A number of surveys indicate a rise in the percentage of elders involved in volunteer work over the past 25 years. This article identifies cultural, demographic, and programmatic factors that have contributed to this increase. After describing some current policies and programs, it identifies strategies for sustaining and expanding volunteerism by elders in the future.

Key Words: Activity theory, Continuity theory, Demographic changes, Social policy

Volunteerism by Elders: Past Trends and Future Prospects

Susan M. Chambré, PhD

The past quarter century has seen a substantial increase in the proportion of elders who volunteer. National surveys have monitored Americans' patterns of volunteering since 1965, as shown in Table 1. The surveys differ in several ways. First, the time of year when a survey was done might reflect seasonal differences. This would be most apparent in the 1974 study (ACTION, 1975) that was done during Easter and Passover, when many individuals would be involved in church work but when schools were closed. Several other studies were done during the summer months, which might also reduce the number of current volunteers. A second difference is whether volunteering was defined as working for an organization or also included informal activities. Studies conducted for Independent Sector in 1983, 1985, 1987, and 1989 all included both formal and informal volunteering. However, the proportion of individuals doing informal volunteering only was not substantial. A third difference pertains to the inclusion or exclusion of particular types of organizations. This would have had the greatest effect on the 1965 survey since it did not include religion or political activity as categories. Despite this, a significant number of respondents whose only involvement was for religious organizations (28.5% of all volunteers) indicated that they were volunteers (U.S. Department of Labor, 1969).

Although the surveys' varied methods reduce our ability to be specific about the actual amount of change because they defined volunteering differently and were done at various times of the year, they suggest a considerable increase in the proportion of elders reporting they volunteered in the previous year. In 1965 11% of people over age 65 had volunteered (U.S. Department of Labor, 1969). By 1990, the proportion increased to 41% of people age 60 and over (Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991). Two other surveys, done in 1990 and in 1991, had very similar results. The Independent Sector survey, done in March 1990, asked people about their work in 1989; the Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study was done in January and February 1991 and estimated patterns of involvement in 1990. If one excludes volunteers in the Independent Sector study who only did informal work, the results are very close, 38.6% of people 65 and above.

The surveys also suggest that the link between voluntarism and age has become weaker (Table 2). Past studies found that people reduced their informal social interaction, membership in voluntary groups, and volunteering as they grew older (see Chambré, 1987, for a review). For voluntary association membership (Knopke & Thompson, 1977) and volunteering, the relationship was curvilinear. In 1965 and in 1973–1974, for example, volunteering appeared to increase during the 20s and 30s, peak in midlife, and decline after 55. By 1989, these differences were less pronounced, and almost one in three people over age 75 volunteered in 1990 (Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991).

Given the higher incidence of serious illnesses past age 75 (Aging America, 1991, Table 4–3) and the fact that poor health is a major reason why older people stop volunteering (Independent Sector, 1990), the current involvement of people in this age group compares favorably with people in their late teens and early 20s. In the past decade, the percentage of participants over 70 has increased dramatically in the three federally sponsored programs for older volunteers. Between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of participants who were 70 and older increased in RSVP (from 45% to 66%), Foster Grandparent (from 49% to 62%), and Senior Companion (from 41% to 53%) programs (calculated from ACTION, 1980, 1990). Recent research suggests, then, that although the tendency to volun-

---

1This article is an expanded version of "Voluntarism by Elders: Demographic and Policy Trends, Past and Present" (Chambré, 1991) and "Voluntarism by Elders in an Aging Society." Working Paper, Center for the Study of Philanthropy, City University of New York.

The author benefited from the assistance and support of Deborah Levi, Lucille and Norman Maizel, Robert Chambré, Kathleen McCarthy, Rosalie Kane, Lori Simon-Rusinowitz, Lucy Rose Fischer, Stephen Noga, and James Sugarman.

