

A PROPOSAL FOR A VOLUNTEER ACTION CENTER  
And Related Information

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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## A PROPOSAL FOR A VOLUNTEER ACTION CENTER

### I. VOLUNTEERS

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, a volunteer is one who enters into or offers himself for a service of his own free will. I would add to this the fact that the volunteer seeks no physical compensation for the services he freely offers. *physical*

There are numerous roles or positions that the volunteer may fill in a social service agency: identifying conditions or problems that require therapeutic or rehabilitative services, policymaking, providing direct services, fund-raising, acting as spokesman for an organization and interpreting its programs and the problems to which they are directed, reporting and evaluating community reactions to programs, collaboration in community planning activities, developing new service-delivery systems, acting as advocates of the poor and the disenfranchised, and protest and public action.<sup>1</sup>

The basis of volunteerism in the United States is traceable to the ideals inherent in the constitution. The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting free exercise thereof, or abridging the right of the people peaceably to assemble." Volunteerism, then, could be said to be people getting together to express their views on social welfare issues. Volunteerism in our country is also heavily based in Judeo-Christian values.

With this base and in light of the difficult economic times faced by this country in the 1970s and early

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1. Encyclopedia of Social Work; Volume 2; "Volunteers"  
Page 1582-83

1980s it is little wonder there has been an increasing amount of attention paid to volunteer work. In 1974, some 37 million, or one out of every four Americans over age 13 did some form of volunteer work. Of this group, 50% worked in religious organizations, 15% each in education and health, 11% in recreation, 12% in civic work and 7% in social and welfare organizations.<sup>2</sup> More recent studies seem to indicate that this trend is continuing.

In 1975 the Commission of Private Philanthropy and Public Needs issued a final report, based on numerous studies of the voluntary sector. One of the studies, on United Way of America, found that "United Way and its member agencies averaged about 2.4 billion volunteer person-hours per year."

Another study, sponsored by the Commission and done by the University of Michigan Research Center and the Census Bureau, showed that the cash value of volunteer services constitutes more than half the 50 billion dollars in money and services donated each year.

## II. VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

We have, to this point, discussed briefly what a volunteer is and what he does. We have also looked at the roots of volunteerism in this country. Lastly, we have seen just how extensive volunteerism is in our country. Now, let us look at some of the volunteer organizations and what they do.

NCVA. The National Center for Voluntary Action is a voluntary nonprofit organization whose funds come from foundations, dues, and fees. The NCVA serves as a

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2. American Volunteer; ACTION; February 1975 (based on a 1974 Census Bureau survey)

national clearinghouse for more than five thousand voluntary programs. It also helps communities develop local Volunteer Action Centers and assists local VACs and volunteer programs with any problems that they might be having.

ACTION. Action is an independent federal agency which was established in July 1971 to administer volunteer programs here and overseas. The purpose of Action is threefold: 1) streamlining existing volunteer programs, 2) developing ways to make the best use of volunteers, and 3) providing opportunities for everyone to serve their communities through volunteer work. When formed, Action was made up of seven groups. Of these, the five that remain are: the Peace Corps, VISTA, Foster Grandparent Program, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, and the National Student Volunteer Program.

Peace Corps. This program provides placement of individuals, with needed skills, for two years or more in developing nations. This self-help program focuses on grassroots person-to-person assistance.

VISTA. VISTA provides full-time volunteers to organizations requesting help in solving problems revolving around poverty, other human needs and the environment. VISTA's goal is to help communities to mobilize their resources to help themselves.

Foster Grandparents. This program enables persons of low income, aged 60 and over, to serve children with special needs in institutions, schools, day care centers, and their own homes.

Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). RSVP gives volunteers, aged 60 and over, an opportunity to serve on a regular basis in public or private nonprofit organizations.

National Student Volunteer Program (NSVP). A supportive program with a small budget, NSVP provides technical assistance and publications to foster the growth and increase the quality of local student volunteer programs.

University Year for Action. In this program a student can receive a full year of academic credit for community service while working on poverty-related problems.

