

Volunteers in Britain Today

By Mildred Katz and Becky Proudfoot

Early last summer, we visited with 22 volunteer leaders in London, Edinburgh, Sheffield and Coventry in a 21-day visit to Great Britain. We began with tea on our first day at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Alec Dickson (Dr. Dickson is founder and honorary director of Britain's pioneering Community Service Volunteers) and ended with visits with six agencies in Coventry on the day before our departure. Throughout our visit, our British colleagues were gracious, well-informed and generous in sharing information, ideas and literature.

We have some concerns about reporting our impressions, for it is easy to over-simplify or to over-generalize. Nevertheless, we do want to share our experiences and our enthusiasm to generate more interest in international exchange and to encourage a broadened perspective on volunteerism and voluntary activity. What follows are bits and pieces of our three weeks.

Volunteers and voluntary organizations are regarded with the utmost seriousness in England and Scotland. They are part and parcel of many health, welfare and educa-

Katz, CAVS, is coordinator for Experiential Education at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. She is a long-time member of AVA, and has been chairman of a committee to look into international exchange. She was the program coordinator for the tour planned for AVA members this year which had to be cancelled because of rising transportation costs.

Proudfoot, CAVS, is coordinator of Volunteer Services in the Pueblo County Department of Social Services in Pueblo, Colorado. She is a long-time member of AVA, and was on the committee for international exchange. Mrs. Proudfoot has prepared a report on each of the agencies visited. For a list of the reports and how to obtain them, write to her at 212 West 12th, Pueblo, CO 81003.

tional services. In some cases, or situations, their involvement and roles are hotly debated. We found, for example, that the volunteer administrator in the Lothian (Edinburgh) Social Services had been recently terminated. The reason given was that recently-elected regional councilmen who are community organizers persuaded the rest of the council that volunteers have a negative effect on the initiative and self-help efforts of low-income people. On the other hand, in Sheffield we found that a crucial component of St. Luke's Hospital is a large corps of about 300 volunteers who work in all aspects of its programs — in-patient, day center, and community care. The nature and support that volunteers and staff give each other is basic to maintaining the caring atmosphere of this hospital which, along with St. Christopher's in London, has pioneered in helping the terminally ill die with peace and dignity.

Another example of how highly volunteers are regarded (and regard themselves) is the network of Citizen's Advice Bureaus operated by volunteers with help of very few paid staff. They are recognized by both the government and the local communities as a central place for dependable information on everything from securing the theater tickets to how recently enacted legislation affects a particular citizen's personal problem. Their excellent reputation for accuracy depends on the willingness of the volunteers to accept their responsibility for keeping the Bureau's information up-to-date and readily available.

Volunteering in Britain has a tradition of support from the private sector. Since the late sixties, citizen involvement has been greatly expanded with the encouragement of and financial support from central and local governments. The Volunteer Centre, a national organization, has been funded by two conservative governments and one labor govern-

ment since its founding in 1973. Its small, but highly competent and dedicated staff focuses on three areas — information, advising those who are directly involved with the training of volunteers and voluntary service coordinators, and development work designed to extend voluntary participation in both statutory (government) and voluntary agencies.

The current economic problems of inflation and unemployment are impacting voluntary activity. This, along with recent cuts in funding for health, social services and education affect the role of volunteers. "What can volunteers do when services are cut?" "What should they be allowed to do?" "What will volunteers be willing to do?" "Should community service be an alternative for the unemployed?" These are some of the questions being asked.

There is considerable effort to define appropriate roles for volunteers and to facilitate understanding between volunteers and unions. The Volunteer Centre published a carefully prepared statement on the subject titled "Guidelines for Relationships Between Volunteers and Paid Non-Professional Workers." This was drawn up by a working group of union officers and leaders of several major voluntary organizations. The guidelines include the following major points.

