



Bridging Volunteers and Agencies

VOLUNTEERING NEWS

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www.volunteer-referral.org

Spring 2006

VRC's Young Professional Committee up and running



Share your Heart: YPC volunteers mentoring at the art projects.

Last year VRC started a Young Professional Committee to promote volunteerism among young people in New York and to raise funds for the Volunteer Referral Center. Currently about 100 young professionals are part of the YPC network.

This year, the YPC began organizing volunteer events in which members of the YPC network can participate in team activities. Our first and very successful event, "Resolve to Do Good," was held on January 22, 2006. The YPC organized a pizza and bingo party at a service center for homeless men and women at the Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter (www.ncsinc.org). Seven YPC members arranged and served a pizza lunch, followed by a bingo game with CVS gift certificates as prizes.

The second event, "Share Your Heart," took place on February 25. This creative arts event was organized by Free Arts NYC (www.freeartsnyc.org) in collaboration with the Children's Aid Society (www.childrensaidsociety.org). Seven YPC volunteers attended the event. Each volunteer mentor was paired with a child who was between five and twelve years old. Together, the volunteer and child went through several theme based recreational activities. The theme of the day was African Art, in honor of Black History Month, and the children were able to choose from making masks, djembé drums, African necklaces, African games, or colorful shields. This way, the children had the opportunity to explore different art materials and techniques.

After lunch, the day closed with a very festive and interactive musical performance that included African drums and a dancer. Both children and volunteers ended up dancing to the music. This event was a great experience for everybody involved.

In March, YPC volunteers set up an activity at the Sarah Powell Huntington House, where homeless women who have been involved in the criminal justice system are reunited with their children. The Huntington House, home of 37 mothers and about 35 children, is part of the Women's Prison Association (www.wpaonline.org). The event was a Spring "Eggstravaganza" and included decorating eggs, making baskets, and an egg hunt in Tompkins Square Park. Everybody, including our seven volunteers, had a terrific time and particularly enjoyed the outdoor part of this event.

We are always planning new events. For the YPC calendar, please see our website at: www.volunteer-referral.org/ypc.

If you are interested in joining VRC's YPC, or if you are a volunteer director interested in organizing an event with the YPC, please call our office at 212-889-4805 or email ypc@volunteer-referral.org.

NEWSLETTER TEAM

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VRC's Board Members are dedicated volunteers

VRC is pleased to welcome three new members to its Board of Directors. Doris May, who serves as an interviewer at VRC, joined the Board in January. And a former board member, Julie Marks, rejoined the Board in January as well. Christine Pascarella is the third new board member. She works at the International Rescue Committee and joined us in March.

Many of our board members donate much of their time and energy not only to VRC, but also to other non-profit agencies. President Nancy Carr and Vice President Alice Greif also serve on the boards of the Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter (NCS) and the Women's Prison Association.

Nancy Carr deserves special mention. For many years at Thanksgiving she has baked over 80 pumpkin and apple pies to complete the Turkey Day Dinner served to the homeless clients of the Neighborhood Coalition. Millicent Cavanaugh, Director of Volunteer Services at NCS, says that "both NCS and our clients appreciate the pies a great deal! Nancy's pies have become part of a holiday tradition that staff and clients look forward to."

Two other board members singled out for their volunteer efforts are Liddy Guiher and Mary Lambert. For her work at the Visiting Nurse Services of New York, both in the office and visiting hospice patients, Liddy received their Volunteer of the Year award. In addition, Liddy has been a board member and dedicated volunteer for ARTEK (Art of the Early Keyboard) for many years. Luckily for us, she spends two days a week volunteering in the VRC office, too.

Mary, who is a VRC interviewer, also volunteers at the Ronald McDonald House and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. She was recognized for her work as chair of the membership committee of the Federation.

These are just a few examples of the community involvement of our dedicated Board. VRC is proud to have such an active Board!



VRC President Nancy Carr baking more than 80 pies for the homeless



Where do our volunteers go?

VRC refers many people to a diverse array of non-profit agencies throughout the five boroughs of New York City. In the past five years, we more than doubled the number of referrals we made, an increase of 218% to be exact. Last year, VRC made more than 2,800 referrals to NYC agencies, an increase of 27% over 2004. So, where do VRC's volunteers end up?

In 2005, some of the most popular categories for volunteer work were those involving "Youth & Children", "The Arts," and "Hospital and Health Related." We made 45% of our referrals to agencies in those categories. Agencies in the categories "Recreation", "The Environment", and "Working with animals" received fewer referrals. Only 6% of our referrals last year were to agencies in those categories. However, one must realize that the agencies in these categories make up a smaller percent of VRC's agencies as well.

Over a period of five years (2001-2005), did the popularity of certain categories change, or did they stay the same? The percentage that is included after each category reflects the average percentage of all referrals that were made in specific categories in the last five years.