Alliance for Volunteerism. The Alliance for Volunteerism acts as a convenor and catalyst for greater cooperation among voluntary organizations for the purpose of combining and developing resources. There are many member organizations, a few of which are: Church Women United, National Black United Fund, National Council of Negro Women, National Information Center on Volunteerism and the Association of Junior Leagues of America.<sup>3</sup>

### III. INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

International Secretariat for Volunteer Service. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, this agency is primarily directed toward assisting Third-World countries to develop their own volunteer agencies. It also encourages the volunteer agencies of different countries to work together.

Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service. This Committee offers information to potential volunteers and has consultative and associate-relationship status in UNESCO.

United Nations Volunteers. This U.N. group offers young people, who possess some special skill, the opportunity to work on specific projects for the U.N.

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3. Encyclopedia of Social Work; Volume 2; "Volunteers"  
Page 1584-86

The International Office of the Social and Rehabilitation Service of HEW. This branch of HEW recruits volunteers for United Nations agencies. They also, on a limited basis recruit for the sixteen voluntary organizations in the U.S. which have international programs.<sup>4</sup>

#### IV. VOLUNTEERISM IN SOCIAL WELFARE

There are certain basic things which must be present for an agency to be considered a voluntary social welfare organization:

1. A group of private citizens join to organize a service that derives from the group's particular interests or values.
2. The organized service is funded through voluntary contributions.
3. The organization has no legal responsibility for the general welfare and no responsibility to continue its existence beyond the duration of its own interest.
4. The organization, having met the legal requirements of incorporation and licensing needed to protect its specific purposes and to guarantee standards of service,<sup>5</sup> is neither responsible nor accountable to government.<sup>5</sup>

This then, is what a voluntary social welfare organization is.

These four items, while being relatively straightforward, have not always been adhered to. For this reason and others there has been considerable debate about the future of volunteerism.

The interim 1968 report of the Voluntarism Project of the United Community Funds and Councils of America (UCFCA) listed five factors as unfavorable to the survival of voluntary agencies:

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4. Ibid.; Page 1588-89

5. Encyclopedia of Social Work; Volume 2; "Voluntary Organizations in Social Welfare" Page 1573

1. Fragmentation of efforts, tending to isolate agencies from the mainstream of community problems.
2. Too many specialized agencies, too small to be effective.
3. The volunteer, divorced from direct participation, has become more and more a spectator.
4. While voluntary agencies almost always stress their role as innovators, too many perform this function in a minor key, if at all.
5. Voluntary agencies have not responded often enough to their opportunity to identify weakspots in our social welfare system and advance proposals for remedial action.<sup>6</sup>

While these points are quite valid, they indicate to me a need to change and update our ideas on volunteerism not a need to do away with the system.

The report of the Voluntarism Project stresses the need for a redefinition of volunteerism rejecting the contention that provision of service to large numbers of people is appropriate for voluntary agencies. The report recommends for the future that:

1. Direct service whose emphasis is standard setting, demonstration, innovation, and research.
2. Enhancement of ethical and cultural values and development of character.
3. Effective leadership in advocating social measures that promote community wellbeing.
4. Professional education and citizen training for service in behalf of voluntary social welfare.<sup>6</sup>

What has been done to this point is to briefly discuss volunteers and volunteer agencies and particularly how volunteerism relates to social welfare. Now I will introduce my proposal.

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6. Institute of Community Studies, Voluntarism and Human Welfare (New York: UCFCA, January 1968) Page 1

V. INTRODUCTION: A PROPOSAL FOR A VOLUNTEER ACTION CENTER

My proposal is for the initiation of a Volunteer Action Center. The Volunteer Action Center is to be affiliated with the United Way of Delaware County, Inc.

The Volunteer Action Center, or VAC will address three major issues centered around volunteerism.

First, it is apparent upon scrutinizing the issue that volunteerism is not being promoted as well as it could be in the Muncie Area. Through a variety of means the VAC will seek to publicize the efforts of volunteers in the community and make known the opportunities available to potential volunteers in local agencies.

