VOLUNTEER BUREAUS AND THE VOLUNTEER AS AN ADVOCATE*

MICHAEL LANGLEY
Asst. Prof. of Sociology
Univ. of Tenn. at Chatt.

If there is one image which has stuck with the organized volunteer effort in this country, it is the image of a volunteer as "Lady Bountiful." Briefly, this phrase refers usually to the white, fairly affluent female who gives of her time and her resources to some disadvantaged people serving program which is located many life styles away from her suburban tri-level home with its two car way of life. This style of voluntarism has been documented by Platt (1969) relative to the juvenile court and child welfare movements in this country which took place around the beginning of the present century. Armed with their version of compassion for the to-be-served youths and coupled with their understanding of the problems of these youths, these bountiful volunteers gave of themselves enthusiastically and apparently with some regularity in the development of agencies for their favorite charities.

The nature of voluntarism being what it is in this country, there exists no meaningful statistics that could grasp the breadth of the organized volunteer effort in America, past or present. Yet, while the saga of "Lady Bountiful" is repeated hundreds of thousands of times a year, many of the social problems which generated these volunteer services and programs continue to increase. To those near the scenes of organized volunteer action, it is apparent that the programs of human services which public and private monies have generated are not yet equal to the task of reducing the human problems towards which these service programs address themselves.

Within the last three or four years, some basic philosophical changes have been occurring inside and outside of the volunteer effort. Perhaps traceable to the general cultural process of deemphasizing influence via social status, the "Lady Bountiful" volunteer has slipped both in her desirability and in her effectiveness (Nathan, 1970). In fact, it is rather fashionable today to poke fun at the ole girl. In subtle and not so subtle ways, many people in the organized volunteer effort desire to create appropriate distance between their volunteer efforts and this slightly-to-highly tarnished image of our avocation (or vocation as it is for volunteer administrators).

---

* Presented at the First Southeast Regional Meeting of Association of Volunteer Bureaus of America, November 17-19, 1971, Birmingham, Alabama.

Acknowledging the current demise for this image of and orientation to the organized volunteer effort (without judging that demise as positive or negative), a new image for this effort is clearly on the horizon and seemingly ready to take its place as a central feature among our phrases of self-identification (Nathan, 1970). This new phrase which may provide voluntarism with a new image is the phrase "the volunteer as an advocate." Probably immediately traceable to the populist movements of our recent past (the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and the 1960's, the War on Poverty of the mid 1960's and the Vietnam War protests of the mid and late 1960's), this phrase may occasion a new day and a new role in "professional" human services for the volunteer. Inherent in this philosophy of voluntarism is a shift away from emphasis on performance considerations (for example, how many volunteer hours did your Bureau generate this month?) Increasingly, more attention is being focused on service impact considerations (for example, have your volunteer service efforts produced perceptible, fairly permanent improvement for the people toward whom your service is (was) directed?), and on issues of needs unmet by existing service programs (for example, why do so many juvenile courts continue to judge youths delinquent without providing these youths with minimum legal services?). There has been too little concern with actual results and too many unasked questions by volunteers that may have precipitated the increased interest toward activism within the organized volunteer effort — activism directed at the agencies themselves.

But it is this speaker's general impression that such activism in organized volunteer efforts hasn't permeated very deeply into Volunteer Bureaus. With a Missourian orientation (that is, "Show me") to this general issue, a questionnaire was constructed and sent to the thirty-three Volunteer Bureaus in the Southeast Region (Volunteer Bureau Directory, 1971).[1] Prior to reporting the results of the returned questionnaires, (73% of the questionnaires were completed),[2] it would seem appropriate to briefly describe the phrase "volunteer as an advocate" which this paper suggests is developing into a new action philosophy of voluntarism.

The source for defining the concept "advocacy" in this paper is Senator Ribicoff's pending bill on child advocacy, (Congressional Record, 1971). From that context the following definition of advocacy is developed. Accompanying that definition is a statement of advocacy objectives. The term "advocacy" refers to the process of representing the interests and unmet needs of people unable to help themselves or unable to secure help for themselves. Of the major source of interests present in most settings where organized voluntarism occurs — agency interests, professional personnel interests, the person-in-need interests — the last set of interests are treated as primary by the volunteer ad-