From 2001 to 2005, the percentage of referrals that we made to agencies in the following categories increased: "The Arts" (14.2%), "The Elderly" (5.0%), and "Youth and Children" (13.6%). We continue to send about the same percentage of our volunteers to agencies that focus on "Working with animals" (2.2%), "The Environment" (1.4%), "Homeless/Soup Kitchens" (5.2%), and "Recreation" (1.0%). A slight decrease can be detected in "Civic/Community/Advocacy/International Programs" (13.6%), "Education and Mentoring" (12.0%), "Hospital and Health related" (15.8%), "Prison reform/Crime related/Hotlines" (8.0%), and "Women/Family" (6.0%).

NEW VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWER JOINS VRC

As a non-profit organization, VRC relies heavily on the help of volunteers. We are very pleased to welcome yet another volunteer interviewer, **Syeatta Bolden**, who has proven to be a great addition. Syeatta works at DC 1707 Local 389 Home Care Employees Health, Welfare & Pension Fund. This non-profit organization serves approximately 6,200 members from 12 agencies, providing health and retirement benefits, which members receive as part of their union membership. Syeatta began working there in 1992 as a college intern. Currently, she handles multiple projects for the Fund, such as the support of home care workers in all of their endeavors.

Time for a change; TIME TO VOLUNTEER! An interviewer's diary

As a young chemist at GE in the 1960s, VRC interviewer Elaine Orr worked for the Space Center at Cape Kennedy on one of the first space flights: a biosatellite with a monkey aboard. In the following years, Elaine left GE to raise two sons and to build, together with her husband, a communications company from its birth to its current status as a worldwide telephone system provider.

By age 60 however, Elaine was ready for another blast-off. When her suburban Philadelphia neighborhood changed -- her now ex-husband and his new wife settled on her block -- she decided it was time for a major change. Putting her farmhouse and furniture on the market, and packing only her computer, bed, and three pets, the intrepid six took off on a one-way trip ... destination, New York City.

Elaine's son worried about her choice and wondered what she would do in New York. Her response: "What can't you do there?" Elaine had made no plans and just wanted to explore: "I suppose I sometimes do things in extremes and I chose New York because it was totally different from where I had been living. I was no longer building a career, my kids were grown and gone, and I decided that this was my time."

Volunteering in the Big Apple

Upon arrival in New York, Elaine promptly began working as a guide at the Central Park Zoo. Volunteering seemed a great way to experience something new and to meet people. After hearing about the Volunteer Referral Center, she soon became an evening interviewer, helping potential volunteers find their own callings.

Elaine explains that making a perfect match between the volunteer and the agency requires research, knowledge, and observation.

"Sometimes people themselves don't know quite what they want," says Elaine. "But through conversation you can suggest things they hadn't even considered. I look for little things to see where they perk up. I usually find at least two or more agencies that appeal to the volunteer and that makes me happy."

"People who come into our office are often in times of transition. Some are retired and now want to do something entirely different. Some are looking to change careers or are in-between jobs. I believe volunteering is great if you are in-between jobs. Not only does it help keep you motivated, it helps you feel validated and makes valuable connections. Volunteering strengthens your resume."

The Many Rewards of Volunteering

"There are really two aspects of my VRC experience," Elaine notes. "It's satisfying learning about people's interests and seeing their eyes light up when you find the right place for them. The other aspect is going to the agencies we serve for site visits with Helene Victor, another VRC volunteer. We learn first hand about the agencies, their work and their volunteer needs."

In addition, "Since I am retired and I am not one for going out on the town at night, volunteering is the best way for me to meet people. Through the various places I volunteer, I have made many friends. Basically, I run around with three different groups. It's great -- I can wear the same outfit three times and no one notices."

She concludes with an audible grin, "Moving here took a little courage but once I got the process going I found the 'what' in terms of 'What was I going to do?' Now a year later my son calls and says 'My goodness you're busy!'"

Interview conducted by Justina Williams

WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

2005 was a very successful year for the Volunteer Referral Center. We realized an impressive increase in our core-service -- referring volunteers to New York City's non-profit organizations. Last year we made more than 2800 referrals, an increase of 27% over 2004. In addition, we conducted 915 interviews in 2005, an increase of 20%. We at VRC are very proud of that result. At this time we are working hard to make 2006 as big a success.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who supported our annual appeal and our recent theater benefit. Both were very successful. The support of our many friends makes it possible for us to continue our efforts on behalf of volunteerism in New York City.

This newsletter again presents some interesting articles, which I hope you will enjoy. One article highlights the activities of our Young Professional Committee, which has become very active. Another article in our series "an interviewer's diary" features Elaine Orr, one of our interviewers.

Again, I would like to thank everyone who supports VRC. I do not know what we would do without you!

With warm regards,

Nancy Carr
President



VRC President Nancy Carr

Individual contributions

In response to our 2005 Annual Appeal, our fall 2005 benefit (Singers over Manhattan, Eric Reed Trio), and our 2006 spring benefit (The Right Kind of People, Primary Stages), many people supported VRC. We at VRC are very grateful for all these donations. Thank you!

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