



# Alternative Service Delivery Project Research Bulletin

## Making a Difference: Volunteers and Non-Profits

*The Canada West Foundation's Alternative Service Delivery Project (ASDP) was initiated to increase understanding of, and stimulate debate about, Canada's non-profit sector, its relations with the state, and its role in the delivery of social services.*

*Drawing on data collected from 72 non-profit social welfare agencies from July 1998 to January 1999, this research bulletin discusses the role of **volunteers** in non-profit organizations, and the impact of government funding on this critical aspect of non-profit activity.*

*The Alternative Service Delivery Project is one of a number of research projects funded by the Kahanoff Foundation, and collectively known as the Non-Profit Sector Research Initiative. The Initiative was established by the Kahanoff Foundation to promote research and scholarship on non-profit sector issues and to broaden the formal body of knowledge on the non-profit sector. The Initiative works to increase understanding of the role that non-profit organizations play in civil society and to inform relevant public policy.*

### Introduction

If you look closely you will see that almost anything that really matters to us, anything that embodies our deepest commitment to the way human life should be lived and cared for, depends on some form – often many forms – of volunteerism.

– Margaret Mead

Non-profit organizations<sup>1</sup> comprise a significant part of Canadian society, yet relatively little information is available about the sector. Non-profit organizations are formal structures through which millions of Canadians channel their volunteer spirit. According to the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, "7.5 million Canadians, or 31.4% of the population aged 15 and over, indicated that they volunteered to help non-profit organizations between November 1, 1996 and October 31, 1997."<sup>2</sup>

Volunteer support is one of the chief characteristics associated with non-profit organizations, so much so that

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FIGURE 1

## The Comparative Advantages of Non-Profits: Focus on Volunteers

In theory, non-profit organizations possess a number of "comparative advantages" such as the assistance of volunteers that make them an attractive alternative to government. These advantages, however, often come with at least some costs and/or barriers attached. This chart lists the main benefits and costs associated with the use of volunteers by non-profit social welfare agencies.

### Service Delivery Advantages

- unpaid labour
- the "human touch"
- unpaid governance
- direct link to the community
- potential source of future donations

### Positive Social By-Products

- social capital/trust
- empathy for others
- greater awareness of social issues
- skill development
- non-state outlet for civic action

### Costs/Barriers

- lack of appropriate skills
- volunteers consume resources (recruitment, training, supervision)
- turnover/burnout
- confidentiality/liability issues

the non-profit sector is often referred to as the "voluntary sector."<sup>3</sup> As Hall and Reed note, one of the main drivers of the non-profit sector is "the desire to contribute, to improve the life of the community and its members, to participate."<sup>4</sup>

On a practical level, the ability to utilize volunteer (i.e., unpaid) labour is one of the key comparative advantages non-profits possess that make them an attractive alternative to government and for-profit delivery of services. Volunteers and volunteerism are, moreover, associated with a series of positive by-products such as the generation of social capital, empathy for the experiences and needs of others, and civic engagement (see **Figure 1**).

According to *The Report of the Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector*, voluntary action or volunteering is

"active citizenship"; it is people accepting responsibility for, and participating in, civic affairs; and, it is people helping others, both formally and informally.<sup>5</sup>

**Formal** volunteer work, or working without remuneration for an established organization, encompasses a range of activities including serving on boards or committees; fundraising for everything from health research to recreational programs; providing administrative support; helping educate others about, or advocate for, social issues; and contributing time to the operation of non-profit organizations such as soup kitchens, hospitals, marching bands, art galleries, and women's shelters. Many people

also perform **informal** volunteer work such as shoveling a neighbour's driveway or babysitting without being paid.

Volunteers are an important part of the character of the non-profit sector, and fundamental to Canadian society. There is, however, a scarcity of empirical information about how non-profit organizations use volunteers, what pressures they face in this regard, and the effects, if any, of government funding on this aspect of their operations. To help answer these questions, this report presents empirical data and qualitative feedback gathered from non-profit social welfare agencies about their use of volunteers and the trends and issues that they see as critical in this area.

