

TRAINING A PROFESSIONAL STAFF TO WORK WITH THE PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

By Florence S. Schwartz

A key obstacle to the greater development of volunteer programs in social service agencies has been the resistance of the professional paid staff, covert and overt, conscious and unconscious.

This resistance, sometimes almost hostility, has been clearly evidenced in my work with social agencies, in my teaching experience, and in the research study I did with the Associated Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations of Greater New York¹ (an organization of 13 community centers, 10 nursery schools, 9 senior citizen centers, and camps in a variety of socio-economic neighborhoods of the New York Metropolitan Area). The data demonstrated the variety of ways that staff limited the role of volunteers: by the assignments they made available; by their treatment of volunteers; their recognition of volunteers or the lack of it; by their contradictory responses to questions about reliability, etc. Another clear pattern was their practice of using older adults and teenage volunteers, but omitting the middle adult group.

For instance, when professionals were asked where they thought volunteers were most useful, the leading response was "clerical work". When asked where they thought volunteers were least useful, the leading

response was "group leadership," followed by "professional functions", "program activities," and "intensive service" (defined as complex tasks that involve responsibilities similar to those of the professional staff). When asked what demands should be made of volunteers, the professionals emphasized routine and limited assignments such as "clean up, chauffeuring, and assisting professionals," and indicated that their expectations of volunteers involved mainly such routine things as punctuality and regularity. When asked about evaluation of volunteers, only half of the professionals indicated that volunteers were evaluated, and of these the great majority (about 85 per cent) indicated the evaluations were done informally, verbally, and not frequently. When asked to compare volunteers with paid but untrained workers, the majority of the professionals stated that the paid though untrained worker was preferable, primarily because of the factors of regularity and consistency.²

This study was later replicated by a group of my students in a variety of social agency settings - including settlement houses, a child care agency, a psychiatric hospital, a Y.M.H.A., and the Brooklyn region of Catholic Charities. Certainly, my experience in the classroom has confirmed this data about professional resistance to use of volunteers, so that I am convinced that this is not idiosyncratic but intensive and pervasive.

There is a long and complicated relationship between social work professionals and social work volunteers and their

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respective roles in social work agencies. Social work actually derives from the work of the volunteer - the name we now view pejoratively was "Lady Bountiful". "Lady Bountiful" was the benevolent, kindly, well-intentioned upper class "charity lady" who brought food baskets to the poor. She was succeeded by the "friendly visitor" who added the function of improving the condition of the poor, through various programmed institutions which developed into social work agencies and which became increasingly professionalized.³

The volunteer no longer delivered direct service, but became an administrative volunteer: Board member, fund raiser, policy maker, community liaison. However, in the more recent period, volunteers have been returning to the function of delivery of service. They are more and more frequently being used for program purposes in a variety of social work settings. At the same time, their administrative volunteer functions have also expanded. *Despite the increase in the importance of volunteers, social work education is doing very little about preparing students to work with volunteers, so that we still produce inadequately trained social workers.*

During the 60's, the social work profession accepted the concept of the paraprofessional in the human relations field in a way they had never accepted the volunteer (though many of the motivations and needs of the paraprofessional and the volunteer are often the same). Since they were paid, the paraprofessionals became part of the bureaucratic hierarchy and therefore could be fitted in, whereas the volunteer does not fit in so clearly, and may even be considered a threat.

There are some positive signs, however. These include the whole national climate toward the encouragement and development of the use of volunteers. The increasing thrust of utilizing older adults as volunteers through projects like RSVP and the fine work of the Voluntary Action Centers are all contributing to greater receptivity to the volunteer by the social work profession.

Nevertheless, resistance still exists. As a consultant to the Associated Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations of Greater New York I developed a course for supervisory and program staff who work directly with volunteers in an attempt to deal with this resistance. The content of the course was developed with a committee of executive staff members and the two Board members who were responsible for the agency's interest in volunteers. The Executive Vice

President of the agency participated, demonstrating the sanction, interest and support of the head of the organization.

