

Mandatory Service

A Look at the Ins and Outs of Requiring People to Do Good

By Carol Memmott

The man dishing out food at the local homeless shelter and the woman emptying bed pans at a nearby nursing home may be helping themselves more than they're helping others.

Community service has taken on new meaning for thousands of Americans, and the public is paying more attention as states incorporate mandatory service into welfare reform, schools require service before handing out diplomas, and more judges are ordering offenders to do community service.

Of particular interest right now is welfare reform as states look for more innovative ways to help people become more independent. At the forefront are states like Virginia and Massachusetts where benefits are contingent on work experience.

Reflecting national trends, Virginia has been experiencing increasing caseloads and costs of welfare programs, especially in its Aid to Families and Dependent Children program. From 1990 to 1994, average expenditures for AFDC benefits increased by 36%. Virginia's other concerns: nearly all recipients are single female parents, half of whom have not completed high school and 25% are second or third generation recipients.

The state's solution, effective July 1995—put everybody to work. Recipients finding full or part-time work in the private sector still receive enough AFDC benefits to keep their income from falling below poverty level. Recipients can also be hired for government-subsidized employment, and if they can't qualify for this, they are placed in a community work program. For single parents, day care is subsidized. Failure to work means benefits are cut off.

The program is being phased in throughout the state and Culpeper County, the first jurisdiction to implement it, is already claiming success. The Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) program gives welfare recipients 90 days to participate in job-training and find a job. Culpeper's first group of

recipients had a deadline of October 1, 1995. "We thought come October 1, we'd be inundated with people looking for community work experience but that just hasn't been the case," says Lisa Houck, Culpeper's VIEW program supervisor.

Of the approximately 50 benefit recipients due to find work by October 1, all but two had found full or part-time jobs. Of the two who were doing community service, one was working in a hospital and the other at a community college. "It's a shock," says Houck, "but if you look at the new policy, it rewards people for going out and getting an unsubsidized job, I think people do want to work and this is a good example of this."

Many states are considering similar programs. "There is a trend overall to make people—if they're getting benefits—give something back," according to Daniel Borochoff, president of the St. Louis-based American Institute of Philanthropy. It's more palatable for people to receive welfare benefits if they can do something in return. "There's a misunderstanding," adds Borochoff, "that everyone on welfare is lazy and doesn't want to do anything, which is not the reality. People who are unable to work are willing to do something to show that they want to work and want to be out there doing things. It helps their morale. People who volunteer will feel better about themselves, and the public is more willing to help someone who's trying to do something for the community."

In Massachusetts, a similar community service program began last November. Catherine Touchette, of the Springfield Volunteer Center, thinks many in her area will need to be placed in community work sites and that its impact will be very positive.

"For a lot of them it will mean more self-esteem. If nothing else it will get them trained because maybe they're on the rolls because they have no skills." Longtime welfare recipients reap the most benefits, says Touchette. "In some cases we're talking third or fourth generation on the welfare rolls so work and work experience is not in their life, not in their being."

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in some form," says Trueblood. "The work we are doing is extremely important in terms of the economy. Most new jobs created are in the small business sector."

Trueblood says his group is seeing the signs of changing economic times in the people seeking SCORE's services. About 15 percent of SCORE's clients are people who lost jobs due to corporate downsizing and the closing of military bases and now want to try to start their own businesses.

The National Executive Service Corps is trying to ease the impact of belt-tightening on social service agencies. In its 1994 annual report, the NESC noted that "social service agencies will bear the brunt of the cutbacks coming down the line from federal, state and city governments. Our volunteer consultants can help social service agencies become more self-reliant, and develop the management capacity necessary for survival."

Executive Service Corps' volunteer consultants—most retired senior-level executives, other executives in transition and non-retired executives—are matched with nonprofit agencies according to their expertise. The consultants offer assistance in accounting and financial management, board recruitment and training, fund raising and strategic planning. The corps provide management consulting services to nonprofit groups throughout the country. Begun in 1977 in New York City, Executive Service Corps today operate in 43 cities in 24 states, with 17 other locations developing ESCs.

Though social service agencies are only one of the groups with which ESCs work, they make up half or more of the clients in many cities. New York's National Executive Service Corps provided help to 88 social service agencies in 1994, representing 62 percent of its consultant work that year.