## Highlights

- as a group, the sample receives 81% of its revenues from government (only agencies that receive at least some government funding were included in the survey)
- the average number of volunteers per agency is 60
- 91.3% of the agencies have at least 2 volunteers; one in five have 100 volunteers or more
- the amount of time contributed by volunteers per year equals about 3.5 full-time staff members per agency
- government funding is not a good indicator of the extent to which an agency does or does not use volunteers
- the "free" help provided by volunteers comes with costs attached (recruitment, training, supervision, legal liability)

*NOTE: volunteer figures do not include board members*

FIGURE 2

## Size of Town/City in Which Agencies are Located

Population of Town/City	Number of Agencies	Percent of Sample
Million+	3	4.2%
500,000 - 999,999	10	13.9%
100,000 - 499,999	11	15.3%
10,000 - 99,999	31	43.1%
Under 10,000	17	23.6%

N=72 Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

FIGURE 3

## Time Period Agencies Were Established

Time Period Established	Number of Agencies	Percent of Sample
Pre-1900	4	5.6%
1900 - 1949	3	4.2%
1950 - 1969	7	9.7%
1970s	26	36.1%
1980s	22	30.6%
1990s	10	13.9%

N=72 Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

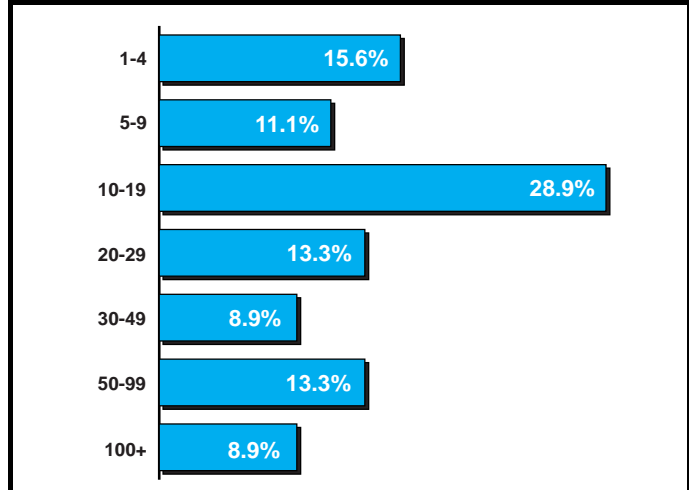
## Profile of the Sample

Data were gathered from 72 non-profit social welfare agencies operating in two service areas: counseling, crisis and emergency shelter services for women (38 agencies - 52.8% of the sample); and services for children and youth (34 agencies - 47.2% of the sample). See Appendix I for a full account of the survey method.

Examples of non-profit agencies providing emergency shelter or crisis support services for women who have experienced violence (physical, sexual or emotional) include women's shelters, sexual assault crisis centres, transition houses, second stage housing, women's centres and programs provided through multi-service agencies. Typical services include specialized counseling and treatment programs, information and referral, crisis telephone lines, support groups, advocacy, public education, job entry programs, child care services, follow-up services and housing.

Children and youth service agencies include those that provide a wide range of preventive and supportive services such as child care treatment centres and

FIGURE 4

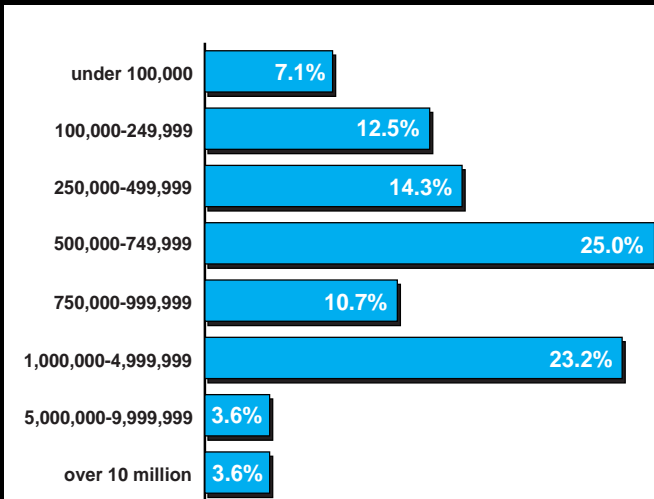
Number of Full- and Part-Time Staff  
(percentage of agencies in each category)N=45 Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98  
Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

residential facilities; counseling; early childhood initiatives and intervention programs; resources for adolescent parents such as life skills training, support and advocacy; personal and motivational services for youth; day treatment programs; youth emergency crisis stabilization; youth resource services and shelters; alternative measures programs for young offenders; referral and advocacy services; stay in school initiatives; mediation; infant development programs; and substance abuse education programs. Child protection services (Children's Aid Societies), childcare centres (non-profit day care centres and nurseries), foster care and adoption services were excluded from the study.

