VOLUNTEERS IN CORRECTIONS*

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Community involvement and public understanding of correctional needs is of prime importance in all areas of corrections today. Probably one of the best ways to attain this desirable state of affairs is to utilize the large reservoir of potential volunteers in some phase of the correctional process. Only slightly more than one-third of the correctional agencies and institutions in the country are now using volunteer assistance at any level of operation.[1] More volunteers are used in juvenile institutions than are used in adult institutions or in field operations, either juvenile or adult. The trend, however, is to an increasing use of the volunteer, particularly in field operations in juvenile courts. In 1961 there were only three or four courts using such volunteers and even four years ago there were only 24.[2] In 1967 there were in excess of 10,000 unpaid volunteers who were providing probation supervision in more than 125 courts,[3] and by 1969 there were between 300 and 400 courts using local volunteers.[4]

Many agencies have attempted to use volunteers; some have been successful, some have had unfortunate experiences. Apparently the key to the successful operation of any volunteer program is to have one person in charge of the volunteers. This person should be a specialist in the field of corrections who is able to recruit, organize, and train the volunteers. Because most correctional agencies are understaffed in the area of professional personnel, many of them feel they cannot afford to release one of their highly trained persons to work with volunteers. Most of the programs that have been attempted without the services of a supervisor of volunteers have failed. The needs in institutions are

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[1]Corrections 1968, *A Climate for Change,* Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, D.C., August 1968, p.22.

[2]Ivan H. Scheier, *Using Volunteers in Court Settings, A Manual for Volunteer Probation Programs,* U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (Washington, D. C.: Superintendent of Documents, n.d.), p. iii.

[3]*Ibid.,* p. v.

[4]U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service, Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development, *Volunteer Programs in Courts* (Washington, D. C.; Superintendent of Documents, 1969, p. v.

somewhat different. Representatives of community groups can come in and work with groups of children or adults. It is easier to assign tasks to volunteers in such facilities without having to worry about exact days and times of the volunteer; however, in general, it appears that there is a linear relationship between increased education of administration and specialists and approval of the use of volunteers. On the other hand, approval of the job done by volunteers appears to decrease as the education of the specialist increases.[1]

What kind of people volunteer their services to correctional facilities? According to a Harris survey done for the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, 57% are professionals, executives, or other white collar workers. Twenty-six percent are housewives. Better than 60% of the volunteers have a family income in excess of $10,000. Almost 50% are college graduates and 74% have had at least one year of college. More than 90% of present volunteers are white. Most are motivated by altruism—the need to help others. Very few had any actual knowledge of the specialized area of problems which they were desirous of helping to solve and very few of the agencies using such help had meaningful training programs designed to increase the expertise of the volunteers.

What kind of work do volunteers do? Many agencies and institutions use special talents of the volunteer. Many work directly with the offender in counseling, guidance, or testing; others are found in self-improvement programs and in recreational activities. Many volunteers are involved in routine clerical and typing assignments which free overworked office personnel for work which requires more knowledge of the agency's operation. No matter in which capacity the volunteer is used, he becomes exposed to the very real problems faced by our correctional facilities because of the lack of public support for adequate resources for treatment of the correctional offender and for the need for legislative reforms. The volunteer becomes a proselyte for needed changes in community attitudes toward our juvenile and adult offenders. This vocal advocacy is carried into areas of the community where professionals have few or no channels of communication. The amount of time devoted by our interested citizens in assuming duties which must otherwise be done by our overworked and hard pressed correctional personnel must be considered to be the main contribution of the volunteers. The role such persons play in interpreting correctional policy and in disseminating information to the community at large approximates the value of the time, services, and material donated.

The advantage claimed for the use of volunteers in juvenile probation agencies, in addition to relieving overburdened staff and acting in a public relations capacity to translate organizational needs and problems to the community, is the fact that the volunteer usually has a

[1]Corrections 1968, *A Climate for Change*, pp. 23-24.

one-person caseload. Because the probationer does not see the volunteer as a paid authority figure, a friendly relationship is possible and the emergence of the image of a person who is there because he wants to be, who is interested only in the problems of the individual, and who can be trusted is also possible.

The disadvantages are formidable unless supervision and training are available to the volunteer. One of the problems that has been encountered is the undependability of volunteers. Many volunteer—few are the chosen. The damage to any client, juvenile or adult, that can result from failure of the volunteer to fulfill his or her commitments is great. Few offenders are able to trust anyone, most have histories of parental rejection, and when they tentatively accept the volunteer as a friend, this relationship is subject to suspicion. If the offender accepts the proffered friendship and offer of help and the volunteer fails to fulfill his obligation, the negative feelings of the offender are reinforced, intensifying his or her problems. To be a correctional volunteer in a probation setting entails a tremendous responsibility but with adequate training and supervision, volunteers can become an important and valuable asset to any juvenile court.

Probably one of the best known volunteer programs is "Project Misdemeanant" in Royal Oak, Michigan.[1] Judge Keith J. Leenhouts is responsible for this program that started in 1960 with eight citizens serving as volunteer probation officers. There were no funds available to provide probation services to misdemeanants. By 1965, more than 500 volunteers were involved in the program and the court was able to supply rehabilitative services which would have cost $200,000 on a $17,000 annual city budget.