The limited objectives for this short course were organized on:

A. A Conceptual Level

1. *To understand the changing role of the volunteer in a changing society.*
2. *To define the differential responsibilities of staff and volunteers.*

B. An Administrative or Operational Level

1. *To create a more hospitable climate for the development of volunteer programs and to develop a cadre of staff who are knowledgeable in working with volunteers.*
2. *To develop new assignments for volunteers which would enable centers to provide services in time of fiscal limitations.*
3. *To develop competent administration of volunteer programs.*
4. *To broaden the volunteer constituency in centers.*

The training course was held at the Hunter College School of Social Work, rather than in the agency for two reasons:

1. *The staff would recognize that this was considered continuing education at a professional level.*
2. *The volunteer program would gain visibility in the school, as a cooperative agency-school activity.*

Announcements went to the executive of each center from the Association's Executive Director, giving an outline of the course and inviting the executive to attend or to enroll another member of their professional staff. There were 16 participants, including several center directors who attended regularly. The majority (11) of the participants were M.S.W. social workers; the others were B. A. level staff members. The course consisted of six sessions, the last of which was an all-day-conference. The program for each of the sessions was as follows:

SESSION 1

The History of Voluntarism

Material covered started with the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (1943) which enlisted the aid of 400 prominent men to provide help (mainly moral) to the immigrant Irish and poor, teaching them about thrift, sobriety, and hard work. Reference was made to the social reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century, the Charity Organization Society movement of the mid-nineteenth century (which utilized both women volunteers and paid staff workers), the social settlements and municipal reform movements of the 1890's, and the modern social work agencies of the twentieth century.

The agency's own history of voluntarism was described and explained by long-time active participants in its program.

SESSION 2

Developing Volunteer Opportunities

Topics covered were: Identification of tasks that volunteers can handle; mobilization of volunteer program activities utilizing volunteers from their own constituencies; understanding the motivations for volunteering; exploration of the process of reaching out for volunteers by professional staff; development of a volunteer skills bank; identification of differential expectations for volunteers and paid workers.

SESSION 3

Developing the Volunteer Program: Recruiting, Interviewing, Orienting and Training.

Two role playing sessions were utilized. The participants were divided into groups of three, assuming roles that reflected key issues. Each group contained two "players" and one observer; the roles were then switched for the others to try new approaches.

Role Play I The Professional Worker

You are the Assistant Director of a center and some members have complained to you about Mrs. Phillips. Mrs.

Phillips has been a clerical volunteer for three years. She is a reliable person who has been working quite successfully in her center task. The complaining members are saying that Mrs. Phillips has been talking to people in the neighborhood about the fact that some people have been given scholarships. They are upset about this breach of confidentiality.

The Volunteer Worker

You are Mrs. Phillips, a clerical volunteer who has been working for a center for three years. You know you have been doing a fine job. You are proud of the fact that you are permitted to look at records that not everyone may see. Lately you have gotten the feeling that your work is not really considered very important.

Role Play II The Professional Worker

You are a professional on the staff of a community center, and someone has told you that Mrs. Lawrence just registered her three year old son in the nursery school.

Mrs. Lawrence was formerly on the staff of Jewish Family Service as a case worker, and it is possible she may be interested in doing some volunteer work, according to your informant.

Mrs. Lawrence is on scholarship and it was suggested that she see you.

The Volunteer Worker

You are Mrs. Lawrence, a former case worker with Jewish Family Service who has been at home since your three year old son was born.

You have just registered the boy in the center nursery school and would like to do something useful with your time. You are not very comfortable with the thought of being a center volunteer.

SESSION 4

Making the Volunteer an Effective Part of the Service Team

Using Force Field Analysis, the group worked on the above stated objective of the session. The Force Field Analysis approach to problem solving is based on the work of Kurt Lewin.

It involves (1) *stating the objective*; (2) *identifying the driving forces*, those forces that support the objective; (3) *identifying the blocking forces*, the obstacles to the achievement of the goal; and (4) *using a "brain-storming" technique*, encouraging the group to let creative ideas flow without any critical discussion. Later, the group deals with the operational aspects of the analyses and the solutions that have been generated.

Among the driving forces that emerged were: new programs can be achieved; staff and workers can learn new skills; and intergenerational and heterogeneous experiences can be provided. Also mentioned were: opportunity to strengthen supervisory skills, public relations, recruitment, financial savings, lighten staff load, new profile and outreach activities. Among the blocking forces that emerged were egocentric volunteers; unreal expectations of volunteers; unavailability; staff resistance; interpersonal conflict; lack of skill and knowledge to train volunteers; threat to staff; more staff work; staff dependency; and lower quality of work.