The sample includes agencies operating in five Canadian provinces: British Columbia (20.8% of the sample); Alberta (19.4%); Saskatchewan (22.2%); Manitoba (15.3%); and Ontario (22.2%). Almost all (97.2%) of the agencies are registered with Revenue Canada as "charitable" organizations, and most (8 in 10) were established within the last 30 years (see Figure 3).

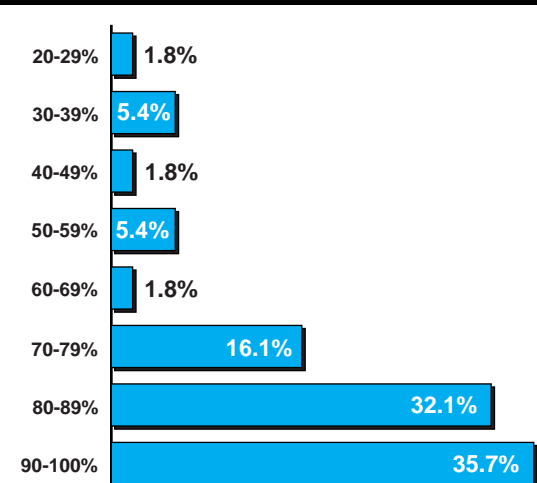
As is the case with other characteristics of non-profit agencies, the number of staff employed by agencies in the sample varies a great deal (see Figure 4). Combining full- and part-time staff, the mean number of staff employed by the agencies is 47 and the median is 16 (N=45).<sup>6</sup> Just over one in ten (13.3%) have only one *full-time* staff member, and almost a quarter (24.4%) have 25 or more *full-time* staff.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Annual Revenues (\$)**  
 (percentage of agencies in each category)



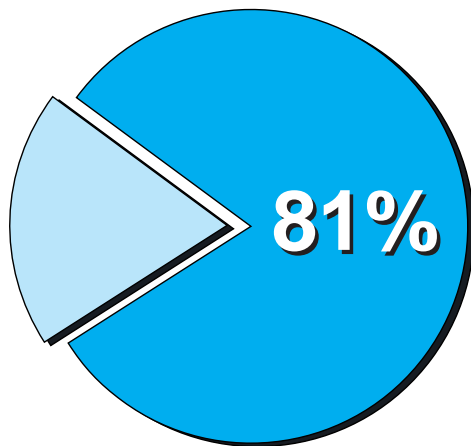
N=56 Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98  
 Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

**FIGURE 7**  
**Proportion of Revenues From Gov't**  
 (percentage of agencies in each category)



N=56 Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98  
 Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

**FIGURE 6**  
**Proportion of Total Revenues From Government (average)**



N=56 Average is based on figures for 1997 and fiscal year 1997/98  
 Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

### Total Revenues

As **Figure 5** illustrates, agencies report a wide range of annual revenues. The lowest annual revenue figure is \$36,400 and the highest is over \$17.4 million. The 56 agencies that provided financial information<sup>7</sup> report combined revenues of \$91.2 million for a mean of \$1.63 million and a median of \$658,000 (figures refer to 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98).<sup>8</sup>

### Government Funding

Most agencies receive a very large percentage of their revenues from government sources.<sup>9</sup> On average, government funding accounts for 81% of annual revenues (see **Figure 6**). Nine in ten agencies (91%) receive half or more their revenues from government; over a third (35.7%) receive between 90 and 100%; and none receive less than 22%. A small but significant number of agencies (7.1%) receive *all* of their revenues from government (see **Figure 7**).

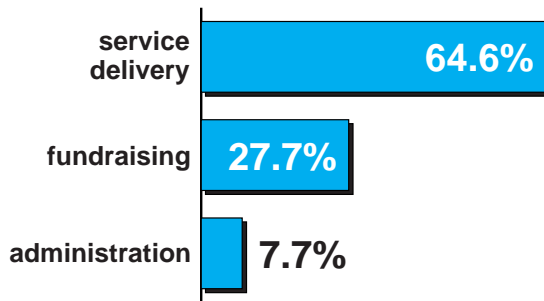
The 56 agencies that provided financial data received a total of almost \$74 million from government, for an average of \$1.3 million. The median level of government funding is \$474,000.