In the Denver County Court alone, nearly 1,000 citizen volunteers are on duty.[2] Each serves without compensation, has completed a three-evening training session, has been sworn in as an officer of the court, and has been assigned a caseload of just one youthful, misdemeanant offender with whom he has agreed to spend at least an hour per week for one year. The volunteer may be of any occupation and any age, of either sex, and of any religious, ethnic, or economic group. The very diversity of backgrounds is one of the strengths of the system, since each probationer may be matched to a volunteer on an individualized basis. While some screening is necessary, experience in Denver and other cities is that it is the leading and most stable citizens who volunteer.

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[1]Keith J. Leenhouts, Judge, Municipal Court & District Court; Director, Project Misdemeanant Foundation, Inc., mimeo attachment to letter dated January 13, 1970.

[2]William H. Burnett, "The Volunteer Probation Counselor," *Jucicature*, 52 (7): 285-289, 1969.

Another volunteer program was started in the Juvenile Court in Eugene, Oregon, in 1964.[1] Here again is the one-child one-adult relationship based on the philosophy that the child needs an adult friend whom he can trust. The amount of time contributed by each volunteer is reported in excess of ten hours per week—some 40-50 man hours per month. The two points stressed to the volunteers were (1) dependability, and (2) confidentiality to ensure that case histories did not become a topic of tea-time conversation. A professionally trained worker coordinated the efforts of the volunteers. Group meetings were held during which mutual problems were solved and informal training sessions were conducted.

Here, as in all volunteer programs, the aides encountered the same problems the professional worker faces—the inadequacy of existing community resources for the treatment of the individual offender. However, being "realistic idealists," the volunteers concentrated on relieving immediate problems. They exhibited an amazing amount of ingenuity in obtaining needed services and supplies from the private sector.

In addition to helping the children, four additional benefits to the agency and to the community were reported:

1. Liaison with the community for needed changes;
2. Support for all facets of agency objectives and goals for the community;
3. They become perceptive concerning legislative matters, particularly child welfare;
4. Some of the volunteers were motivated to become professional workers through further education.

Minnesota has several programs and all correctional institutions in that state have at least one program involving volunteers.[2] The Minnesota Home School, a co-educational institution, has a horseback riding program because an organization of ex-airline stewardesses has provided a stable of 15 horses. The program has been in existence for the last six or seven years, with funds for the purchase of horses and riding equipment being raised annually through a Ball. The group has also contributed other sporting equipment to the institution.

This school has a half-time paid volunteer coordinator. The attempt is made to recruit various groups who "adopt" cottages and who come once or twice a month to offer various services such as crafts,

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[1] Robert J. Lee, "Volunteer Case Aid Program," *Crime and Delinquency,* Vol. 14, No. 4, October, 1968, pp. 331-335. See also Jewel Goddard, "Volunteer Services in a Juvenile Court," *Crime and Delinquency,* Vol. 13, No. 2, April, 1967, pp. 337-343.

[2] Connie Schoen, "Things Volunteers Can Do," *American Journal of Corrections,* Vol. 31, No. 4, July-August, 1969, pp. 26-27.

sports, picnics, or just visiting. A few of the volunteers engage in a one-to-one type activity in which they visit youngsters who do not have any other visitors. Other groups supply needed items such as books, clothing, greeting cards, and miscellaneous items. Another group supplies funds at Christmas time.

The State Training School at Red Wing, a school for boys, has a full-time volunteer coordinator who is herself a volunteer. Forty citizens responded to the first request for volunteers and it is reported that there are three types of services performed by the volunteers at this institution: (1) Institutional services—improving comfort and looks of the institution and providing services that relieve staff; (2) Enrichment program—social and recreational activities; and (3) Volunteers in the Community—a public relations group that conduct panel discussions on radio and in the community for other organizations.

At a short-term institution, the Minnesota Reception and Diagnostic Center, where the average stay is about four weeks, volunteers have been used effectively in establishing "significant relationships" with the children. One group is composed of students from the University of Minnesota and is engaged in group recreational activities. Another group of Jaycees conducted a series of informative programs in the institution where speakers were brought in.

There are many ways volunteers can be used in institutions and in probation agencies and there is a trend toward the use of volunteers in all areas of social problems. It is estimated that 130 million Americans are eager to contribute time and effort but many of them don't know where to go to volunteer. Recognizing the magnitude of the problem, and also recognizing the constructive potential of such a large number of available man hours, President Nixon has recently created a special cabinet level committee to assist such volunteers.[1] The object is to provide a clearinghouse for information on volunteer activities and to assist volunteers to find areas of service.

If you are interested in starting any type of volunteer program or if you would like to know more about how such programs operate, free material such as films and literature is available from Judge Keith J. Leenhouts, Director, Project Misdemeanant Foundation, Inc., 200 Washington Square Plaza, Royal Oak, Michigan 48067. A program similar to the Royal Oak and Denver programs has been operated in Boulder, Colorado, since 1963. This is the locus of the National Information Center on Volunteers in Courts. A Volunteer Courts Newsletter (6 issues annually) and a number of good publications are available. For information concerning this source of material, write Dr. Ivan Scheier, Juvenile Court, Hall of Justice, Boulder, Colorado 80302.

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[1] *Community Exchange,* Washington, D. C.: Bureau of Prisons, Vol. 2, No. 16, August 8, 1969, pp. 1-2.