2Associate professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Baruch College, City University of New York, Box 511, 17 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10010.
Table 1. Percentage of Older Persons Who Volunteered in Selected Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of volunteer activity</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>% of respondents who volunteered</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Time of year survey conducted</th>
<th>Definition of volunteering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Labor, 1969</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Unpaid work for hospitals, clinics, health or medical organizations, education, social or welfare, recreation, civic or community action groups in previous year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973–1974</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>ACTION, 1975</td>
<td>April (Easter-Passover)</td>
<td>Unpaid work for hospitals, clinics, health or medical organizations, education, social or welfare, recreation, civic, community action or political groups, legal services, scouting or other youth groups, churches or synagogues in previous year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>National Council on the Aging, 1975</td>
<td>Late spring to early summer</td>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–1981</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Gallup Organization, 1981</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Working in some way to help others for no monetary pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Older Americans and... Volunteerism, n.d.</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Volunteer activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Yankelovitch, Skelly, &amp; Wright, 1986</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Community work and volunteer activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Independent Sector, 1985</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Working in some way to help others for no monetary pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Herzog et al., 1989</td>
<td>May to October</td>
<td>Series of questions specifying volunteer work for religious, educational, senior citizen, labor or similar organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1991</td>
<td>November 6 to December 2</td>
<td>Volunteer work at a charity, church, synagogue or other organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>60 to 64</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Marriot Seniors</td>
<td>January to</td>
<td>Volunteer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>65 to 69</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Volunteerism</td>
<td>February</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>75 to 79</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>80 and over</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table excludes several surveys. One was a local survey, the 1988–1989 Minnesota Senior study, which found that 52% volunteered. A second national survey, sponsored by J.C. Penny for Volunteer: The National Center (n.d.) was done in September 1987, but the report indicates the proportion of volunteers in various age groups and not the percentage in each age group who volunteered.

Why Has Volunteerism by Elders Increased?

This article reviews cultural, demographic, and policy changes that contributed to greater involvement in volunteer work by elders and recommends a number of directions for future policies. It considers several questions: How have cultural, social, and demographic changes influenced volunteerism by elders over the past quarter century? What has been the impact of public and private sector initiatives? What types of policies and programs are suggested by previous research and changes in the composition of the older population?

Cultural Changes in the Meaning of Old Age

The idea that older people might become involved in community service was introduced almost 3 decades ago. Two articles in major social work journals noted some obstacles: older people might not be...
Although negative stereotypes of elders are not uncommon, there are some new images, perhaps also stereotypical, but important in shaping interest in volunteering. The old image of a person sitting in a rocking chair has been joined in ads and magazine covers (e.g., Time, February 22, 1988) by the active elder who travels and plays tennis, a byproduct of what Ekert (1986) labels “the busy ethic.” Even advertisements for devices associated with the infirmities of old age stress this image; ads for diapers and electric scooters stress that people can use them to be more active.

In addition to the emphasis on keeping active, retirement is perceived as a stage when people can freely choose how to spend their time (National Council on Aging, 1975). For some — and perhaps an increasing number in the future — “retirement” actually involves returning to work, continuing in the same job on a part-time basis, or entering a new career. Between 1970 and 1985, labor force participation rates for men over 65 declined dramatically from 26.8% to 15.8%. Over the next 3 years, it increased to 16.6%. For women, a similar pattern occurred, but inferences are difficult to make because many of them spent large portions of their lives out of the labor force. Their participation declined from 9.7% in 1970 to 7.3% in 1985 and was 8.4% in 1989 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991, Table 632). When age groups within the older population are examined separately, the findings are striking. One in four men and 16.4% of women who were between 65 and 69 were in the labor force in 1989 (Aging America, 1991). A longitudinal study of 2,816 men revealed that 30% returned to work after they retired and remained at work for about 2 years (Modern Maturity, 1990–1991).

Another option is to “work” without pay as a volunteer; this might function as a substitute for paid work but is often combined with part-time employment (Chambré, 1984, 1987; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1991).

Newspaper and magazine articles extol the virtues of volunteering; if old age is a frontier, then volunteering is a way to “make a difference” and “be a hero.” With titles like “Three Cheers for Older Heroes,” “It’s Time to Serve Our Country,” “Giving Time, Sharing Knowledge,” and “A Legend in Her Own Town,” the articles present what might be an overly positive view of volunteer work and the people involved (Brody, 1985; Deets, 1989; Kahn, 1986; Lindeman, 1988). A New York Times Magazine article, “Assignment: 90 Days on the Polish Front,” describes how a retired executive applied his otherwise unused expertise to improve the productivity of a glass factory and, moreover, he “helped a company see the benefit of a free-enterprise system and provided some of the tools to enable it to participate” (Karoly, 1990, p. 78).