Provincial departments of social services (and the Ministry of Women's Equality in BC) are the main source of government funding. These departments contributed 64.4% of total revenues, and 79.9% of government revenues.

### Volunteers<sup>10</sup>

In addition to assisting non-profits with service delivery, fundraising, and administrative tasks (see **Figure 8**), volunteers are a visible manifestation of community involvement in an organization and a strong indication of the "civic" qualities associated with non-profits such as

FIGURE 8

**Tasks Performed by Volunteers\***

N=59 (6 agencies do not have volunteers; 7 did not answer)

Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98

\*Excluding board members Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

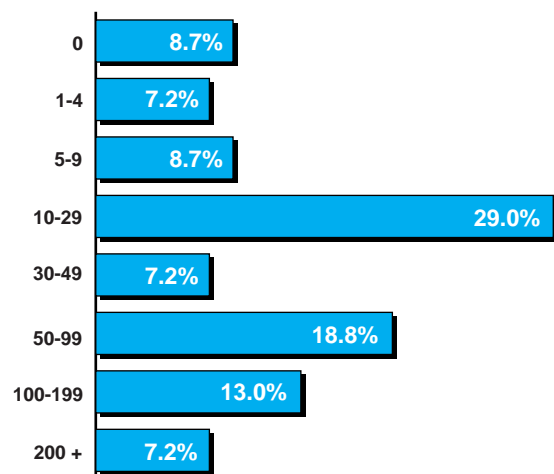
the generation of social trust and social exchange outside the confines of state institutions.

The findings of the survey indicate extensive use of volunteers by non-profit social welfare agencies. The average number of volunteers per agency is 60. The median agency has 24 volunteers. Only 8.7% of the agencies have no volunteers (see Figure 9).

Volunteer activities mentioned by respondents range from providing care and support to clients through counseling and crisis intervention to answering the telephone and photocopying. Many volunteers, especially those assisting agencies that provide residential services, help with housework, cooking and facility maintenance. Volunteers also represent non-profit agencies through their engagement in public relations and public education. Another area of volunteer involvement is fundraising, canvassing, or campaigning activities, and organizing or supervising special activities or events. One participant noted that their "volunteers are spending more time fundraising, for example, manning booths and selling raffle tickets." Finally, non-profit agencies use volunteers to assist with administrative tasks such as reception, computer maintenance, and accounting.

The average number of hours contributed per volunteer in a year is 170, or about 3.3 hours per week (N=44).<sup>11</sup> The median number of annual hours per volunteer is 62. The range of annual hours per volunteer reported by agencies is very wide (see Figure 10). The lowest number of hours

