



Coming of age

Volunteers have more skills, less free time

It used to be that volunteers stuffed envelopes and answered telephone for nonprofits. Increasingly, however, volunteers at organizations large and small provide services to clients, write materials and basically help run the organization.

By KATHERINE NOBLE

At the Center for Peace Education in downtown Carrboro, Brett Eckerman coordinates the activities of the educational nonprofit's many volunteers, recruiting newcomers, matching people's interests with projects and supervising activities.

He's also a volunteer himself.

The center, which has a single full-time employee, relies heavily on members of the community who support its mission of educating young people and adults on conflict resolution skills, nonviolent communication and diversity awareness.

"To a large extent, volunteers are this organization," Eckerman says. Volunteers help with everything from preparing educational materials for conflict resolution workshops, to fundraising and publicity.

Volunteers used to perform clerical and supportive tasks for nonprofits. But that's changing. The Center for Peace Education isn't alone in relying on volunteers for important functions.

Volunteers are more active than before, says Jim Drummond, volunteer coordinator at the Volunteer Center in Asheville. For example, he says, several agencies in Asheville employ volunteers as advocates for victims of sexual abuse, child abuse and domestic violence. In some cases, the volunteers play an active role in court.

"Nonprofits, just like our for-profit folks, are having to run much leaner and meaner, and nonprofits were already pretty much threadbare in staffs," he says. As a consequence, "we rely even more on volunteers."

Nonprofits serve as vocational training centers for volunteers. The agencies also benefit from the professional skills individuals bring, skills a nonprofit often can't afford to buy.

But tight budgets aren't the only reason nonprofits employ volunteers. The Center for Peace Education, for example, sees community involvement as integral to its educational goals.

"Community outreach and volunteer involvement is one very impor-

tant part of our philosophy of how we improve communication," Eckerman says.

Donna Buzzard, director of the Volunteer Center of Orange County, says that's a philosophy that can be helpful to many community-based nonprofits.

Volunteers can help a nonprofit stay in touch with, and reflect, its community, she says.

"If you have a diversified volunteer base and listen to the volunteers and encourage them to voice their opinions, then you can do a better job of making sure that your services reflect the needs of the community."

But as volunteers increasingly are service providers, advocates or communications specialists, managing and recruiting the free labor becomes more complicated.

At the Central North Carolina Chapter of the American Red Cross in Durham, Christa Eaves, volunteer services director, works with the organization's 503 active volunteers

on a regular basis, doing screening, orientation and placement.

It's also her job to keep the volunteers happy — and motivated. Eaves makes sure volunteers are recognized for their contribution to the organization, and reminded of the important role they play.

She regularly recognizes volunteers with telephone calls, personal letters and certificates of appreciation. She rewards them with service pins, patches and plaques. And she reinforces the importance of their role with frequent evaluations.

At the Thompson Children's Home in Charlotte, Gay Morgan, director of volunteer services, says volunteers work directly with the abused and neglected children who live there, tutoring them in school, being an adult "special friend" and even bringing a child home for visits during holidays and other special occasions.

Because volunteers work closely with young children, background

checks are run on each applicant. Volunteers also go through an extensive interview process.

In Durham, volunteers at the Caring House work directly with the residents, adults who are undergoing cancer treatment at Duke University. The facility operates with just two paid staffers.

Executive Director Nancy Laszlo says about 25 volunteers work in three-hour shifts each day and evening, checking in residents, helping them find their way around Durham and Duke, and most important, talking with and providing emotional support to residents and their families.

The nonprofit makes a training investment in each volunteer, but Laszlo says the volunteers make the effort worthwhile.

They help keep the attitude at the Caring House upbeat and positive, she says. She wouldn't replace the volunteers with professionals even if the organization could afford them.

"The guests say one of the strong points of being here is the wonderful volunteers."

Christy Greeson, executive director of the Voluntary Action Center in Greensboro, says volunteers for the most part are changing faster than nonprofits can keep up with them.

"We're seeing the dynamics of voluntarism change rapidly," she says, "and it's changing from the perspective of the volunteer faster than it's changing from the perspective of the agency."