### Changing Demographic Characteristics

An important finding in past research, that volunteerism appeared to decline as people aged, might not have been the result of growing older but a reflection of differences between age cohorts with regard to average education, typical occupation, and foreign-born status.

Changes in the older population have probably accounted for the currently higher level of involvement and the weaker link between volunteering and age. Today’s older population is better educated, somewhat more affluent (Aging America, 1991; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990; positively associated with volunteering), and more often native born (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990; Independent Sector, 1990; being foreign born is negatively associated with volunteering) than past generations. All of these changes contribute to higher levels of participation, especially the rise in education. Over the past 30 years, the gap between the educational achievements of the young and the old has virtually disap-

---

### Table 2. Percentage of Americans Who Volunteered in the Past Year, by Age, for Selected Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1973–74</th>
<th>1989</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 to 24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>over</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See Table 1 for descriptions of how volunteer activity was defined in these surveys.


*From Independent Sector, 1990. Based on special tabulations of Independent Sector data for the author, the percentages of those involved in formal volunteering done for an organization are 38.6% for all individuals 65 and older, 43.3% for the 65–74 age group, and 31.3% for those 75 and over.

---

*From ACTION, 1975.

peared. In 1960 and 1970, the typical person over 65 had about 8 years of schooling (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1975). By 1989, this rose to 12.7 years, much closer to the average for all age groups (12.7 years); about one in five older people attended college, and one in ten graduated (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990).

Education has a strong influence on whether people volunteer. A secondary analysis of the National Council on Aging survey in 1981 revealed that relatively few with 8 or less years of school volunteered (9%), compared with 17% with some high school, 26% of high school graduates, 38% with some college, and 47% of college graduates (Chambre, 1987). More recent figures are 38% for high school graduates and 66% for college graduates (Mariott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991).

Today’s older population consists of “pioneers” in another way: they represent the first generation of elders who reached maturity in a society with mass higher education. Their educational profile explains why many people are attracted to different communities and interest have both increased. In 1974, only one in ten nonvolunteers indicated that they were interested in volunteer work (National Council on Aging, 1975), compared with 25% in one recent survey (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1991) and 37% in another (Mariott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991).

Social Policies Promoting Volunteerism by Elders

Cultural and demographic changes have increased the supply of elders interested in volunteer work and also the demand for their services. Starting in the mid-1960s, the decline in full-time homemakers as more women entered the paid labor force was expected to create a shortage in the supply of daytime volunteers (U.S. Department of Labor, 1969). Older volunteers could take the place of these women and, either by design or by chance, the prospect of a shortage of daytime volunteers coincided with the development of a number of initiatives designed to expand community service by older persons.

Over the past 25 years, a broad array of programs under public and private sponsorship have provided opportunities for older people to volunteer. Today, older volunteers provide social and emotional support to potential child abusers, abused or neglected children, patients in mental hospitals, retarded children and adults, families with chronically ill or retarded members, and boarder babies, including some with AIDS. Older volunteers work in day care centers, schools, prisons, and hospitals. Other roles include consulting with small business owners, mentoring young people, participating in VISTA or the Peace Corps, providing services to other long-lived people in their own communities and in nursing homes, parent education, health education to other elders, working as auxiliary police, doing income tax returns, working as consumer advocates, and engaging in lobbying and voter registration. (For discussions of new roles for older volunteers, see Baggett, 1981; Costello, 1991; Dowling, 1989; Friedman, 1975; Modern Maturity, 1984a; Harvey, 1983; Korte & Gupta, 1991; Kozak & Degar, 1982; Levine, 1982; People, 1990; Murphy, 1988; Piper, 1978; Sainer & Kallen, 1972; Schmidt, 1985; Sunset, 1989; Springer, 1989; Children Today, 1987; Tierce & Seelbach, 1987; Aging, 1988.)