SESSION 5

Problem Lab

Each participant had been asked to bring in problems encountered in their work with volunteers. These were dealt with in small groups, and then brought to the total group. A sampling of the problems that were presented:

- 1) The wife of a board member pictures herself as an "artist." She has been taking courses and doing work at home since her children went away to college. She now "volunteers" to teach the oil painting course in the senior citizen program of the center. As director of the senior program, however, I am very reluctant to have her fill the position because I have observed that she talks down to, and infantilizes, the seniors in her dealing with them at the center. Also, she has said that she will teach beginners by encouraging them to copy from attractive pictures. She is not interested in volunteering in any other capacity.
- 2) Some volunteers in the older adult program feel that they are entitled

to extra privileges or compensation such as:

1. Free trips.
 2. Extra food.
 3. Better seats in bus or theatre.
 4. Free admission to special functions and events.
- 3) Certain jobs among the older adult group are considered more prestigious than others. How to deal with assignments, rotation, and qualifying procedures?
 - 4) Some volunteers become over-invested in their work, resulting in frustration sometimes or in hostility and aggressiveness at other times. How to "depersonalize" contacts among volunteers?

SESSION 6 (All-Day Conference)

The Creative Use of the Volunteer in the Community Center

An all-day institute planned by the committee of executives and board members of the Associated Y's, and developed with the workshop participants. Fifty members of the agency professional staff attended. Professor Eugene Litwak of Columbia University made the keynote address, Agency Linkages to the Community, based on his paper, "Community Participation in Bureaucratic Organizations: Principles and Strategies," (Interchange: Vol. 1, No 4, 1970).

Dr Litwak's paper contrasted natural support systems, such as are found in primary groups such as family, friends and neighbors, with rationalistic structures such as business, government, or social agency organizations. The latter maximize specialization, technical knowledge and economics of large scale; the former maximize interpersonal relationships, the sense of individual obligation, and the emphasis on general function as against specialized function. Dr. Litwak explored the two types of organizations from the points of view of motivation, cooperation, organizational structure, rewards, training, professionalism and effectiveness.

In discussing the role of the volunteer, Dr. Litwak called for a variety of linkages between staff, community and volunteers that most utilizes characteristics of both types of structures in new and innovative forms.

His presentation was followed by four workshops led by the planning committee and participants of the previous sessions.

WORKSHOP SUBJECTS

- I. *The Retired Professional Volunteer.*
- II. *Mutual Expectation of Staff and Volunteers.*
- III. *Organization of Volunteer Program - Issues and Dilemmas of Board Member Volunteers.*
- IV. *The Volunteer Drop-Out, a Psycho-Social Dilemma: The Role of Supervision As A Supportive Tool.*

A summary session provided an opportunity for all the participants to learn about the highlights of the sessions they were not able to attend.

EVALUATION

Evaluation forms were mailed to the participants several months after the completion of the program.

Participants unanimously proposed that the course be repeated for other staff workers. Seventy percent found the course useful in their own centers. Sixty percent were interested in a continuation of the course.

Among suggestions for future sessions were:

- Training in how to lead sensitivity sessions for volunteers.
- Training in content and methods of group supervision.
- Sessions dealing with young volunteers.
- Sessions with more homogenous participants.

COMMENT

It is my belief that the approach of this program represents a significant shift in emphasis for dealing with staff in relation to volunteers. We deemphasized the "how to deal with volunteers" aspect, and emphasized the program as an educational experience which provided intellectual stimulation through consideration of issues, philosophy, and history. Some of the

sessions dealt with specific operational problems, but the tone of the entire program was to provide a truly professional atmosphere. The material that was offered, and the additional material that came out of the sessions can provide the basis for consideration of what might get into social work education regarding voluntarism.

The technique of opening up the area of professional resistance to the use of volunteers provided opportunities for participants to deal with their own resistance and to interact with one another around the problem.

The variety of topics dealt with enabled the participants to see the various contexts in which voluntarism should be viewed.

Some additional topics that require consideration are: 1) the significance of social class differences between volunteers and professionals; and 2) the strains involved where the consumer of service is also the deliverer of service.

Since the workshop, there appears to have been an increase in the use of volunteers in the agency, and an additional full-time staff member has been added with duties related to the use of volunteers.

FOOTNOTES

1. Florence S. Schwartz, *Volunteer Activity in Community Centers: Its Nature and Satisfactions* (Ann Arbor Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc, 1966).
2. Ibid Chapter 7
3. Dorothy G. Becker, Exit Lady Bountiful: The Volunteer and the Professional Social Worker, in *The Social Service Review*, March 1964, pp. 57-72.