

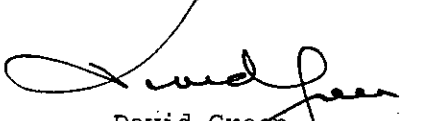
2 August, 1985

TO: Staff and Volunteers

Brotherhood Policy for Volunteers

The Strategic Planning Committee and the Equal Opportunity Consultative Committee would welcome your views about the attached paper, which is a draft policy regarding the role and work of volunteers at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The paper was prepared when Dorothy Brusey retired, and was considered necessary given the increasing interest in volunteer issues, and the increasing number of unemployed people seeking volunteer experience somewhere in the Brotherhood. It is very important we have clear guidelines which support the work of volunteers, and their relationship with paid staff.

Any comments to members of the two committees or myself would be welcome.

  
David Green,  
Director of Community Services.

A REVIEW OF VOLUNTEER WORK  
AND POLICIES FOR THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE  
JULY 1985

Introduction

Like many community service organizations the Brotherhood has a long tradition of volunteering. In fact the organization is largely built upon the unpaid work and commitment of the original members and their friends. Many of the work patterns of the past have now changed, although the contribution of volunteers is still strong and significant. However traditional approaches to volunteering are now under some challenge. Some community service organizations have an absolute policy not to support volunteer work, on the basis that it reduces the amount of paid work available to those who need it. As a result of the increasing concern about the relationship between the labour market and volunteering the Brotherhood must be clear about its own position. Consequently this paper has been prepared for discussion by paid and unpaid workers in all parts of the organization. The need for a review has come about for a number of reasons and they can best be summarised as follows:

1. The end of "full employment" which we experienced since the Second World War, and the reality of high rates of unemployment, up to 10% which has become part of our society since the mid 1970's.
2. At the same time increasing leisure time for some groups and the increasing recognition that older and retired people have a significant contribution to make to their community.
3. The increasing concern by unions and other groups regarding the role of volunteers in community service organizations and the possibility that volunteers may be filling jobs that could be taken by those who need paid work.
4. The increasing number of requests from unemployed people seeking work experience and work opportunities as volunteers, as an avenue to paid work.
5. The arguments that volunteer work is an avenue of "solving" unemployment problems, particularly for young people.
6. The concern that volunteer work is sometimes seen to be the appropriate course of action for women and mothers, many of whom may prefer and need paid employment.

The Brotherhood has always taken a strong and unequivocal position on the importance of employment as the most important way of alleviating poverty, and providing younger and older people, women and men, with the opportunities for fulfilling dignified and respected roles in our society. As a consequence we must address the relationship between volunteering and employment in the interests of volunteers, paid workers and the unemployed. The current problems which arise because of increased unemployment are perplexing, disturbing, and difficult to solve. However they cannot be ignored.

## The Key Components of Volunteering

"Voluntary work may be defined as unpaid work which is chosen freely by a person and carried out during their free time. It spans almost all spheres of social and public life including politics, business, unions, religion, sport, recreation, emergency services and social services."

This definition indicates both the scope of volunteering and some of its critical characteristics - that is, it represents an activity chosen freely by an individual, undertaken in time which belongs to that individual to use as they choose, and relates to work for which there is no pay.

These essential characteristics of volunteering must not be forgotten. However, factors like unemployment, the increasing inter face between formal or paid, and informal or unpaid work in the community services, and the impact of technology, are amongst the factors which are both changing community organizations, and changing the nature of volunteering. Not so many years ago most caring and support activities, for example, were informal and carried out by the extended family and on occasions, close friends and neighbours. In addition women usually bore all of this responsibility. Caring and support were seen as exclusively women's work, and in addition work for which pay was not either appropriate or necessary. The growth of organizations like the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the growth of government services as well, are clear demonstrations that dependence on friends and volunteers, and the goodwill of women, is no longer acceptable in a modern society. A whole range of factors have led to a situation where the functions of caring and support in our type of society are to be carried out by very much more complex range of organizations, professions and networks, extending far beyond the original family networks.

Looking ahead there are more changes to come. The amount of paid work available is likely to further decline, and the rapid expansion of formal institutional services will be braked substantially over the next ten years. The process of curtailing the growth of residential services is already underway. For many reasons the current trends away from institutional help towards care and support at home and in the community, and away from dependence on formal organizations towards self-help and participatory structures will continue. There is a strong coalition of interests from both groups of people in the community wanting to establish more control over their lives, and governments who want to reduce costly institutional and professional expenditure, which coalesce in making sure that these trends shall continue.

In this context volunteering will be more adamantly supported than ever before by some groups, but at the same time attacked and in some cases vilified in ways that have never happened before.