"With the budget cuts, I think we're going to see more agencies looking to ESCs for help," says Gerald Levy, acting executive director of the National Executive Service Corps. "It's going to be even more important that groups collaborate, and that organizations are audited."

In Philadelphia, the ESC of the Delaware Valley sent retired SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceutical executive

Eileen McManimen to help the Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements improve operations. The federation, a group of 16 settlement houses in low-income neighborhoods, wanted to know how effective the agencies' fundraising efforts were and how well the groups were meeting needs. After presenting her recommendations for change, McManimen went on to prepare a five-year strategic plan for the federation.

"Foundations and corporations are also concerned about the impact of the cuts and the ability of nonprofit organizations to continue to perform," says Levy.

ESCs also work with schools. Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits, the ESC for the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, is analyzing the recruiting, hiring, compensation and benefits system of the St. Paul public schools. Terence Quigley, retired head of the Deluxe Corporation's Human Resources Department and a product of the St. Paul public schools, is the team leader for the project, being assisted by executives from Northern States Power, Cargill, 3M,

Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Company, Land o' Lakes and Graco.

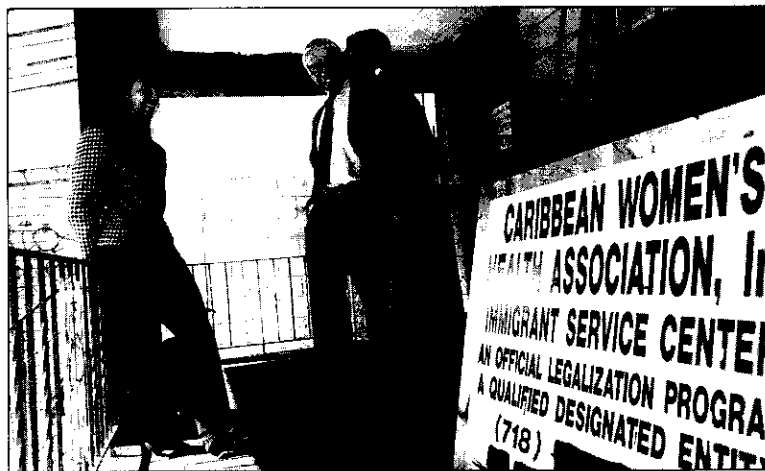
At least one high-profile retired executive galvanized a volunteer movement. President Jimmy Carter has led a work camp for Habitat for Humanity International since 1984, and "He's made the organization what it is today," says spokeswoman Maria Schumacher. "He's our most prominent volunteer." Habitat for Humanity builds new homes and renovates

existing structures for the disadvantaged in more than 40 countries, most in South America.

Not only do Carter and former first lady Rosalyn hammer and saw, Carter also lends his name to fundraising appeals for the group, and he has served on the group's executive board.

Habitat doesn't keep figures on its senior volunteers, but many of them head south each winter to volunteer at the Atlanta headquarters and build homes. Retirees in recreation vehicles—dubbed RV Gypsies—travel from site to site building houses. And Habitat has joined forces with Elder Hostels to offer work/education programs for older Americans who like to travel.

(Continued on page 23)



Lisa Smith, left, of The Robin Hood Foundation and NESC volunteer consultant Ira Wheeler work with Yvonne Graham, executive director of the Caribbean Women's Health Association in transforming her counseling-oriented organization to a full-scale health-care provider.

Photo: Carrie Boretz

Court-ordered

While the public supports community work experience for welfare recipients, public response to court-ordered service is not always positive, according to Scott Wallace, Special Counsel for the National Legal Aid and Defender Association in Washington, D.C. "The misperception is that community service is used instead of punishment when in fact it's used in combination with other punishment," Wallace says. "Court-ordered service is perceived as a softer type of punishment."

In many cases, it's used in combination with imprisonment, participation in a community corrections program, or in combination with restitution. "So someone can be on intense supervised probation with an ankle bracelet and be required to turn over all of his or her paychecks to a restitution fund and also be required to work in a drug treatment center or nursing home to perform some sort of obligation back to the community," according to Wallace.

Bad publicity has also beset court-ordered service because of well-publicized cases of celebrities abusing their community work sentence. The belief that many Hollywood and sports celebrities are trading jail cells for community service has also perpetuated the belief that mostly rich people can trade service for jail time.

