

## Volunteer Spotlight: Helene Victor (continued)

Helene was also recently honored for her work with a city Alzheimer's center. "My mother had Alzheimer's, and mostly I spend time at health fairs, talking and chatting with people, giving them information about what to expect at different stages and making them feel less worried."

Twice weekly she and good friend Elaine Orr also consult with different agencies to discuss how the Volunteer Referral Center can help them. Through this, they not only touch base with current associations but also continually explore and forge new alliances.

"I started out with one to two locations I volunteered at and I loved it," says Helene. "I felt welcome and I made friends, and I kept doing more and more, and now of course I feel like I'm working in the candy store! I'm never home, I never lie down—I'm exhausted, but every time we do something I go, 'Whoa! This is so much fun!'"

"I was like a mad person when I first came here," she laughs, "and I still am! There's too many things to do—I've made a total maniac of myself!"

She notes that previously, "I had lived in an entirely different world, in a different life. I was married, a housewife—it was a protected world. And then being thrown into a completely changed environment, you have to do things for yourself. At first, (after arriving) I just kept stopping in the middle of the street and going, 'Nothing is the same—it's all different!'"

"I still have some rough days," she concludes, "but I never regretted the move. I have friends and people I can count on here who are just terrific, and there's loads of things to do. I think it was the best decision I ever made."

Or visit our website at [www.volunteer-referral.org](http://www.volunteer-referral.org)

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161 Madison Ave, Suite 5 SW  
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Bridging Volunteers and Agencies

## VRC Fall Benefit At Primary Stages



On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Volunteer Referral Center hosted its Fall Benefit at Primary Stages. The show was the latest New York debut for the elder statesman of American theater, Horton Foote, "Dividing the Estate". Interest for the benefit was off the charts, and the Volunteer Referral Center sold every last ticket they could get for the show.

"Dividing the Estate" is a "deeply funny" show with an "authenticity of tone, poised like life between slapstick and tragedy" (*New York Times* review). The show revolves around a small town Texas family quarreling over whether they should divide the old family estate as the family matriarch reaches the end of her life. The play shows in its sharp eye for life's little details that Mr. Foote still has it at ninety-two years of age.

Prior to the show, many people were able to share dinner at the Cinema Café. The food was excellent, almost as good as the company. The Volunteer Referral Center would like to extend a great big THANK YOU to all of our wonderful contributors for making this event a success, and raising money to help the VRC continue its important work of matching volunteers in New York City with the agencies that need them.

## Who Volunteers in the United States?

(All information taken from U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Volunteering in the United States, 2005 Report.*)

We at the Volunteer Referral Center often wonder about who exactly volunteers and how we can reach those people. Maybe you too have wondered what age groups of people are most likely to volunteer, or how much time the average volunteer spends per year doing that volunteering. We have needs for many different kinds of volunteers at the Volunteer Referral Center. People who can volunteer during the day, in the evening on the weekend. People who want to work in fundraising, education, in healthcare settings, with the elderly. People who can give up a couple hours here and there and people who can commit to 20-40 hours a week. The variety of different organizations that the VRC has allows our interviewers to meet all these individual needs when matching volunteers with agencies.

About 65.4 million people in the United States volunteered at least once in the year 2005. That's 28.8% of the population. One fourth of men compared to one-third of women volunteered. The group most likely to volunteer is aged 35-44 years old (34.5%), then 45-54 year olds (32.7%), followed by teenagers (30.4%). People in their twenties and people over age 65 were the least likely to volunteer.

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## Volunteer Spotlight: Helene Victor

Each call to the VRC's Helene Victor to set up an interview for this article finds her arriving at, departing from, or en route to her next location, and is accompanied by the background cacophony of honking taxis, screeching subways, and other urban sounds.



Though she moves with the speed and confidence of a native, the former teacher and housewife gave herself her own radical sabbatical eight years ago when, despite not knowing anyone in the area, she decided to pursue a lifelong dream to move to New York City.

Helene may be retired, but her schedule suggests otherwise; one week's appointments range from volunteering to teach New York City third graders to offering much-needed advice and solace to people with Alzheimer's as well as their caregivers. She also helps city youth with award-winning theatrical productions at the nonprofit organization All-Stars, and volunteers at the Museum of Natural History and occasionally at a nearby classical theater—and of course also spends time at her home base at the Volunteer Referral Center, where she works in many different capacities. And that should cover about half the week.

Helene may be retired, but her schedule suggests otherwise.

Helene's current location represents both a dramatic move and an oft-longed-for homecoming. Born in Jamaica, Queens, Helene was raised in Texas and then moved with her husband to Long Island, where she worked as an elementary school teacher, teaching grades one through six.