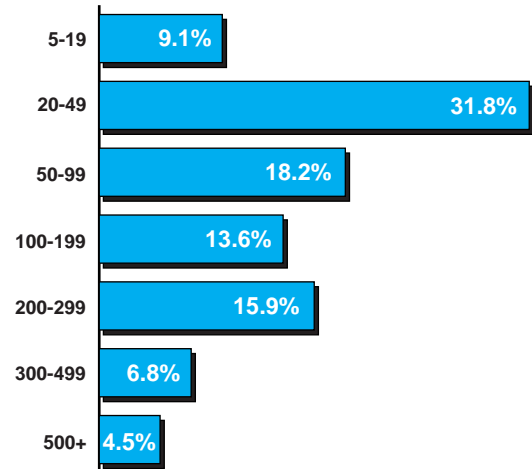
FIGURE 9

**Number of Volunteers\***  
(percentage of agencies in each category)

N=69 Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98

\*Excluding board members Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

FIGURE 10

**Annual Number of Hours Per Volunteer\***  
(percentage of agencies in each category)

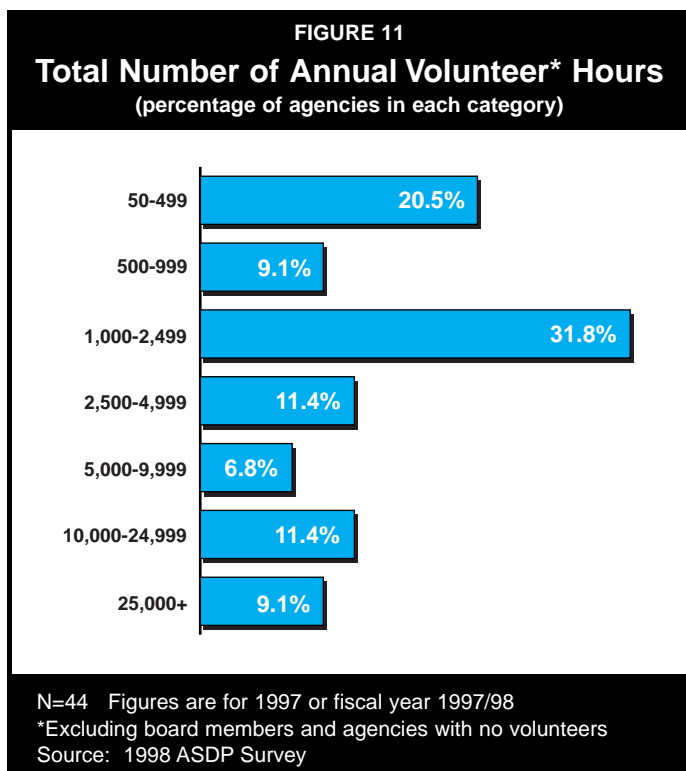
N=44 Figures are for 1997 or fiscal year 1997/98

\*Excluding board members and agencies with no volunteers

Source: 1998 ASDP Survey

contributed per volunteer is five hours per year whereas the highest annual figure is 1,680 hours.<sup>12</sup>

The total number of volunteer hours contributed in a year averaged 6,673 per agency for a total of almost 294,000 volunteer hours (44 agencies reporting). This works out to



about 3.5 full-time equivalents per agency (based on a 40 hour work week for 48 weeks). The median number of total annual volunteer hours is 1,640. Again, there is a wide range in the total number of annual volunteer hours (see **Figure 11**). At one extreme, a small agency that operates an early childhood intervention program in a rural community reported a total of 50 volunteer hours in 1997. At the other extreme, volunteers contributed more than 40,000 hours to a large urban child and family centre during the same year.

Large agencies (measured in terms of annual revenues) tend to have more volunteers. Nonetheless, some large agencies have no or relatively few volunteers, and some small agencies have a large number volunteers. For example, a transition house for women with a budget of over two million dollars reported no volunteers whereas a youth centre with a budget of under \$300,000 reported 200. Annual revenues seem to set an upper limit to the size of an agency's volunteer force, with no agencies with revenues under \$100,000 reporting more than 9 volunteers and no agencies with revenues under \$250,000 reporting more than 49.

There is no correlation between the proportion of an agency's revenues supplied by government and its number

of volunteers. The number of volunteers helping agencies that receive the majority of their funding from government spans the full range from zero volunteers to over 200.

Executive directors were quick to point out the vital role played by volunteers in their respective organizations, many of which were formed by volunteers and have a "grassroots" ideal as a part of their organizational history. As the executive director of a transition house for women noted, "without the generosity of our volunteers, we would not be able to offer the high quality of care and support that we are able to provide to the women and children that need our services." It was apparent that without volunteer support many of the tasks would be left undone and the quality of the services would decline since "volunteers truly are the backbone of our organization, and we are very appreciative of each one of them." Participants also pointed to the effects of unstable or insufficient funding: "volunteers are more important than ever and are doing more work...as funding gets tighter...services cannot be maintained without them."

Another benefit of volunteers noted by participants is their ability to enhance an agency's public profile and increase community awareness. For example, the director of an agency committed to promoting community education about violence against women and children argued that "volunteers are very important because they enable our organization to get input from the community and educate the community"; it is "desirable to have a high profile and maintain the community support through volunteers." A similar point was made by the director of a well-established multi-service agency that provides a range of programs for children: "volunteers are potential ambassadors of the organization, and can develop the [positive] profile the organization wants in the community."