These efforts have expanded the supply of older volunteers by making volunteerism attractive, recruiting people and helping them find appropriate jobs, and, in some cases, like RSVP and Foster Grandparents, reducing economic barriers by providing stipends, carfare, or a free lunch. Actual participation and interest have both increased. In 1974, only one in ten nonvolunteers indicated that they were interested in volunteer work (National Council on Aging, 1975), compared with 25% in one recent survey (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1991) and 37% in another (Mariott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991).

Government-sponsored Programs

Several programs were initiated by the federal government during the 1960s. The first was the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), started in 1964 by the Small Business Administration (Bradney, 1986; Foster, 1983). Its 13,000 members provide management expertise to prospective or current small business owners (Buffam, 1991).

The three other federally sponsored programs were created separately and merged into ACTION when it was formed in 1971. The Foster Grandparent program was begun in 1965 as an antipoverty program to provide community service employment and an income supplement in the form of a “stipend” to low-income elders. In 1990, 27,000 Foster Grandparents, 89% of them women, provided social and emotional support to children with “special or exceptional needs” including autistic, physically handicapped, abused, and neglected children, teenage parents, and adolescents with substance abuse problems (ACTION, 1990).

Currently the largest program, with about 410,000 participants, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) was established in 1969. It represented the nationwide implementation of the Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience (SERVE) program in Staten Island, New York. RSVP recruits volunteers, often through other organizations, who are screened and placed in RSVP-sponsored programs or other organizations. Its original premise was that older people would benefit from volunteering as part of a group. The approach has been modified, since RSVP volunteers work alongside people of all ages, but the idea is still evident in the fact that participation confers an identity as an RSVP volunteer. People working in scattered locations are affiliated with a broader effort. Material rewards with the RSVP logo — shopping bags, calendars, or pens — and yearly recognition events foster a sense of community. Beginning with human service roles, RSVP jobs now range from working with boarder babies or for the VITA (Volunteers in Tax Assistance) program to technical assistance and consulting assignments.

The newest federally sponsored program, the Senior Companion program, established in 1974, also offers a stipend; 10,000 volunteers currently visit frail
elders in their homes and provide them with social support (ACTION, 1990).

Some local RSVP, Senior Companion, and Foster Grandparent programs are public-private partnerships since they are sponsored by nongovernmental organizations and rely on private or local funding. In 1990, half of RSVP, 54% of Foster Grandparent, and 38% of Senior Companion program funds were raised from outside ACTION, from private or local government funds (ACTION, 1990).

**Private Sector Initiatives**

Similar to other social policy domains, the federal government’s role in starting and funding programs has diminished and public-private partnerships or private sector initiatives have become more prominent in the development of new programs for older volunteers. Some efforts targeted towards all age groups also attract elders, such as the “Give Five” campaign of Independent Sector, a national network of Voluntary Action Centers that match volunteers with placements (Allen, 1986), programs like the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers (1989), and President Bush’s Points of Lights Initiative, which has focused public attention on volunteerism (Goss, 1991a, 1991b).

From 16 programs for older volunteers in the U.S. in the mid-1960s, (Sainer & Zander, 1971), the number of community-based efforts has become too large to estimate. One of the earliest nongovernment programs was the Shepherd’s Center in Kansas City, where a coalition of 22 churches in 1972 created a network of programs where elders were collaborators as well as clients (Payne, 1977). In 1984, the National Council on the Aging piloted the Family Friends program, through which volunteers provide social support to a family with a mentally ill member or a retarded child (Wolfe, 1991). Initially funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the eight national demonstration sites are being expanded to six additional locations with funds from the federal Administration on Aging (Perspective on Aging, 1992), including 148 consultation projects in New York City in 1990 (National Executive Service Corps, 1990a). Its Science/Math Enrichment program in Baltimore City Schools is designed to motivate students and to expand their understanding of how math and science are used in the work world (National Executive Service Corps, 1990b).

The National Retiree Volunteer Center, established in 1986, offers technical assistance to corporations interested in establishing programs for retired employees. For example, the Honeywell Corporation sponsors the New Vista School for teenage mothers that is partly staffed by its retirees (Higuera, 1992). By the first half of 1991, the National Retiree Volunteer Center had helped initiate projects in 44 corporations (National Retiree Volunteer Center, 1991).

