

A Volunteer Talent Pool and the Public School

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THE Volunteer Talent Pool is an independent community agency charged with a twofold responsibility: (a) to fill requests from community agencies and schools for qualified and responsible volunteers; and (b) to find jobs for members of the community who wish to give volunteer service. This agency is dedicated to the philosophy that members of the community can and should be a continuing influence on the established institutions, whether they be civic or philanthropic, public service or private not-for-profit.

In the operation of this program, now in its eighth year, there is agreement that a centralized agency can take the responsibility for promoting community involvement and can continuously work to develop channels of communication to all services and agencies. It is economical and efficient for the management of the agency to remain in the hands of volunteer community leaders. There are practical advantages for the day-to-day operation:

1. Every agency has equal claim on the human resources in the community. Therefore, competition between agencies for volunteers is first reduced—then ultimately eliminated.

2. Agencies are approached to gain their cooperation in utilizing volunteers to enrich their own operation. Requirements for help are reported to one central place. There is

assurance that before a volunteer is referred, experienced Volunteer Talent Pool staff personnel have made an objective and careful evaluation of the volunteer's capability, personality, interest, and availability. Agencies retain the right to accept or reject a volunteer and to participate actively in training a volunteer for the service he will be performing.

3. The potential volunteer can conserve his time and energy because in one place he can learn about the opportunities open to him in a wide range of programs. He has help in determining where his specific skills, interest, and available free time can best be utilized and where the rewards will be the greatest.

4. The Volunteer Talent Pool knows the residents of the community and who can do what. It has a reciprocal working relationship with other Volunteer Talent Pools in adjoining communities.

5. The pool maintains a continuing working relationship with universities, professional organizations, industries, churches, Senior Centers, consulates, and so forth, from which it can recruit persons with special skills when these are needed.

6. As an independent organization, the pool can free agencies and schools from the hazards of disturbed public relations when, because of personality, anyone offering to

help in a particular area has to be rejected. Such persons are redirected and can find satisfaction in assignments for which they are better qualified.

7. The Volunteer Talent Pool maintains extensive and confidential current records of persons classified by skills and availability in time. Agencies, then, are freed of laborious record keeping and of making a place for a volunteer when it may not be timely to do so.

8. There is no waste of a professional's time, no duplication of efforts, and no cost to agencies or schools.

In the past year, the Volunteer Talent Pool in Winnetka filled 429 requests for volunteers with over 300 qualified people. All kinds of services were performed in school settings in all academic and nonacademic areas. Let us look at the partnership from the point of view of the professional school staff. "In order to function in today's world, children must learn more and learn it better than ever before."¹ The schools must then teach better and teach more children than ever before. Each teacher is challenged each day to give learning direction to 20 or more children.

The capable volunteer can contribute immeasurably not only in the content he brings to the classroom, but in the image he brings as a representative of the workaday world who has chosen to come and share his wisdom and experience.

"Directive for Volunteers"

The classroom teacher must plan for progress appropriate to the group. Yet he knows that the child "at the bottom" and the child "at the top" of the progress chart need and should have special consideration and should have it at the moment of need. A responsible volunteer can be directed and supervised to give the teacher help.

The volunteer takes time to listen to a child with patience, acceptance, and understanding. He can be the child's ally—fair,

¹ From opening remarks, Mrs. Adele B. Tunick, Director, National School Board Volunteer Program, First National Conference, Public Education Association, New York, N.Y.

honest, and human. The Volunteer Talent Pool selects the volunteer who can bring this sensitivity to each situation. The specifics for the volunteer in the Winnetka Public Schools are spelled out in a "Directive for Volunteers":

- *Seminars:* Should you be called in to assume the role of a seminar leader, the following information should prove useful:

Your role is to *guide* your students in exploring a topic rather than to teach them facts.

The topic will be clearly stated before your first meeting. Please feel free to use our school library. The librarian will be happy to show you sources and available materials.

An important task is to control discussions so that they remain on the chosen topic. Very often children tend to wander afield. At this age they are just beginning to develop the basic skills of research.

Another major objective will be to draw out all members of the seminar. Some students are reluctant to enter discussions. Pressuring them to participate is not the answer. Allow them to "warm up" to the group. There is nothing quite as effective in gaining the pupil's confidence as for him to know that you respect his right to remain silent until he is ready to come forth.

In the event you have a child who exhibits certain aggressive tendencies that are disruptive, please notify the coordinator who contacted you. She will, in turn, discuss the problem with the teacher who is responsible for this child. In most instances, you will be able to handle the problem without any assistance. However, you should not have to act as a disciplinarian.