One of the most celebrated cases involves hotel queen Leona Helmsley. Convicted in 1989 of mail fraud and income tax evasion, Helmsley spent 21 months in prison, paid more than \$8 million in fines, taxes and penalties and as a condition of her three years probation, was required to perform 750 hours of community service.

The controversy began when it was discovered she had ordered her household employees to do the work for her. As a result, she was sentenced to an additional 150 hours of service.

This, says Wallace, "confirms a lot of people's suspicion that this is a substitute for getting tough. Other public figures have also abused court-ordered service requirements including O.J. Simpson, who failed to perform community service imposed on him in 1989 after he pleaded no contest to charges of spouse abuse.

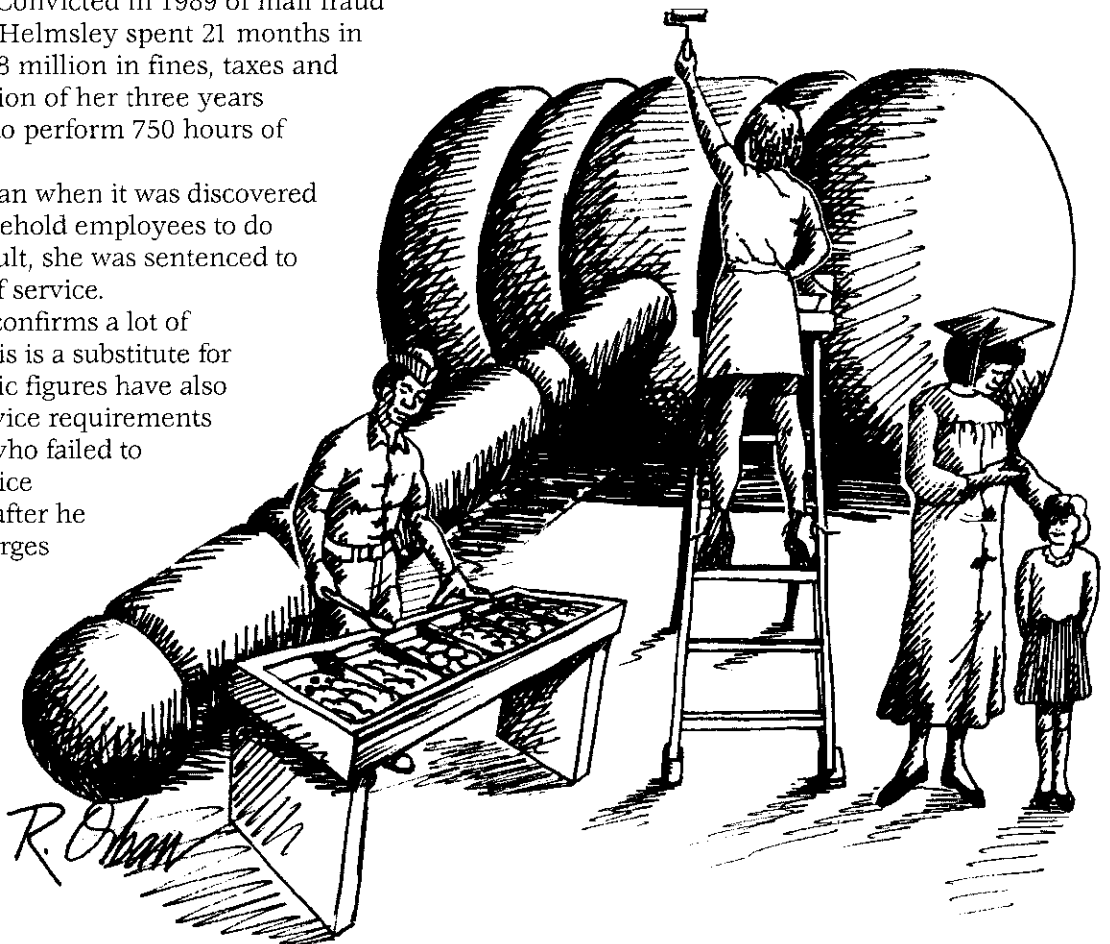
"It's simply a question of the resources to monitor service," says Wallace. "There has to be a probation officer who will monitor whether the offender is complying with the court's condition." The success of court-ordered service,

he says, rises and falls based on the amount of resources we commit to it.