**What Has Been the Impact of Programs on Volunteerism?**

It is difficult to unravel the individual effects of demographic and cultural changes in the older population and the impact of expanded opportunities in programs targeted towards them. The programs themselves tend to be age-segregated and designed to help elders acquire new social roles when they retire or when their family obligations decrease (see Chambre, 1984). Empirical research suggests that these features oversimplify the diverse paths to volunteer activity of older persons. The following sections summarize these studies, review some demographic shifts, and offer some different ways to conceptualize future policies.

**Age Integration in Volunteer Activities**

Most elders volunteer in settings where there is a mix of age groups. In 1988, very few older volunteers in the U.S. were in ACTION or AARP-sponsored programs (4% worked for RSVP, 2% for Foster Grandparents, 4% for Senior Companion, and 8% in AARP programs [Hamilton, Frederick, & Schneider, 1988]), and in one local sample in Canada, 38% reported “working in connection with other seniors” (Volunteer Centre of Calgary, 1991). As in all age groups, the largest concentration of elders (57%) work for churches and synagogues (Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991). Some organizations rely heavily on older volunteers but without necessarily designing programs for them. For example, more than half of Red Cross volunteers are over the age of 55, many having been involved for several decades (Smith, 1991).

**Work, Family, and Volunteerism**

A second feature of older volunteer programs is the assumption that retirement, widowhood, and/or reduction of parental responsibilities motivate elders
to become involved or to expand their participation (cf. Chambré, 1984). Pamphlets and publications note that community service is a work substitute — “Just because you’re retired doesn’t mean you don’t want to work” (Modern Maturity, 1984b). Plying one’s trade as a volunteer has some decided advantages since a person can “work” part-time without the more rigid scheduling and financial dependence of a job. Others, like Foster Grandparents, define a role in quasi-kinship terms.

A large proportion of older volunteers are continuing previous patterns of community work. In western Canada, 45% reported being involved in volunteer work “throughout their lives” and only 21% noted that they actually began after they retired (Volunteer Centre of Calgary, 1991). Current programs might reinforce participation by people with past involvement rather than attract new volunteers. Among new enrollees in New York City’s RSVP program, retention was far greater for people who had volunteered in the past (Stevens, 1989).

Role loss does not necessarily foster volunteerism. Having free time (17.1%; Independent Sector, 1990), seeking companionship (25%), and wanting to reduce one’s sense of loneliness (17%; Mariant Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991) motivate a minority of elders. Indeed, elders have a higher tendency to volunteer if they are married and if they are employed (Chambré, 1984, 1987; Herzog & Morgan, in press) irrespective of their age or health. Many successfully combine paid and unpaid work, especially if they work part-time: 58% of working and 41.8% of retired elders volunteered in 1990 (Mariant Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991, Tables 2.1 and 17.1).

Why are people who have left the paid labor force less often involved in volunteer work? One possibility, which has not been examined empirically, is that they might be unwilling to work without payment. For some, retirement was a welcome relief from an unrewarding job. A small number (4.4%; Independent Sector, 1990, Table 3.22) believe they “paid their dues” to society when they were younger (Fitzgerald, 1986). Retirees do not appear to reallocate the time spent working to social or communal activities; a good deal of it is used for solitary and passive pursuits like watching television, especially for men (Palmore, 1981). The tendency to join and to participate in voluntary associations might not change substantially over a person’s life (Ward, 1979).

In addition to the assumption that retirement would motivate elders to begin to volunteer, programs set up fictive kinship relationships with children, adolescents, and adults. Involvement in community work is often an extension of people’s work and family obligations. This is less common for elders since relatively few (5%) volunteered to ensure the “continuation of activities or institutions I or my family benefit from” compared with a third of all volunteers (Independent Sector, 1990). Elders report that they are less often asked to volunteer: 36.7% of people over 65 compared with 41.1% of all respondents indicated that they were involved in current activities because someone asked them (Independent Sector, 1990). Although there are more volunteer opportunities for older persons than in the past, there are not enough ways they can be involved in the same way as younger people, to be asked to volunteer by organizations that benefit them, their families, or their friends.