Second, there is no single place that an individual, with time to donate, can go to explore opportunities for volunteerism. This necessitates a time consuming search for an opening that fits the requirements of the individual. The potential is there for the volunteer to become discouraged and drop out of the entire process.

Lastly, the agencies in the volunteer process may not make good use of the volunteer. Proper utilization of the volunteer will encourage that person to continue to volunteer. Providing the agencies with information and training in the use of the volunteer will facilitate the entire process.

United Way is in an excellent position to administer a program of this type. Because United Way is an umbrella agency for 25 other agencies they receive calls weekly asking about volunteer opportunities. With a VAC section they would be able to refer these people to that agency which best fits their needs.

The United Way has VAC centers in several of its local offices including Indianapolis. By affiliating the VAC with United Way locally we could avoid the potential problem of jealousy that could occur if a direct service organization

ran the program. There could be less questioning of who got the "most" or "best" volunteers if done in this manner.

#### VI. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem in a nutshell is that there is no single organization responsible for addressing the three major issues I identifies in the introduction: promotion of volunteerism, volunteer coordination, and agency volunteer utilization training.

To determine that this service was actually needed I took an informal poll of 22 local United Way agencies. I believe that the 22 agencies polled are representative of the volunteer using organizations in Delaware Co. They include those involved in recreation, health, education, etc... The questionnaire on volunteer utilization, which I used, deals with whether an agency uses volunteers and if they could use an agency that could help provide them with qualified volunteers. If the agency could use volunteers, then I also asked how many volunteers they could use in a given period, what functions would be performed by volunteers and when are they needed. (See Appendix A)

As a result of the questionnaire, the findings of which I will discuss in a moment, I determined that a service that could deal with the major issues discussed previously is needed and could be used by social service agencies in our community.

In the first question I asked whether or not an agency could use volunteers in their program. Some agencies require particular skills of their volunteers while others make use of relatively unskilled personnel but all need volunteers and most could use many more that they have presently.

The next question involved the utilization of a service designed to provide volunteers to the agencies. To this question

also the answer was overwhelmingly yes. All but one agency, were enthused by the prospect of being provided volunteers at no cost or trouble to themselves. The one agency that was not particularly interested in this program was the YMCA. The concerns expressed were twofold: 1) cost and 2) duplication of service. It should be noted that the YMCA has an abundance of volunteers for their programs. The idea of having the volunteers pre-screened as to interests and skills was also attractive to the people with whom I spoke.

According to my questionnaire the combined agencies could use an average of 450 people a week. The number would be much higher in the summer due to outdoor, seasonal activities which take place then. The varied number of times that agencies need these volunteers is matched by the variety of jobs they could fill.

Beyond the questionnaire, two things make me believe that a VAC is urgently needed in Muncie.

The first is an article run in the Muncie Star on October 15, 1981. The article states that, "Some 31% of American adults are involved in organized, structured volunteerism on a regular basis-." The source for the article was a study done by the Gallup organization on October 14, 1981. With that kind of potential, communities that maximize their volunteer efforts by the use of VACs will do the best job in making up for cut-backs in government and private funds.

The second is that another group has independently arrived at the same conclusion and are working towards a VAC type operation in a slightly different setting and form. Rita Winters of Altrusa and Dorothy Danner of the YWCA are currently studying the potential for a VAC associated with the YWCA.

#### VII. STATEMENT OF PROPOSED SOLUTION AND OBJECTIVES

My objective in initiating a Volunteer Action Center is

threefold: 1) promotion of volunteerism locally, 2) volunteer coordination to include recruitment, referral and follow-up, and 3) education and training of volunteer using organizations.

Promotion of volunteerism, or community awareness, is an integral part of any VAC. As a result of increased community awareness stemming as it does from increased, more effective promotion the agencies utilizing the VAC should experience an increased flow of volunteers.