Sometimes imposing community service sentences on low-risk offenders is the only way to punish them at little cost. Consider the statistics: The U.S. prison population has grown from 200,000 to more than a million since 1973. Annual cost to taxpayers is \$19,000 per inmate compared to approximately \$850 a year for probation. Many jurisdictions can't afford incarceration. Of the 80,000 adults on probation in Los Angeles County, up to 75% face community service. In the Washington, D.C. area, officials estimate that 12,000 offenders complete \$2 million worth of work for charities and public agencies every year.

Kevin Paulsen, senior probation officer for the DuPage County Department of Probation and Court Services, in Wheaton, Illinois, thinks mandatory service has many benefits. In this large suburban county near Chicago, 500 juveniles and about 4,000 adult did court-ordered service in 1994.

"There are many, many benefits," says Paulsen. "As a sanction from the court, which is non-punitive, it's an excellent choice. Instead of just paying restitution or getting locked up or being ordered to house arrest or early curfew—all the 'don'ts'—this is a 'do' sanction and individuals will benefit. The impact of your behavior on the



community is going to be positive for a change. Instead of busting windows, you're going to help clean them."

The theory behind community service for teenage offenders is simple. Delinquent kids chronically suffer from low self-esteem because they haven't succeeded at anything. These kids, Paulsen says, fail at school, are at the bottom of the social ladder in their neighborhoods, the cops pick on them, their parents tell them they're stupid.

Therefore it's no surprise, he adds, that they're unmotivated, don't think much of themselves, and see themselves as failures. "To be able to send them out and have them succeed at helping somebody else, they learn they can do something right, be a benefit to other people. It can be the beginning of a success pattern that we want kids to experience."

A program soon to be instituted at an Illinois hospital will allow young gang members to trade volunteer work for free tattoo removal. More and more judges are ordering young offenders to have tattoos removed as part of their rehabilitation. The reason, says Paulsen: "If kids are claiming they're going to abstain from gang activity they need to stop being identified as a gang member." The average cost of tattoo removal can be as much as \$200.

But how can community service help adults who may already have jobs and normal family lives? According to Wallace, community service has a rehabilitative as well as a retributive function. And often the rehabilitative function is stronger if it's properly selected. "If you have someone who committed mail fraud involving senior citizens —like a telemarketing scam —it would help them from recidivating if their community service efforts involved working 40 hours a week at a nursing home to help humanize the victims they were ripping off," Wallace explains.

He predicts an increase in use of community service for non-violent offenders. Reasons: Overcrowded prisons, budget constraints and a sense that community service in combination with other sanctions can be quite effective in rehabilitation and restitution as well as having some retributive function.

Schools

School administrators are also taking a closer look at students and community service. In 1992, Maryland became the first state to require all public high school students to perform community service as a condition of earning a diploma. The class of 1997 will be the first to complete the service requirement.

In most Maryland counties, students must perform 75 hours of service with credit earned in middle school and high school. And Maryland educators aren't the only ones who believe community service bolsters students' self-worth and community spirit. Last year, for example, Washington, D.C., graduates were required to complete 100 hours of service; Atlanta students must do

75 hours of service; and Minnesota and Massachusetts fund service-learning programs.

Student service is linked to the belief of many educators that experience is an important component of learning. Proponents say students have different ways of learning and that many students become more engaged with academic material when they get a chance to get out of the classroom.

"It lets them see some practical applications for things they're learning in school," says Suzanne Goldsmith of the American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities, a public interest group founded on the principal that individual rights have to be balanced by responsibilities to the community in order for our society to work. "Schools can feed that learning with experiences that touch students on an emotional level" says Goldsmith, "or help them build a sense of competency in the world."

Internships also perform this function but more recently the focus has been on community service which exposes students to workplace environments and engages them with questions about how the world works, how communities work, what a community's needs are and how those needs can be met.

Andrea Sanchez, referral coordinator for the Volunteer Center of Portland, Oregon, thinks required service for students is a good idea as long as it's presented in the right way. "Most kids probably don't experience organized volunteering but it can be frustrating when they're sent out by their teacher and told to perform service on their own. If the teacher organizes it and it's very group oriented," says Sanchez. "It can be very fulfilling for them and would hopefully spur a lifetime commitment to the community they live in."