1. Any change in the level of voluntary service should be preceded by full consultation between interested parties.
2. Agreements on the nature and extent of additional voluntary activity should be made widely known among interested parties.
3. Voluntary work should complement the work of paid staff, not substitute it.
4. The action of volunteers should not threaten the livelihood of paid staff.
5. Voluntary workers should not normally receive financial reward.
6. There should be recognized machinery for resolution of problems between paid staff and volunteers.
7. Volunteers in the situation of industrial action (strike) should undertake no more voluntary work than they would do in normal situations.
8. If the volunteers are faced with a picket line which is not prepared to agree that the volunteer workers should cross, the volunteers should not attempt to do so, but discuss the situation with their organizer of the voluntary service who should, in turn, discuss it with union and management officials."1

Several volunteer organizers spoke with us about their relationships to the employees of their facilities and to the union representatives. One said he routinely checks new job descriptions for volunteers with the union leadership.

Despite all the problems a sagging economy presents to volunteerism, our view is that voluntary activity in Britain is strongly based and capable of adaptations which will not destroy its heart. Volunteers and voluntary agencies in this social welfare state play a vital part in both advocacy and services to the elderly, the mentally ill, legal offenders and many other at-risk groups. Many voluntary agencies receive grants from the central government and local authorities. Both statutory and private non-profit voluntary agencies involve thousands of citizens in direct service volunteering. Self-help groups are much in evidence for single parents, mothers of young children, offenders, elderly, mental health clients and others.

As in the United States, we found that advocacy volunteering is naturally more controversial than service volunteering. SCARP (Student Community Action Resources Programme), according to reports in the papers while we were there as well as interviews with several of its leaders, stands to lose its central government grant because its social activism displeases the current Tory government.

The close administrative relationship between health and social services seems to bring about helpful collaboration in sharing valuable volunteer services. We found, for example, a very close working relationship among volunteer coordinators from the health and social services in the Hammersmith-Fulham area of London in assuring that the frail elderly discharged from the hospital receive support from regular volunteer visitors. And it is our impression that on the local level there is a strong sense of partnership among the volunteer administrators in the statutory and voluntary agencies.

We also sensed a close relationship between the professions of social work and volunteer administration. In fact, a number of the volunteer coordinators we met were social workers by training. One volunteer bureau director we talked with saw volunteer work itself as a preparation or natural introduction to social work, and she was considering offering an introductory social work course to volunteers.

While the broad outlines of health and welfare services are set by central government policy, we were impressed by the extent of local initiative and the uniqueness of programming emphasis in the several communi-

ties we visited. In Edinburgh, as has been previously mentioned, the Social Services Department no longer had paid volunteer organizers. Its governing board has voted to terminate those staff positions. On the other hand, in Coventry there is strong involvement with several volunteer service officers employed by its Department of Social Services.

Volunteers, we found, may play the major service and decision-making roles in some direct service programs with a few paid employees to supplement their efforts. In a social club for mental health clients in one community, and in a neighborhood house in another, volunteers were doing the major share of the work and were making the principal decisions. In each case, the volunteers had hired a person or two as assistants and, in both places, the volunteers we spoke with saw themselves as teachers and supervisors of the staff they employed.

The word "volunteer" came up for discussion a number of times. Several volunteer leaders told us it would be helpful if a better word could be found. For some, the word has an unpleasant social class ring about it. One community organizer who works with hundreds of school-age volunteers said he preferred "community service or neighboring," but both of these terms, he added, were not quite right either. Serious effort is being made to involve working people and males as volunteers and to get away from the stereotype of volunteers as middle-class females. One program at the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange is called the Job Shop and is located, by design, in a store-front building in a working class district. Its staff was proud of the fact that this approach has indeed attracted many males and ordinary working folk to volunteering.

"Neighborhood" is both an important word and concept in the planning and delivering of services in which volunteers participate. Much attention is given by both voluntary and government agencies to help neighborhood people help each other. At least 20 of the publications of the Volunteer Centre refer to projects where neighborhood involvement or care is an important ingredient.