vocate. While the rhetoric of voluntarism has always emphasized the importance of the people being served, much (a more accurate word might be most) volunteer effort seems to have been organized mainly around the primacy of agency and professional self-interests. Again drawing from the Ribicoff bill on child advocacy, the role of the volunteer as an advocate is seen as having two general objectives. First, the volunteer "will be the link between the person in need and the program that fills that need, (Congressional Record, 1971)." For example, a mother in the ghetto might come to an agency where a person is doing volunteer work. The mother's daughter may have a vision problem for which the agency refers the mother and her child to an appropriate service agency. The volunteer advocate might go with the mother and child to the referred agency or check subsequently with the mother (not the agency) to see that the needed services were provided as well as follow up later to see how the mother and child are progressing. Through this objective the volunteer functions both to provide continuity of service to the mother and child and to provide a spokesman (or broadcaster) if obstacles arise between the needed services of an agency and the people needing such services. In short, the advocate volunteer is most committed to people needing services and not to the agencies or agency personnel providing services. The volunteer advocate, in the primary interests of persons needing service, will confront or challenge agency policy and/or professional etiquette if either or both seem to be in conflict with the interests of the people needing service. It is this recognition that: (1) the interests of the people in need are paramount and (2) the willingness to question the standard operating procedures of professionally-run agencies that are the special characteristics of volunteer advocacy.

The second objective of a volunteer advocate is to serve as an overseer (perhaps uninvited) of human service programs within the community. Quoting Sen. Ribicoff, "Since the volunteer is an independent agent solely concerned with the welfare of his clients, he will be best able to assess the needs of community people, to evaluate the adequacy of the community's performance and to (help) set the goals and priorities. He will spot inefficiencies and inadequacies in the present system and press for their solution" (Congressional Record, 1971). It might be pointed out that to the extent to which the attention of the volunteer advocate is devoted to agency service objectives, likely to be missed by the advocate is the extent of similar but unserviced needs of people who are not in contact with existing service agencies. It is this commitment to unmet human needs which broadens the concern of the volunteer advocate from just meeting agency service objectives to meeting the entire class of needs to be serviced by that agency.

With this rather long description of advocacy, it is now appropriate to turn to a description and analysis of the questionnaire data. The work-

ing hypotheses which guided the development of this questionnaire were two in nature. The first hypothesis concerns the breadth of services provided by Volunteer Bureaus in the Southeast. That is, do the services provided by the Volunteer Bureau extend existing services in a community or merely supply free woman power to ongoing services? The second hypothesis involves the extent to which Volunteer Bureaus are an autonomous service force within their respective communities. That is, do Volunteer Bureaus bring their own standards (which hopefully are higher) of quality control to human service settings, of do they attempt to fit into current practices? The first four tables provide information on the first working hypothesis. As table 1 indicates all or

TABLE 1

Services Provided By Volunteer Bureaus

	Yes	No
Volunteer Recruitment	24	0
Volunteer Selection	22	2
Volunteer Training	8	16
Volunteer Placement	22	2
Volunteer Supervision	2	22
Volunteer Evaluation	12	12

virtually all Bureaus provide volunteer recruitment, selection and placement services. About half of the Bureaus provide the services of training, supervision or evaluation of volunteers. Table 2 reflects the

TABLE 2

Bureaus With A Philosophy of Voluntarism

Yes	No
21	3

extent to which each Bureau apparently has articulated a specific philosophy of voluntarism. A needed analysis of these specific philosophies suggests a very lucrative area for a follow-up research project. Tables 3 and 4 provide information on the relationship of Bureaus to

TABLE 3

Volunteers Recruiter or Placed in Extra-Agency Settings

	Yes	No	No Answer
Recruited	11	12	1
Placed	11	12	1

agencies utilizing Bureau volunteers. Bureaus are split almost evenly

TABLE 4

Evaluation By Bureaus of Volunteer Settings

	Yes	No	No Answer
Agency's Purpose for Volunteers	17	7	0
Agency's Opportunity for Volunteers	22	1	1
Agency's Volunteer Supervision	15	9	0
Agency's Service Where Volunteer is Working	12	12	0

concerning the extent to which they work totally within the community's agencies as opposed to extending the role of voluntarism beyond the existing network of agencies. Such a tendency seems very relevant when coupled with the degree of evaluation practiced by Bureaus relative to the use of volunteers by different agencies. As Table 4 indicates, only about half of the Bureaus engage in direct evaluation of an agency's service wherein volunteers are used. But the vast majority of Bureaus are evaluating the purposes of, opportunities for and supervision of volunteers within specific agency settings. The information in this particular table seems particularly relevant to the information to be discussed subsequently in Table 9.