Recruiting the Uninvolved

Even though participation tends to be higher among elders with histories of community involvement, it is possible to attract new volunteers: close to half of a sample of people in the Family Friends program (N = 180) were new to volunteering (Farkas, 1991). Recruitment of retirees, in particular, is a cost-effective strategy because they devote more time than other groups when they are involved: 69% of retired, 55% of employed, and 54% of homemakers devoted 10 or more hours a month to volunteer work (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1991).

Retirees and previously uninvolved volunteers might be attracted by different types of roles. Some might be interested in community service that is defined as a “leisure alternative,” not a way to work or be a grandparent but a change from playing golf or watching television. Defined in this way, some elders could be attracted by the chance to engage in a contributory form of leisure.

Schools and youth organizations could involve older people by recruiting grandparents and great-grandparents just as they involve parents. They are especially needed now because far fewer parents are available during daytime hours than in the past. It is realistic to recruit grandparents since most regularly visit their grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). This strategy has another consequence. Grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood are meaningful but sometimes quite ambiguous social roles (see Chambré, n.d.). Involvement with organizations serving their offspring might reduce the role confusion some older persons experience by providing a context for shared experiences.

Changing Residential and Educational Patterns

Several demographic changes are altering the location, needs, and interests of older volunteers. These need to be taken into account in designing policies and developing programs. In 1989, over half of elders lived in nine states. Each of these states (California, New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and New Jersey) had more than a million older persons.

Some of this residential concentration is the result of migration. The impact of permanent and seasonal migration on volunteerism needs to be better understood since both types of migration are more frequent among better educated and more affluent elders (Krout, 1983; Longino & Marshall, 1990), the kinds of people who tend to volunteer. Organizations might systematically offer information about volunteer opportunities to new migrants. For seasonal migrants, short-term and recurring assignments could be created, especially in national orga-
nizations like Scouts and the Red Cross, so people could do the same job in different locations. Some seasonal migrants move to resort areas that experience periods of greater demand for health care, social services, and recreational facilities at times that closely correspond to the movement of “snowbirds.” Short-term and seasonal volunteer assignments could help organizations respond at these times of greater demand.

A larger number of elders now live in suburban areas than in central cities (Aging America, 1991). This change suggests a need to arrange transportation for older volunteers, not just reimburse costs. A second strategy is to create at-home volunteer opportunities. This is currently done in the Linking Lifetimes program, in which people offer social support and information over the telephone.

The overall supply of older volunteers is likely to increase in the future because there will be more older persons and their average education will continue to rise. Currently, one in ten are college graduates as compared with 16% of those 55-64 and 22% of those 45-54 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990). A better-educated older population will include more potential volunteers and a large number with skills and past experience in community work. These qualities suggest, however, that there might be fewer people interested in clerical and unskilled tasks. There will be a need to continue to expand volunteer opportunities for well-educated elders and to create work climates where people can find gratification in performing tasks that might not fully utilize their skills but are needed to sustain organizations.

Conclusion

A larger proportion of elders are currently engaged in volunteer work than 25 years ago, the result of changing public images of old age and elders. Themselves, a redefinition of the nature and merits of volunteer work, a better-educated population, and expanded opportunities in public and private sector programs. A continued rise in average education suggests that the number of older volunteers is likely to increase over the next several decades. However, more people are likely to combine community work with employment, and the kinds of volunteer jobs they find attractive may also change.

Recent research suggests several ways to consolidate and expand participation in the future. Older people could be recruited through important social roles that many of them acquire in later life, grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood. In addition to being defined as work- or family-substitutes, volunteer work might be described and people recruited to become involved in activities that are a meaningful alternative to leisure activities. Since permanent and seasonal migration influence availability for community work, systematic steps might be undertaken to recruit permanent migrants and to develop opportunities responsive to seasonal migration. Finally, the increase in elders residing in suburban areas suggests a need to offer transportation and more in-home volunteer jobs. These strategies would increase the participation of a growing, strategic source of unpaid labor and offer elders opportunities to maintain or expand social relationships, apply job skills learned over the course of a lifetime, and contribute to their communities and their families.

References

ACTION. (n.d.). Some of the most productive people are . . . retired.
Washington, DC: Author.

Washington, DC: Author.

Washington, DC: Author.

Washington, DC: Author.