Maggie O'Neill, director of the Maryland Student Service Alliance, which oversees school service programs agrees. "The students I've talked to are happiest when they are given responsibility but are secure in their ability to meet that responsibility and that means somebody is walking them through the process."

Ironically, says Sanchez, her experience with college volunteer programs shows that non-active college students are those who say they had a bad experience with high school volunteer mandates.

But not everyone thinks mandatory service in schools



is a good idea or even legal. Lawsuits protesting mandatory service have been filed by a handful of students in three school districts on the East Coast. A suit filed by several students in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1994 was unsuccessful in U.S. district court then lost on appeal. The plaintiffs then tried to take their suit to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the case was rejected. Suits also filed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Ryeneck, New York, have lost in district court and were in the appeal process late last year.

In the two ongoing cases, the American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities has assisted in the schools' defense. The main contention of students filing suit is that mandated service is the wrong way to teach students the spirit of volunteering. But Goldsmith says schools are not trying to teach the spirit of volunteering. "They're trying to teach them the skills of citizenship and hopefully they'll pick up the spirit of volunteering. This is an introduction to the community and to the spirit of active engagement in the community and to civic responsibility."

The suits are challenging required community work as an attack on the 13th amendment which abolished involuntary servitude without compensation. "It's been our experience," says Goldsmith, "that even students who are reluctant to fulfill their requirement or feel resentful of the requirement ultimately think it's a good thing once they have a chance to experience it."

A growing body of research shows that there are many positive outcomes that come from service learning including a greater sense of civic responsibility, better grades, clarification of career goals, improved communication skills and the ability to cooperate. A recent survey sponsored by the Prudential insurance company shows that two-thirds of 933 high school students polled think it is a good idea to require them to perform community service as a graduation requirement.

Maryland uses students' attitudes toward service learning as one gauge of the program's success. "Students look at it as just another thing required of them like reading and writing," says O'Neill. "But when I ask them 'What are you getting out of this?' they say 'I feel like I'm making a difference, I'm learning how to contribute, I feel I know my community better.'"

Community work experience will continue to grow as an option for offenders, welfare recipients and students, says Katie Noyes Campbell of the Virginia Office of Volunteerism. "It exposes people to an arena of activity that they may never have experienced before, and we know from the court-ordered experience that there are folks who finish their required hours and keep on volunteering." It has the potential, adds Campbell, "to help somebody get used to a work environment in a less stressful atmosphere, where people are a little bit more patient, a little more tolerant, and where they are dealt with with a helping and enabling attitude rather than as just another employee." ■

Elder Volunteers

(Continued from page 19)

Elders Helping Elders

Older volunteers are also interested in helping their own. The American Association of Retired Persons offers career counseling for mid-life and older workers in all 50 states, helping people who lost jobs for a variety of reasons, including recession, downsizing and the push for early retirement. Many have difficulty finding new jobs or starting new careers because of their age or the need to update their skills.

"The workshop gave me the emotional support of knowing I was not alone," said one recent workshop participant, who went on to start her own business. "It also helped me figure out what avenue I should pursue and gave me the wherewithal to find out how to get there."

AARP doesn't guarantee that workshop participants will automatically get jobs, but in New York City, 13 AARP volunteers operate a free employment service called Job Hub. Working with employment agencies that specialize in job searches for older people, Job Hub matches people who've completed AARP career planning sessions with employers. Over the past three years, Job Hub has made 2,000 successful matches.

Further reinforcing the notion that being retired doesn't make a person retiring, senior citizens are also volunteering as crime fighters. Since older people are often the targets of unscrupulous marketers peddling health insurance, home improvement ventures and "free" loans, a group called Senior Sleuths was formed to help prevent consumer fraud. Volunteers in several states talk to community groups about what to watch out for.

In Florida, where the organization began, Sleuths ferret out scams by posing as hapless victims, says trainer Shelley Feldman. Volunteers in Florida, working with the blessing of the state attorney general's office, were trained to sift through junk mail for fraudulent material, resulting in legal action against 12 companies since 1991.

While this generation of older Americans continues to volunteer, the next generation will be one to watch. In January 1996, the first of the baby boom generation hits 50—making them eligible for membership in the American Association of Retired Persons. This pool of potential volunteers will present new challenges to social service organizations.

Says the Corporation for National Service's Berning, "How can we tap into that pool and design opportunities that really fulfill people? It's an incredible underused resource." ■