The feedback provided by respondents indicates that the importance of volunteers has *increased* for a variety of reasons including funding cuts, the need to place greater emphasis on fundraising, and an increased demand for services. Without additional volunteer help, many respondents argue that their organizations will not be able to maintain the quality or level of services they currently provide. This places some agencies in a difficult situation because additional volunteers require additional resources for recruitment, training, and supervision.



## Issues and Constraints

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Six (8.7%) of the agencies do not have any volunteers other than board members, and eleven (15.9%) report using volunteers in only a limited capacity. Volunteers tend to *supplement* services, and most agencies are not fully dependent on them. The participants report a variety of reasons for limited use or non-use of volunteers, several of which illustrate the changing nature of volunteering in the non-profit sector in the 1990s.

A number of agencies rely solely on paid staff and do not use volunteers because they have the funding to do so or because their ability to use volunteers, especially in direct service delivery, is influenced by other factors (e.g., legal liabilities, inappropriate skills possessed by volunteers, etc.). In one case, this is the result of an agency's philosophy that "women have been expected to volunteer for too long" and that they should be paid for their work. In another instance, the CEO of a large child protection agency stated that "while we have always recognized the importance of volunteers, they should be used as an enrichment to the services – not as the primary service provider." The preference for paid staff was noted by other respondents including the director of a small women's resource centre: "the importance of volunteers has changed because we received funding for a second paid staff position, and therefore volunteers are not as critical as they used to be." Nonetheless, most of the agencies that reported limited use of volunteers would like to use them more (though not necessarily as substitutes for paid staff) and are hoping to attract additional volunteers.

Several key issues restricting the role of volunteers are apparent: funding linked to supervision and training; liability concerns; accountability; and confidentiality. As well, demands, expectations and attitude can, at times, hinder the role played by volunteers.

### **Funding and Support**

The primary reason cited for not using volunteers is a lack of funding to coordinate them – "they are important but we cannot use them." Volunteers are not necessarily "free." For most agencies, having a volunteer coordinator is crucial for the proper recruitment and training of volunteers, and without one many organizations cannot maintain an effective volunteer contingent. Funding is

needed for a paid volunteer coordinator, but this is often the first position eliminated when revenues fall short or are needed elsewhere. The executive director of a women's resource centre noted that "the need for volunteers and the important part that volunteers can play in the service has not changed. Time that can be spent on volunteer supervision and support has, however, decreased." The Report of the Advisory Board of the Voluntary Sector echoes the participants' comments:

There are costs and it is essential for the voluntary sector to have appropriate resources to build capacity to serve the community and to continuously develop leadership and management in voluntary organizations. There is a need to support the basic elements of recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers through dedicated resources, and to support and manage information technology needs within the sector.<sup>13</sup>

The need to "make sure that volunteers are properly supported" was mentioned by a number of respondents.

The costs associated with using volunteers combined with the pressing need to generate revenue have led some agencies to use volunteers as fundraisers rather than as service providers. For example, a rural women's shelter is moving its volunteers away from direct client service and into fundraising on the grounds that "it is hard enough to train enough staff." Shortfalls in funding also affect other aspects of the operations of the agencies, including administration. As the director of an early childhood intervention program noted, "it is important to have a volunteer helping in administration because they [the funder] do not provide funding for a secretary."

### **Liability**

The nature of counseling and crisis intervention services can create liability concerns for many agencies. This was raised, for example, by an executive director who said that "we can't have people doing front-line shelter work without paying them. The crisis line was once manned by volunteers, but now we are using trained paid staff so the organization can be accountable." The link between a lack of training and potential liability issues was noted by other shelters. For instance, one shelter prefers to use volunteers at special events so that the paid staff can

continue to do their work since "volunteers do not necessarily have the training or the skills to do the direct service work because it involves counseling.... We cannot rely on volunteers...it is almost a risk due to the type of service – we must be very cautious."

Agencies realize that accountability has become a central concern of many government funders. Feedback from respondents indicates that governments are attaching more conditions to the funding they provide – usually in the form of increased reporting and outcome measures – as a means of increasing accountability. Although respondents believe, in general, that accountability in the non-profit sector is necessary, one of the difficulties is the impact of the new requirements on volunteers. Pressure has been placed on some agencies to make their volunteers more accountable through additional training, screening, and narrowly defined tasks. According to the director of an urban children's agency, non-profits need to realize that "accountability and credibility are the cost of doing good business, and that [non-profits] cannot overly rely on volunteers – a balance is needed between staff and volunteers."