"They're still thinking about volunteers as they did 20 years ago."

Twenty years ago, for example, more women stayed home raising children, which meant the mother and the rest of the family had more time to volunteer. Most nonprofits haven't tailored volunteer activities to the needs of families where both parents work outside the home, Greeson says.

"If we want to increase the number of volunteers who are in their childbearing years," says Buzzard of Orange County, "then we must have opportunities that don't make a parent choose between spending time with family or volunteering."

Greeson says nonprofits need to devise weekend, monthly or even occasional volunteer opportunities that could include the whole family.

Helping a nonprofit with a clean-up project as a family, or working once a month at the soup kitchen gives parents a chance to spend time with their children. And it also gives parents a chance to show their children the value of community service.

Volunteering, says Greeson, can be a real "quality-time" activity.

Maturing volunteers Seniors are pitching in for charity

By KATHERINE NOBLE

Adults over 50 are a large and growing segment of the population. According to a recent study, they're also a segment of the population that is ripe for volunteering.

The recently released report, Senior Citizens as Volunteers, is chock-full of information about senior citizens and their volunteer activities based on an Independent Sector 1992 survey of volunteering and giving.

Among the survey's findings:

- 45 percent of people 60 to 75 years old volunteer an average of 4.4 hours per week; 27 percent of those 75 and older also volunteer.

- Seniors who work part-time are more likely to volunteer than the fully retired person;

- Seniors tend to remain in their volunteer positions longer than younger volunteers.

- 87 percent of senior volunteers surveyed said they volunteer because it is important to help others.

Unlike younger people, seniors don't volunteer to learn new skills or make contacts. Instead, religious beliefs and a feeling of obligation to help others are primary motivations for senior volunteers.

According to the report, the most active volunteers have strong religious commitments. They also had a volunteer role model during their youth.

Kathy Mangum, director of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program in Chapel Hill, says more than 600 senior volunteers contributed 65,000 hours of volunteer service through RSVP in 1993. Last year, the 20-year-old organization celebrated its one millionth volunteer hour.

"If it weren't for these volunteers," Mangum says, "many of our nonprofit agencies wouldn't exist."

For copies of the report, call Independent Sector publications at (301) 490-3229.



Volunteers repair and paint a toy box on a playground at a daycare center in Cary. According to the Independent Sector, 94.2 million Americans volunteered an average of 4.2 hours per week in 1991.

File photo

BRIEFLY

Hospice honors its heroes

The Center of Living Hospice in Asheboro sponsored a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in March to thank volunteers for sharing their talents with patients, staff and families. During 1993, volunteers donated 9,752 hours and drove 61,353 miles, saving the hospice \$79,972.

Students paint YMCA in Jamaica

Twenty students in the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's Global Volunteers program recently traveled to Montego Bay, Jamaica, to paint a YMCA. Global Volunteers is a service organization co-sponsored by the UNC-W Leadership Center and United Christian Campus Ministries.

Clinic expands services to poor

Eighty-one volunteers have staffed Surry Medical Ministries in Mount Airy since it opened in October 1993, providing \$11,000 in voluntary services. The clinic recently received a \$40,000 grant from Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust to expand its medical services.

Volunteers needed for concession stand

The AIDS Service Agency is recruiting concession stand volunteers for performances at Walnut Creek Amphitheatre and Durham Bulls games. Sessions range from four to eight hours each. A portion of the sales receipts is donated to the AIDS Service Agency. Call Stephanie Treadway, 467-2177.

Foster parents in demand

Single people and couples are needed to be foster parents for children in Wake County who have been abandoned, abused or neglected. Methodist Home for Children provides training and other services, through its Specialized Foster Care Program, for people who care for children with physical and emotional needs. Services include a 24-hour support and consultation line and initial and ongoing training. Without the foster care program, many of these children, some of whom have been sexually abused, would not be able to live in a home environment. Methodist Home for Children has 62 licensed and trained foster families for these children in Goldsboro, Raleigh, Wilmington and surrounding areas. Call (919) 828-0345, ext. 115.