An organization like the Brotherhood must be crystal clear about its position on the questions of volunteering, and must be able to defend its policies in a variety of situations and in a context of a variety of potentially strong criticisms. We have been clarifying our policies over a number of years and generally have a firm basis upon which our approach to volunteering can be built. However, in a number of areas we need to clarify some of these issues and reinforce the importance of a clear and well defined approach to policies on volunteers.

Basic Principles of the Brotherhood's Policy

1. Volunteering is real work. The contribution and commitment of volunteers has a distinctive value which is significant to their organization and society. This contribution and commitment is different from that of paid staff because it is given freely and by choice. This difference does not mean that the work of volunteers is of less value, but it does mean that some of the roles and responsibilities of volunteers may be different from paid workers.
2. Volunteers are members of the organization, and they have rights and entitlements along with paid workers. In this regard the Brotherhood believes that volunteers should have access to clear job descriptions, access to support and supervision, protection from liability and the costs of accident or injury, clear lines of responsibility and accountability and information regarding their work and their organization. Volunteers are welcome to attend meetings, activities and all aspects of the organization's work. In addition volunteers should have access to staff training and staff development opportunities, according to their needs and the work they are doing.
3. Volunteers need good safe working conditions and protection against work related risks. In addition to the need for volunteers to have access to information and staff services, the Brotherhood needs to provide protection to volunteers that are available to paid staff. Appropriate policies regarding insurance and indemnity are necessary with respect to the adequate protection of the volunteer in terms of health, well-being liability. These entitlements for volunteers do not weaken the commitment of the volunteer but rather strengthen the commitment of the organization concerned.
4. Volunteer time and work should be acknowledged as part of the financial income and costs of the Brotherhood. Each budget should be recording both the value of the unpaid labour anticipated and the costs of supporting that unpaid labour. In this way we should be monitoring:
  - \* the financial benefits to the community and the shortfall of adequate funds in certain areas of community services;
  - \* the areas of work which are using unpaid workers and why;
  - \* shifts and changes in the use of unpaid workers, particularly if these changes indicated new needs in the community and potential for considering paid work.
5. There are some areas of service to people that are not appropriate for volunteers. No matter how hard the organization tries to make sure unpaid work is recognised and has a high standard, and no matter how "professional" the volunteer, it is difficult for people receiving services to feel as free with volunteers as with paid staff. There is always the feeling that it is harder to ask a volunteer to do something extra, or something different, or complain about the work of a volunteer.

These problems are particularly acute for those people who need assistance for personal care, such as people who are frail or have a disability. As a consequence the Brotherhood will not use volunteers in personal care tasks such as dressing, showering, assistance with personal hygiene, or other duties where the person involved has to work out a very clear relationship with a worker around very personal matters. In these circumstances use of volunteers may cause extra strain for those concerned.

6. Volunteer work should not be used for the purpose of work experience. The key characteristics of volunteer work are different from those for people seeking work experience, on the job training, or the opportunity to keep up work related patterns and skills. Workers who seek the Brotherhood for work experience reasons should not be treated in the same way as volunteers, but should clearly be assisted in the context of clear policies and commitments to the unemployed. Clearly we should consider opportunities for work experience for those people out of a job, but not confuse this legitimate need with volunteering.
7. Volunteers should not be used to displace paid staff. The Brotherhood must examine the jobs which should be undertaken by paid staff. Under no circumstances should unpaid workers be used in situations where paid workers are considered desirable or essential, except in those circumstances when essential services are threatened by an industrial dispute

There are some circumstances however, where the Brotherhood should not carry out a service or activity, rather than enlist volunteers. Undoubtedly it is difficult to make those decisions, but all managers and supervisors should attempt to do so. For example, when it has been established that paid staff are required for a service or activity, and financial cut backs or limited funds mean the organization can no longer afford those positions, consideration should be given to ceasing the service or activity rather than seeking volunteers.

8. Volunteer work should provide new experiences for workers. The majority of volunteers have been and continue to be women. It is only in the last few years that the proportion of male volunteers has begun to increase and in the services the proportion is still around 60% being women. In the past little distinction was made between domestic work carried out at home and volunteer work - they were all seen as part of the role and work of housewives. It is most important that the Brotherhood distinguishes voluntary work from other forms of unpaid work which are not freely chosen. These kinds of work include for example, domestic labour, housework, and cleaning. Not many people actively and freely choose jobs like washing and cleaning and they are not the kinds of activities that people undertake in their free and uncommitted time. Consequently they are not suitable tasks for volunteers.

### Conclusion

These eight principles are suggested as the basis of our policy regarding volunteers. They are attempts to ensure that the work and rights of volunteers are protected, while at the same time the relationship between paid and unpaid

work is clear and unambiguous. The viewpoints of volunteers and staff would be welcome, as these principles may be subject to different interpretations or unnecessarily restrictive, so please feel free to comment as strongly as you wish.

  
David Green