### ***Confidentiality***

Confidentiality is a concern for many agencies, but more so for non-profits providing women's crisis services. Although volunteers may be trained to uphold confidentiality rules within an organization, some executive directors related past problems, and one participant pointed out that they "must be very careful about who volunteers because confidentiality can become a problem in a small community." Other agencies have implemented strategies for maintaining confidentiality and have changed the way that they are using volunteers, as illustrated by the following comment: "there were no set boundaries for volunteering in the past...now we let our clients know that all the volunteers are screened and they do not all have access to the confidential files."

### ***Demands on Volunteers***

In many cases, changes in funding levels, staffing shortages, and an increase in the number of clients have placed greater demands not only on the organization, but also on the volunteers. In the area of women's services, the issue of violence and abuse shows no signs of diminishing. As one respondent explained, "due to the increased number of calls on the crisis line, and therefore the

importance of people covering the phones, the demand for volunteers has increased."

Compounding the problem of increased demand for volunteer time is the increasingly competitive recruitment environment. In addition, those who do lend a hand are feeling the strain, as illustrated by the following comments: "we have a small number of volunteers...it is very difficult to attract volunteers because people are 'volunteered out' – especially as people have to work more...recruiting is very difficult..."; "[agencies] cannot over use volunteers because if you are relying on the same volunteers then they can burn-out"; "it is the same people doing the same work over and over, and they get played-out."

### ***Expectations of Funders***

Non-profit agencies are under pressure from some funders and government departments who expect that they *will* have a volunteer component. One of the problems for some agencies is that it takes time to establish a strong volunteer base. The director of a small second-stage housing facility for abused women summarized the impact of funding losses and government expectations by stating that "losing government money had a real impact on the character of the organization...the government wants a volunteer component, but people can't volunteer forever ...[we are] not going to get qualified volunteers to give up their lives for this agency or cause.... The government thinks that the informal sector will help fill in the gaps in delivery, but the bottom line is that they won't."

### ***Attitude and Type of Volunteers***

One of the challenges for some agencies is to find tasks that volunteers enjoy. Many organizations feel that volunteers are really needed in fundraising activities, however "...now there is less interest in volunteering if people are not directly involved with the clients, but at the same time the agencies are becoming more professional." Other participants noted an increase in episodic volunteers who are interested in undertaking short specific tasks and who may not stay involved with the agency for very long. The 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating also identifies this as one of the barriers to volunteerism. Individuals are often unwilling to make a year round commitment to an organization.<sup>14</sup> All of this increases the logistical problems associated with managing volunteers.



## Voluntary Boards

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Of the non-profit agencies reporting that the role of their board changed over the last five years (62.9%), two divergent themes were expressed. In some agencies the role of the board clearly shifted toward "policy governance" where the board governs by making policy and providing strategic direction, but stays "hands-off" in terms of management. Other agencies remain committed to having an "administrative governance" board that not only sets policy, but also is actively involved in its implementation within the organization.

Some boards have moved from being active in the day-to-day operations of the agency to an approach that is hands-off and restricted to only policy and governance issues. The majority of survey participants experiencing this change noted that it has happened over the past five years as their boards became more focussed on being advisory, visionary, and developing policy. The attitude is to "...let the manager manage and the board looks after governance."

While this may appear to be a straight forward progression, executive directors did note that some boards are struggling with the change process, especially since many board members were once volunteers and actively involved with the agencies. The following comment made by the director of a women's shelter and sexual assault centre expresses this theme: "there is a dilemma of how far should the board be active in the day-to-day activities of the agency, or how far should it be a policy setting board...because many of the people who have served on the board were volunteers in the agency, there is a tendency to want to be a very hands-on board."

Other agencies are trying to get their boards to be *more* active in the day-to-day management and operations of the organization. The need to get board members more involved in fundraising, often due to financial instability or shortfalls, was also mentioned by several participants. This is illustrated by the following comment: "due to the loss of health funding, the board will have to be much more involved with fundraising. However, they have not done any fundraising over the last 15 years." Staffing shortages have also inspired organizations to try to increase the activities and responsibilities of their board

members. In this regard, some respondents feel strongly that their boards need to be "action-focussed."