While she was in her early fifties, and after 25 years of marriage, Helene's husband passed away. The loss was compounded by the passing of both of her parents around the same time. "It was tough, really tough," she says. "The way I handled it was to be very busy—and to not handle it. And then one day the bottom dropped out and I had to sit down and grieve."

However, in the time that followed, she realized that she wanted to lead an active, contributing life. She recalled a year she spent as a child living with her grandparents in Middle Village, Queens; the experience had made such an impression on her that even years later she remembered it vividly, viewing New York as the "promised land." Comparatively, Long Island felt insulated and didn't seem like the best place for single people, and she realized that if she stayed it would be "like living in a mausoleum."

Marshaling her resources, she concluded, "I had always wanted to live in the city, and since supposedly good comes out of everything, I got a new friend—called the computer—and with its help I decided to set up a new life in a new place."

"I knew I that I still wanted to work with kids and teach, so before I left Long Island I went online and messed around until I found the Volunteer Referral Center, and the day after I moved I went there."

She acknowledges the VRC and the warmth of its leaders, among them Nancy Carr and Brienne Cliadakis, as instrumental in her transition and raves, "All the ladies have been wonderful, and it's a special place to come."

Helene's interview at VRC got off to a good start. Her interviewer listened to Helene's reasons for volunteering and worked with her to come up with what would end up being not just one, but several good matches with nonprofit agencies. As Helene described it, "the first person I met was Kathy Pershan...Kathy is spectacular; you can sit and talk to her about absolutely anything."

"I knew that I still wanted to work with kids and teach, so before I left Long Island I went online and messed around until I found the Volunteer Referral Center, and the day after I moved I went there."

## Who Volunteers in the United States? (continued)

Married people were much more likely to volunteer than single people (34.1% to 23.0%), and people with minor children were also much more likely to volunteer (37.0% to 25.5%), showing us that volunteering is a family activity. The median time spent volunteering was 50 hours a year or about one hour per week. Religious (34.8%) and educational/ youth service related (26.2%) organizations were the most common places people volunteered.

The most commonly reported activity during volunteering was fundraising (29.7%), then collecting, preparing, distributing or serving food (26.3%), engaging in general labor or supplying transportation (22.5%) and tutoring or teaching (21.3%)

40% of volunteers got involved on their own initiative. 43% of volunteers were asked to volunteer by somebody. So why don't people volunteer? 45.6% of people cite a lack of time, 15.2% face medical or health issues, and 9.3% cite family or childcare responsibilities. Busy people often find volunteering to be a therapeutic experience, and many volunteer possibilities are open to families working together. So find a reason to volunteer today!

### YPC League of Women Voters Event

On Monday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, the Young Professional Committee of The Volunteer Referral Center hosted an after work volunteer event on behalf of the League of Women Voters. Approximately 15 volunteers participated in prepping a newsletter that the League of Voters sends out on a quarterly basis. The event was hosted at West Lounge (on the West Side Highway). Thanks to all the YPC participants for braving the freezing temperatures and fierce winds coming off the Hudson to help the League of Women Voters. The League's quarters are quite cramped and it is quite challenging for them to get this quarterly mailing put together. They were effusive in their thanks and praise to the VRC's YPC for helping them with this endeavor!

## WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

2007 has seen a lot of new activity at the Volunteer Referral Center. We had a new addition to the VRC family with Brienne's new baby boy, Nathaniel Alexander Gadea, born on May 15<sup>th</sup>. It's only a matter of time before he gets started on his long volunteering career.

The Young Professional Committee (YPC) has gained great momentum thanks to the work of YPC coordinators Tonya Leary and Lisa Kohn who have also joined the VRC's Board of Directors. The YPC is a new VRC committee to help busy young professionals get even busier by volunteering. It is part of VRC's leadership development efforts. Thanks to Tonya and Lisa's hard work, the YPC has had a number of great volunteer and social events this year.

Some events have combined volunteering and socializing especially well, including an event with the League of Women Voters where the YPC prepared a mailing for the LWV at West Lounge over appetizers and cocktails. Who said volunteering can't be a party? Speaking of parties, the Family Center's Holiday Party was another terrific event where volunteers manned craft stations and families dealing with a terminally ill family member enjoyed a range of activities.

From Green Chimney's "Birds of Prey" day to art projects and supplies being sent to African children, the YPC has done a lot of fun events this year that have helped a lot of people. The YPC is only getting bigger and better. If you're looking to volunteer and have a little free time, maybe you will want to get involved with the next YPC project. Go to [www.volunteer-referral.org](http://www.volunteer-referral.org) for more details.

Thank you so much to all of our volunteers, and to our donors who made our Fall Benefit, "Dividing the Estate" at Primary Stages, such a success.

With warm regards,

Nancy Carr  
President



VRC President Nancy Carr