Conscientious recruitment, referral and follow-up will also pay dividends in increased numbers of volunteers coming into the system. Success in these areas will increase the chances of keeping volunteers in the system by making them more satisfied with their volunteer experience.

If the agencies, through proper training and education, make effective use of volunteers then those volunteers will be more satisfied and so will remain in the system.

Success in each of the above objectives will pay dividends in results that are clearly measureable: increased volunteerism in the Muncie area.

#### VIII. PROPOSED METHOD OR PROCEDURE

To this point I have spoken briefly about the program, given my reasons for saying there is a problem, and stated my objectives. Now it is time to discuss the implementation of those objectives.

First I will cover volunteer promotion. One project that would help to keep those involved in the program abreast of new developments is a monthly news letter. This would be sent to a predetermined group interested in volunteerism. It would include news of meetings, people and programs the VAC will be involved with.

Next the VAC would publish a booklet entitled "Volunteer

Opportunities". This would list possible placements for potential volunteers with area agencies. Each entry would describe the opening: responsibilities, scope, time, etc...

There is also the potential for public service announcements on radio and television. These would be used to give wide exposure to volunteers and openings that are available locally.

Finally, attempt to gain access to people through the use of the newspaper. A "Get Involved" column such as the VAC in Indianapolis runs weekly would be well worth the exposure it should give.

All of these promotion items would be ongoing projects. They would be coordinated by the VAC director with the actual work done by a volunteer committee on promotion. (For a look at the agency organization see Appendix B.)

The next objective to be dealt with is volunteer coordination. The VAC has already laid the ground work for this step by talking to the agencies and getting good job descriptions of opportunities.

They will then interview and refer all interested applicants to agencies selected jointly with the volunteer. This will be done by volunteers who have knowledge of the intake forms and who are familiar with available opportunities. The entire process is to be assisted by the VAC Director where that becomes necessary.

Next volunteers at the VAC will follow-up the process to determine whether a good match was made for the volunteer. This is an attempt to measure the success of the referral process and demonstrate continued interest in the volunteer.

Last, records and statistics will be kept to help evaluate the program and facilitate continued volunteerism. The interview, referral, follow-up process is an ongoing one. Files on volunteers are to be updated each contact and during follow-ups.

The third objective is to train and educate agencies in the use of the volunteer.

Two types of workshop will be offered to the agencies. Open workshops will allow anyone interested to obtain information on the proper use of volunteers. Workshops will also be offered to agencies for their employees on a contract basis. This would occur when specific information is desired.

To determine just what information could or should be provided a survey of training needs should be conducted. The survey and the workshops would be run by the committee for education and training and overseen by the VAC director.

The VAC director should also be available to the agency staffs for consultation regarding development of the volunteer programs they are running.

#### IX. EVALUATION PLAN

The Volunteer Action Center will be monitored to assure, insofar as possible, the success of the agency. My evaluation plan is very basic and centers around three things: 1) follow-up, 2) volume of business and 3) feedback from volunteers and agencies.

Each referral the agency makes will be followed up 4 to 6 weeks after the placement. This is to insure that the agency is utilizing the volunteer properly and that the volunteer is happy in the agency.

Questions will be asked to determine the satisfaction of the volunteer. There should be some discussion of how the agency could make better use of the volunteer. Also, it is important that we determine from the volunteer what we could have done to make the placement a better experience. (See Appendix C)

Another indicator of agency success is the amount of business done. If the agency promotes volunteerism well, makes good referrals and follow-ups on each case we should see an increase in the amount of traffic handled by the agency.

The number of people who come in inquiring about volunteerism and the number of agencies listed in "Volunteer Opportunities" are indicative of the relative success of the program.

We would also be quite interested in the feedback received from both people and organizations. Comments, both of a formal and informal nature, will be evaluated to determine areas in which changes need to be made. Suggestions from all those involved in the volunteer system will be considered in order to make the agency more responsive to the community.