In Scotland, neighboring has taken a turn toward citizen involvement in the Children's Panel program. In Edinburgh, Alan Finlayson, the director, explained that the trained volunteer panel members replace the traditional juvenile court and decide on activities for juvenile non-violent offenders which will help the children toward more productive pursuits. Social workers, teachers, and other experts serve as resources to the panel as it deliberates and reaches its decision. The activities prescribed are usually task oriented and are carried out

under the supervision of natural enforcers in the community, i.e., parents, teachers, police, etc.

In Britain, there are many community programs designed to keep people out of hospitals and nursing homes. Volunteers have important roles in these programs. Day centers of all sorts, visiting health staff, and what are called "home helps" are common with volunteers adding many support and quality-of-life services to the basics offered by paid staff. AGE CONCERN, a nation-wide advocacy, educational and service organization has many visiting, respite, holiday, and social/recreational projects reaching out to elderly in their own homes. In London, we saw a social club serving, during an average week, 100 former mental hospital patients with daily activities and noon or supper meals. It is run by volunteers with some help from young people who are paid. In Coventry, we visited a day center staffed by four professional and 22 volunteers. Located in a church, it has a weekly client census of about 70 people with psychiatric problems. St. Luke's, the hospice in Sheffield, has, in addition to its small in-patient unit, a day hospital and a community care team with volunteers working in all of these programs.

We found a strong interest in the impact of radio and TV on voluntary activity and social services in general. The Volunteer Centre has a grant, recently renewed, for on-going study of the media's effect on volunteering and on such activities as fostering children. The project was also designed to bring about improved communication between the staff of social services and the staff of public and commercial radio and TV stations and networks. Efforts to accomplish this include a regular publication, Media Project News, and a number of studies of the impact of specific TV and radio programs on audiences, for example, in the recruitment of volunteers.

British youth by the hundreds and thousands are volunteers in many sorts of projects designed to help the elderly, the mentally handicapped, small children and others. Most children and young people volunteer through their "social education" classes or youth organizations. Often, leadership for these projects is provided by Community Service Volunteers who are full-time volunteers similar to our VISTAs. The agency or organization pays the subsistence stipend on which the volunteer lives. In other schools, the community organizers with the local social services departments or the teachers themselves give the necessary leadership. For example, in Edinburgh, a community organizer based in the Volunteer Exchange (a private volunteer placement agency) was offering leadership to projects involving

over 700 children from the schools.

We talked with several volunteer organizers (volunteer coordinators or directors) about the major professional organization for administrators of volunteer programs, the National Association of Voluntary Help Organizers (NAVHO) which might be seen as the counterpart of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA). We were told that its membership includes only a portion of the voluntary organizers in Great Britain and that most of the membership comes from the National Health Services. There are 300 volunteer help organizers employed by National Health, but all do not belong to NAVHO. Concerns of NAVHO are similar to those of AVA — standards, training and recognition. There is a difference of opinion on whether or not the voluntary help organizers should become a separate profession. Those in favor of it feel there is a body of knowledge which is applicable to voluntary organizers in any setting and that there are identifiable skills needed by any person who organizes volunteer programs.

Those opposed to a separate profession feel that an organizer is attached to the setting in which he/she is organizing volunteers either by education or by skill. For instance, a social worker who is a voluntary help organizer in a social service agency is still a social worker by profession. A teacher is still an educator when he/she is organizing students to do some helpful volunteer activity. Those who are not attached to their setting by education feel they are still attached by skills. That is, a voluntary help organizer in a hospital feels the skills he/she needs are different from those skills needed by a voluntary help organizer in a community center.

