administrator should not be an additional burden for an already overworked social worker. Rather, the director of volunteers should be assigned to an administrator who is interested and understands the needs of both the volunteer and the agency.

In the school, the social work student should be exposed to experiences in which volunteers participate in a positive manner. Courses in administration and volunteer management should be included in some curricula.

The final report on the project will be completed in August. Schwartz will present the project's findings and recommendations to the Council of Social Work Education. The inter-agency group hopes that work on the project will not end with that report.

With Schwartz serving as editor, an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* will cover the topic of volunteers in social services.

For further information, contact Florence Schwartz, c/o Association of Junior Leagues, 825 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022. ♥