#### X. POST FUNDING CONTINUATION STRATEGY

The Volunteer Action Center will be an ongoing program of the United Way of Delaware Co., Inc. This means that the program's budget would be submitted annually to the Citizen Review Committee for approval. During this process the committee ensures that the request for funds is fully justified and that all possible economies have been made. In this way the programs fiscal accountability is maintained.

#### XI. BUDGET

As the Volunteer Action Center will be an addition to existing agency, the budget will be relatively small.

There will be one person drawing a salary through the program: the director. The director will draw \$16,000 a year for his services as program coordinator.

No other salaries will be paid as the remainder of the staff will be volunteers. The secretarial and clerical support for the program will be provided by existing United Way personnel.

Insofar as the non-personnel costs are concerned, they too will be minimal. Office space and the necessary equipment are currently available for the program.

The major expense of the agency will be for supplies. The publicity necessary to run a successful VAC will mean large printing costs.

Travel will also be a significant factor when looking at the total budget. The staff, director and volunteers will have to be compensated for their milage.

At the projected low cast of the program, a Volunteer Action Center provides good value for the money spent. (See Appendix D for a detailed budget breakdown.)

## XII. AGENCY STANDARDS

On several occasions in this paper I have mentioned what I call the "proper utilization of volunteers. I believe this to be very important and so have adopted a set of standards for the agencies who will use the services of the VAC and for the VAC itself. These standards clearly define what the VAC will provide volunteers for, who may use the VACs services and what volunteers can do.

1. The VAC recieves requests for volunteers only from those agencies which have some responsible governing body.
2. The VAC receives requests for volunteers only from those agencies which are non-profit and which serve the community in the areas of health, welfare or recreation.
3. The agency will accept no request for volunteers to solicit funds for any agency.
4. The VAC will accept no request for volunteers for any political party or campaign.
5. The agency requires that a volunteer placed in an agency or program is only supplementary; that the volunteer may never displace a paid worker.
6. The VAC assumes no responsibility for final placement of a volunteer in an agency.

7. The VAC makes every effort to make an appropriate placement of a volunteer and undertakes to do minimal screening.

These then are a set of standards which, if followed, should enable the VAC to be effective in its pursuit of its goals while it maintains its integrity.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE-VOLUNTEER UTILIZATION

Agency Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Questions:

- 1) Can you use volunteers in your program?
  
- 2) Would a service that could provide volunteers be of use to your agency?
  
- 3) How many volunteers could you effectively utilize?
  
- 4) What functions could volunteers perform for your agency?
  
- 5) When do you need volunteers?

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### VAC ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

#### I. AGENCY

- 1) Director- A fulltime director is to be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the agency. The director is directly responsible to the Board of Directors.
- 2) Staff- Made up of volunteers who have been trained to perform interviews, make referrals and do follow-up.

#### II. BOARD

A 21 member board will be responsible for policy at the Volunteer Action Center. The Board will serve overlapping, 3 year terms.

- 1) Executive Committee- Made up of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and the Presidents of other standing committees.
- 2) Promotion/Publicity Committee- 7 members to serve a 1 year term.
- 3) Education/Training Committee- 7 members to serve a 1 year term.

APPENDIX C

VOLUNTEER FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe your feelings about your present placement.  
(Satisfied, discouraged, bored, etc...) Explain why you feel that way.
  
2. In what ways could the agency in which you volunteer make more effective use of your time?
  
3. What could we at the Volunteer Action Center do to make your placement a better experience?

APPENDIX D

BUDGET OVERVIEW

I. Personnel

A. Salaries

Director-	\$16,000 per year
FICA	3,360 "
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	1,560 "
Retirement (Not paid in first year.)	
Staff-	None

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Total expense: \$ 20,920 per year

II. Non-Personnel

A. Office rental	None
B. Equipment	None
C. Supplies	
Paper, etc.	\$1,800 per year
Printing costs	3,000 "
D. Travel (Average of 200 miles per week.)	500 "
E. Telephone	560 "
Long distance charges	100 "
F. Other Costs	
Postage	1,500 "
Meals/lodging	500 "

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Total expense: \$7,960 per year