Voluntary Action Leadership, Winter, 4-6.

Older volunteers make the difference.
Washington, DC: Author.

public school setting.
Educational Gerontology, 7, 21-31.

50 Plus, 6 (June), 68-69.

Public Productivity Review, 40 (Winter), 57-67.

In Resourceful aging: Today and tomorrow
(Congress proceedings).

Chambéré, S. M. (n.d.). Expanding community service through role acquisition:
Volunteerism and grandparenthood.
Unpublished manuscript.

An empirical test of activity theory.
The Gerontologist, 24, 292-298.

senior class.

In Resourceful aging: Today and tomorrow
(Congress proceedings).

place in the family, a life apart.
New York: Basic.

Children Today, 18. (1987). Starting a senior latchkey program,
July-August, p. 5.


volunteer service.
In Resourceful aging: Today and tomorrow
(Congress proceedings).

In Resourceful aging: Today and tomorrow
(Congress proceedings).

volunteer world.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Modern Maturity, 32
(June-July), 11.

Life, pp. 102-104.

Ekert, D. J. (1986). The busy ethic: Moral continuity between work and
retirement.
The Gerontologist, 26, 239-244.

Perspective on Aging, November/December, 26-29.

In Resourceful aging: Today and tomorrow
(Congress proceedings).

discussion of the Minnesota Senior Study.
The Gerontologist, 27, 183-194.

New York: Simon and Schuster.

Beverly Hills: Sage.

Perspectives on Aging, 17(17), 25.

Friedman, S. (1975). Resident welcoming committee: Institutionalized elderly in volunteer services to their peers.
The Gerontologist, 15, 362-367.


The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 3(17), 1.

Goss, K. A. (1991b). Points of Light Foundation: Money, power, big ques-
tions.
The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 3(17), 8, 10, 12.
A Place in Time
Care Givers for Their Elderly
By Tom Koch
"In Mirrored Lives: Aging Children and Elderly Parents, Koch described his five years of caring for his ailing father. Here he tells the stories of others who have chosen to take on the care of aged relatives and friends . . . poignant recollections . . ." Library Journal

The Older Volunteer
An Annotated Bibliography
Compiled by C. Neil Bull and Nancy D. Levine
This bibliography contains annotated entries for nearly 400 topically arranged works on the older adult as volunteer.
0-313-28125-4. $49.95.

The Frail Elderly
Problems, Needs, and Community Responses
By Carole Cox
Considers the dimensions of the frail elderly population and support responses at the community and national level.
0-86569-031-6. $55.00.
A paperback is also available: 0-86569-228-9. $17.95

Education for Older Adult Learning
A Selected, Annotated Bibliography
By Reva M. Greenberg
This bibliography includes annotated citations for more than 700 resources on all aspects of older adult education.
0-313-28368-0. $65.00.

Aging in Place with Dignity
International Solutions Relating to the Low-Income and Frail Elderly
Edited by Leonard F. Heumann and Duncan P. Boldy
Analyzes programs in industrialized countries which keep frail and low-income elderly in their communities with proper support systems.
0-275-94356-9. $55.00.

Care for Frail Elders
Developing Community Solutions
By Walter N. Leutz, John A. Capitman, Margaret MacAdam, and Ruby Abrahams
Leutz and his colleagues provide practical guidance for implementing a community-based program of care and present new analyses of the range of needs among the frail aged.
0-86569-029-4. $45.00.

The Image of Older Adults in the Media
An Annotated Bibliography
By Frank Nuessel
Annotated bibliography of more than 550 books and articles on older adults in print and non-print media.
0-313-28018-5. $47.95.

Developments and Research on Aging
An International Handbook
Edited by Erdman B. Palmore
Collects and summarizes programs and research in gerontology in 25 countries.
0-313-27785-0. $79.95.

Gerontological Social Work
An Annotated Bibliography
Edited by Iris A. Parham
Annotated entries on books, articles, and other material on gerontological social work.
0-313-28538-1. $49.95.

Demography and Retirement
The Twenty-First Century
Edited by Anna M. Rappaport and Sylvester J. Schieber
This contributed volume examines demographic issues relating to the coming retirement of America's baby boomers.
0-275-94248-1. $55.00.