Tables 5 through 12 pertain to the second working hypothesis for this study. Table 5 reflects the extent to which Volunteer Bureaus utilize their own quality control standards for their services as opposed to

TABLE 5

Bureaus With Standards For Their Own Services

	Yes	No	Service Not Provided
Volunteer Recruitment	23	1	0
Volunteer Selection	20	3	1
Volunteer Training	10	6	8
Volunteer Placement	21	2	1
Volunteer Evaluation	16	2	6
Agency Evaluation	15	2	7

relying only on the standards or needs of community agencies. Table 6 is an indication of where Bureaus think volunteers should place

TABLE 6

Strongest Loyalty of Volunteers*

Volunteer Bureau	1
Supervisor In Volunteer Setting	3
Agency's Program	9
Volunteer's Personal Goals	0
People Being Helped	13
Loyalty Isn't Relevant Issue	2

* Some Questionnaires contained more than one response.

their strongest loyalty. While a volunteer whose first loyalty is toward the people being helped is the essence of the philosophy of advocacy, a significant number of Bureaus believe that the volunteer's first loyalty is toward the agency program in which the volunteer is working. The potential conflict for the volunteer between the interests of people needing services and the agency's unique interests is seen as a real issue from the data in Table 6. The potential conflict is heightened when the different Bureaus' conceptions of what is "advocacy voluntarism" are considered (See Apendix A). Many of these conceptions reflect primary interests other than those of the people in need of service. Tables 7 and 8 deal with the general issue of the role that

TABLE 7

Should Volunteers Evaluate Quality of Social Agency's Services?

Yes	No	No Answer
17	5	2

the organized volunteer effort should play in evaluating professional

TABLE 8

Should Bureaus Evaluate Agency Programs For Volunteers?

Yes	No	No Answer
17	5	2

human services. Bureaus by a margin of approximately two to one believe that both individual volunteers and the Bureau itself should actively evaluate agency programs that use volunteers. Table 9 serves as an index of the extent to which agency evaluation by Volunteer

TABLE 9

Bureaus Not Placing Volunteers Because of Inadequate Agency Program

Yes	No
8	16

Bureaus has been translated into action (though admittedly, the table reflects only negative action). Eight of the 22 Bureaus who place volunteers have refused to place them with agencies because of inadequacies in these agency's programs. Tables 10-12 offer more data concerning program evaluation and voluntarism. Table 10 shows the number of Bureaus who ask the clients of agencies where Bureau

TABLE 10

Bureaus Asking People Serviced To Evaluate Volunteers

	Yes	No	Sometimes
People Being Helped	14	8	2

volunteers are serving to evaluate the volunteers. About two-thirds of the Bureaus responding include this type of quality control in their volunteer services. Table 11 reflects the number of Bureaus asking

TABLE 11

Bureaus Asking Clients About Adequacy Of Agency's Services

Yes	No
11	13

clients of Agencies where Bureau volunteers are serving to evaluate the Agencies' program. Less than half of the Bureaus responding function in this way relative to agencies where volunteers are placed. Table 12 indicates the number of Bureaus asking agencies where

TABLE 12

Bureaus Asking Agencies To Evaluate Volunteers

Yes	No	Sometimes	No Response
22	0	1	1

volunteers are placed to evaluate the volunteers. Virtually every Bureau responding asks agencies to evaluate volunteers who work in their programs.

Discussion

Regarding the first working hypothesis — the breadth of Volunteer Bureau services — a typical Bureau in the Southeast can be described. Such a Bureau is basically concerned with volunteer recruitment, selection, and placement. It may or may not concern itself with the direct evaluation of its volunteers (as opposed to agency evaluation of its volunteers). More likely than not, it is not involved in training or supervising its volunteers. The typical Volunteer Bureau operates under a specific philosophy of voluntarism. It is as likely to work completely within agency service systems — relative to the recruitment or placement of volunteers — as it is to have extended services beyond the services of existing social agencies. The typical Bureau has evaluated the purpose of, the opportunities for, and the supervision of volunteers by agencies using Bureau volunteers. Lastly, the typical Bureau may or may not have evaluated an agency's program in which its volunteers will be placed. This last mentioned form of evaluation can serve as one lever by which Volunteer Bureaus can exert positive influence to upgrade the quality of an agency's services or to make public the continued service inadequacies of that agency's program.

The picture just described of a typical Volunteer Bureau in the Southeast is not a strong picture when viewed from the perspective of volunteer advocacy as detailed in this paper. Weak in evaluating existing agency services and virtually uninvolved in the training or supervision of volunteers, the typical Bureau would seem to be doing very little to extend or assess the volunteer-using human service agencies in its community. It might be more accurately described as reacting to agency needs rather than to people needs (to the extent that these two sets of needs are not synonymous).