Importance is attached to meaningful evaluation of volunteer programs. The serious shortage of funds limits efforts, but research to find out if, indeed, the use of volunteers accomplished the stated objectives is common. For example, the Job Shop in Edinburgh was carefully monitored for three years, the period of its initial grant, to determine if more working class people and more males did actually volunteer when the location, format and approach were made more appealing to these groups. The director of the Good Neighbor Project in Fulham, a section of London, has recently completed a study of the relationship between volunteer visitors and the frail elderly whom they visited. Again in Edinburgh, at a private agency, we spoke with a social worker/volunteer coordinator who, over a three-year period, researched the impact of volunteer companions on single parents in terms of the project's objectives. Because of the nature of the agency which sponsored this project, it was possible to compare the group of

clients with volunteers to a like group without volunteers. This successful project continues under new leadership, and the social worker who did the original research is now embarked, with the aid of a three-year grant, on a study of the retention of volunteers in government and voluntary agencies.

Interest in talking about the philosophical base or rationale for volunteer involvement is high. Many of the volunteer leaders with whom we spoke took an intellectual as well as a practical approach and were fond of discussing voluntary activity and the use of volunteers within a particular political, economic or social framework. There seemed to be no hesitancy to analyze or to criticize. Publications about volunteer projects reflect this, as, for example, in some 40 case studies published by the Volunteer Centre called, "A Case in Point."² These studies analyze the reasons for the successes and failures of a variety of programs.

Dr. Dickson, founder and leader of Community Service Volunteers, talked with us about the "why" of voluntary activity in terms of the value of volunteering to the volunteers and to the total society. It is, at least in part, from this point of view that Dickson's efforts have led to the involvement of juvenile offenders, police trainees and bureaucrats along with young adults in the work of Community Service Volunteers. The humanizing and democratizing aspect of voluntary activity is well understood by all of the British volunteer leaders with whom we spoke.

We found a strong interest in face-to-face sharing. Various exchanges have taken place not only in the United States, but also with Western Europe. We believe AVA has an important role in increasing international exchange not only through working to make possible informal visits such as ours, but also by seeking funding which will make feasible work exchanges among ordinary practitioners of volunteer administration.

The real enrichment of our art as practitioners of volunteer administration will come when we have opportunities to experience in depth each other's cultures and day-to-day problems.

Footnotes

¹The Volunteer Centre, "Guidelines for Relationships Between Volunteers and Paid Non-Professional Workers," (Published by The Volunteer Centre, 29 Lower King's Road, Berkhamsted, Herts, HP4 2AB, England, Ian Bruce, Director.) September 1977.

²The Volunteer Centre, "A Case In

Point," a series of 40 articles each dealing with a specific situation in which volunteers are involved. (Published by The Volunteer Centre, Berkhamsted, Herts, England, Ian Bruce, Director.) Published at various times.

Bibliography

Below is a selected list of readings relating to volunteer involvement in several different countries for readers interested in more information about the international scope of voluntary activity.

Allen, Kerry Kenn. "Helping Patterns in China." Voluntary Action Leadership, Fall 1978, p. 2.

Anderson, John C. and Larry F. Moore. "Characteristics of Canadian Volunteers in Direct Services." The Journal of Voluntary Action Research, April 1974, p. 51.

Carter, Novia. "Tapping the Untapped Potential: Towards a Canadian Policy on Voluntarism." Volunteer Administration, Summer 1978, p. 28.

Chilton, Susan. "Voluntary as a Citizen Diplomat." Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1979, p. 10

Frank, Wendy. "Volunteers, USO's People Power." Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1979, p. 5.

Herlitz, Esther. "Volunteering in Israel." Volunteer Administration, Spring 1978, p. 23.

Katz, Mildred. "Volunteers in England." Volunteer Administration, June 1973, p. 24.

News item (no by-line). "Music for UNICEF Highlight IYC." Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1979, p. 10.

Noor, Yetty Rizali. "Voluntary Citizen Participation — A Cornerstone to Development." Voluntary Action Leadership, Fall 1976, p. 28.

Savan, Kathleen. "Amesty International." Volunteer Administration, Winter 1978-79, p. 27.

Scheier, Ivan. "Australia: The Impressions of a Friend." Volunteer Administration, Summer 1977, p. 13.

Wedel, Cynthia. "The Growth of Voluntarism—Worldwide." Voluntary Action Leadership, Fall 1976.