- *Work with an Individual Student:* Working on a one-to-one basis usually involves participation with a student who: (a) has a special learning problem, such as an underachiever; (b) is very highly motivated and has a special interest. Each of these categories presents its own unique set of problems.

You will be assigned to a child on the basis of your skills, the child's interests, and the nature of the request being made by the teacher. The coordinator will review the school's rules and regulations with you.

In many instances these children are looking for someone who will show an interest in them. Common sense is one of the most important characteristics that you can possess while working with one of these children.

An underachiever can very seldom be reached in the traditional way. It is critical to locate an area of interest and then capitalize on this interest. Our hope is that this interest may, in due time, be transferred to other areas of the curriculum.

In the case of a highly motivated student, your primary purpose will be to guide and offer direction. Students in this category are usually self-directed and simply need the assistance of someone with specialized skills. In fact, too much direction can be detrimental to a child who does not need much guidance.

● *Lecturer:* Our past experience points out the extensive use that our teachers have made of volunteer lecturers. In viewing past performance, we have noted that the most successful speakers exhibit the following characteristics:

They are completely knowledgeable concerning their subject.

Talks are well organized around a central theme.

Length of the talk is between 15 and 20 minutes.

Time is set aside for student interaction.

To assist you in planning your lecture, the school will arrange for you to be in communication with the teacher in advance of that date.

● *Advisor to a Faculty Member:* Today the demands made on the classroom teacher are staggering. Because information doubles at such a fantastic rate, it has become necessary to provide teachers with an abundance of resources. Included in our file of resource possibilities is the volunteer who comes in to advise faculty members.

Your primary responsibility will be to offer information regarding sources and available materials pertaining to a specific topic. This is your role rather than delivering a lecture or advising the teacher as to the most effective approach to use with children. These are the responsibilities of the teacher.

● *Assistant to the Teacher:* The many tasks performed by the classroom teachers have recently been evaluated. The evaluation has been in terms of time spent on various tasks that do not involve the actual instruction of

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children. As a result, certain faculty members have requested volunteer assistants who would be available periodically to assist with nonteaching tasks. Responsibilities range from paper correction to supervision of small group activities. The teacher is always in attendance but not necessarily directly involved.

This type of work requires a certain professional touch on the part of the volunteer. Techniques of the teacher and information about students must be held in strict confidence.

● *Professional Administration Tasks:* Very often our consultants and academic specialists have statistical data, results of inquiries and researches, that must be recorded and put into presentable form. This calls for a volunteer who is willing to assemble these data as directed. Also, it should be mentioned that due to the confidential nature of much of this material, the volunteer must respect these records appropriately.

Some of the work to be completed will be clerical in nature, while other responsibilities will be more creative.

● *Preparing Instructional Devices:* Our material preparation department has come to mean a great deal to our teachers and consultants. Very often the demands that are made exceed our potential for development. At this point we depend upon assistance from the volunteers. We have been very successful in the past in receiving expert help from the talent pool.

Should you be requested to assist us, we will make every attempt to describe clearly the nature of the project as well as the time schedule and other pertinent information. Materials will be furnished and, if you desire, work space can be provided at one of the schools.

● *Developing a Project with an Entire Class:* Very often we receive requests for volunteers who would be willing to work with a class on the preparation of a group project. Building

models, constructing murals, and organizing plays could be cited as examples of this kind of request.

For the volunteer, working with children is an exciting, yet sobering experience. When a child has confidence in his relationship with a "special" adult who is a sincere human being, he may perform well beyond expectation. A child needs positive guidelines from the adult with whom he associates. The volunteers have the responsibility for setting a proper example of what characteristics make up an adult. Those who participate in the school setting must be aware of this added challenge.

The rewards to the volunteer are invaluable. His own zest for learning increases, and he comes away refreshed and reassured that the new generation has vigor and creativity which it will need so much in shaping the world of tomorrow.

The community oriented volunteer is, then, the link between the community and the school. The school does not have the responsibility for organizing the community for its own purposes; neither does it expect the community volunteers to function only for the benefit of one of its important services. The relationship is significant because there is recognition that the schools are but one part of many influences in a child's preparation for his future responsibilities as a member of the society he will help to create. It is not too early for him to be introduced to this concept in the primary grades.

—JOE A. RICHARDSON, *Campus Principal, Carleton Washburne School and Skokie School, Winnetka, Illinois, and JANET BURGOON, Originator of Winnetka's Talent Pool, Winnetka, Illinois.*



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