With regards to the second working hypothesis — the autonomy and concern with quality of services — the typical Bureau can be described. It has its own standards of quality for the recruitment, selection, placement and evaluation of volunteers. The data reported herein contained no information concerning how formalized or how accountable Bureaus are to their own standards of quality control for human services. The typical Bureau does not have its own standards for training or for evaluating agencies. The typical Bureau believes that a volunteer owes her (or his) loyalty either to the people being served or to the agency where the volunteer is working. It is the belief of this typical Bureau that volunteers should evaluate the services of an agency, but the typical Bureau has yet to refuse to place volunteers in programs found to be inadequate (Or this typical Bureau has yet to find an agency with an inadequate program.) The typical Bureau asks the people serviced to evaluate both the volunteers and the service agency's program. Finally, the typical Bureau asks the agencies to evaluate volunteers.

This tentative description of the typical Volunteer Bureau in the Southeast clearly has the rudiments for implementing a philosophy of volunteer advocacy. Yet this same typical Bureau would seem to be some distance from a program operating on advocacy principles, as opposed to operating on "Lady Bountiful" principles. On the other hand the typical Bureau will settle within current community service standards — both breadth and quality — to the extent that Bureaus react to agency program needs rather than act to meet people's unserviced and unidentified needs. Perhaps the greatest "de-advocacy" trend potentially influencing Southeast Region Bureaus may be their tendency to co-opt the philosophy of advocacy into current non-advocacy or barely advocate Volunteer Bureau programs. Granted the desirability of volunteer advocacy, each Bureau should analyze carefully this philosophy relative to the *changes* and *expansion* in program required to implement this 1970's version of voluntarism.

REFERENCES

Nathan, Cynthia, "The Volunteer of the Seventies." *Volunteer Administration.* Vol. 4, No. 1, 1970, p.g.

Ibid. pp. 3-9

Directory of Volunteer Bureaus. (Preliminary Draft) United Way of America: New York, 1971.

Platt, Anthony M. *The Child Savers.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969.

Congressional Record. Vol. 117, No. 45 (S. 1414 - Child Advocacy Program).

APPENDIX A

Meaning of the Phrase "Volunteer as an Advocate" to Volunteer Bureaus in the Southeast

It distinguishes volunteers whose services to a cause or agency program are not limited to a particular task, but embrace the supportive role of a positive channel to and from the community.

To serve with an eye towards making things better, speaking up, if necessary.

One who believes in helping.

That the volunteer is an advocate of volunteerism. A well-placed volunteer will spread the word of the advantages and awards of being a volunteer to others.

A person who is actively involved in community service and enthusiastically talks about it to others.

A Volunteer directly helping someone with their problems.
Volunteers are public relations ambassadors.

One who is an example of "help to others" in a positive and meaningful way.

This means that individual participation demonstrates or lends support to community needs.

This indicates one offering to speak on behalf of another or support another.

A volunteer may be the voice of the community and may help agencies expand their thinking and service.

It means that the volunteer is so committed to the purpose of the agency as to be the spokesman for the agency in the community. I see the phrase coming to mean that volunteers marshall the resources available to work at solutions to community problems not necessarily through agencies.

Advocate means "plead a cause." The volunteer's satisfaction in a placement usually results in his speaking in behalf of the program and the client served.

It could mean an advocate of helpfulness to others of community involvement, or of self-fulfillment, probably a little of each.

The volunteer must believe strongly in the usefulness of his work and witness to that with others.

Feel that the volunteer by being a volunteer is stepping forward to say "let's help" and lead the way to broader and better service.

Seems to be this year's relevant (along with) input. I suppose it means the power of the volunteer to serve as a spokesman for an agency or program. But it seems to be used more in group form to express the voice of a minority with a grievance.

Encourages and promotes intervention for individuals in need of such intervention.

Nothing.

Voluntary action center.

In a rewarding position, volunteer becomes an arm of the program, interpreting it from a unique viewpoint to citizens and (to) aid recipients. For recruitment of more volunteers.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Southeast Region referred to is the regional organization of the Association of Volunteer Bureaus of America. The states comprising that region are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia.
2. Those communities choosing not to participate include: Mobile, Alabama; Texarkana, Arkansas; Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Miami, Florida; Louisville, Kentucky; Owensboro, Kentucky; Greensboro, North Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina; Richmond, Virginia.

The writer would like to thank Mrs. John Ahearn for her comments relative to the design of the questionnaire used in this study.