Many boards are struggling to renew their connection with the community, and are trying to get more involved in raising community awareness, public relations, and advocacy work: "previously board members just rubber stamped things...[the board] didn't look at planning because a lot was driven by the government funding agenda, and if it wasn't government funded, then they didn't look at it.... They realized, however, that they had lost touch with the community and had to re-establish the relationship."

The participants mentioned two other themes. First, outside demands require that volunteer boards be more professional and have internal diversity. For instance, one board is "less involved in the daily operations since they learned the problems associated with fuzzy boundaries and have become more professional," and another has realized that "outside demands require professional behaviour now, and this enables the board to function better." Second, "accountability [to government] has come to the forefront" as boards must be more knowledgeable and aware of the diffuse issues affecting their organizations.

## Concluding Comments

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As a group, the agencies included in this survey report a significant amount of volunteer assistance. All of the agencies have volunteer boards, over 90% report the assistance of at least two additional volunteers, and one in five have 100 or more volunteers.

It is also important to note the differences that become evident when the agencies are examined on an organization by organization basis. For example, some agencies use volunteers to deliver services while others use them exclusively as fundraisers; some agencies have hundreds of volunteers while others have only two or three; some agencies use volunteers on a regular basis while others use them for special events, etc. Forthcoming Alternative Service Delivery Project research bulletins will illustrate that the diversity that characterizes the use of volunteers is a defining feature of the non-profit social welfare sector.

With this caution noted, it is possible to put forward some generalizations about the use of volunteers based on the feedback provided by respondents. The findings suggest that a heavy reliance on government funding does *not* preclude non-profit social welfare agencies from using volunteers. There is no correlation between the percentage of an agency's revenues that comes from government and its use of volunteers. In regard to volunteers at least, government funding arrangements do not appear to be reducing the comparative advantages that make non-profits an attractive alternative to the state.<sup>15</sup>

As future research bulletins will demonstrate, this holds true for comparative advantages other than the use of volunteers. This is not to suggest, however, that the relationship between the state and the non-profit sector is free of problems. In fact, feedback from respondents suggests governments and the non-profits they fund exist in a state of tension that, while in some ways a creative force, *threatens* to undermine the traits that make the non-profit sector a meaningful alternative to government.

A common theme evident among the comments made by respondents is the need to "resist" the effects of government funding arrangements and preserve the organizational traits associated with the non-profit sector. This does not mean that governments are consciously trying to transform non-profits into mere arms of the state, but rather to point out that the pursuit of government objectives combined with their spending power can, if left unchecked, run roughshod over the unique qualities of non-profits that rely on government funding to operate. There is a need to work harder at the relationship and ensure that both non-profits and the state get what they want from it; namely, high quality services that meet the needs of Canadians.

In regard to volunteers, and again speaking in general terms, the influence of the state on the use of volunteers by non-profits tends to be the result of *inaction* rather than *action*. As the Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector notes, "Historically, governments have tended not to consider voluntary action and its social and economic impact when designing policy and legislation."<sup>16</sup>

One form of inaction on the part of the state is its reluctance – despite the expectation that non-profits will

utilize volunteer labour – to provide agencies with funding to recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. Respondents indicated again and again that not having a volunteer coordinator severely hinders their ability to operate a successful and vibrant volunteer program. Many of the agencies are currently using and want to use volunteers more. However, they feel that they lack the support necessary to harness this resource. It may sound strange at first blush, but volunteers are not free.

An additional concern voiced by participants is the expectation on the part of the state that volunteers will pick up the slack and fill gaps in the social service system left by budget cuts and structural reforms. Respondents argue that this is unrealistic on the grounds that volunteers are not a panacea and can only do so much. The work of volunteers involved in service delivery is seen by most executive directors as an extremely valuable *supplement* to services rather than the first or main service delivery option. This is because the core services provided by agencies in the sample typically require full-time and trained staff to carry them out. This in no way diminishes the importance of what volunteers do, but it does set limits to what they can do. ■

## Notes

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1. Non-profit organizations are defined in *The Social Work Dictionary* as organizations "established to fulfill some social purpose other than monetary reward to financial backers" (Barker, Robert L., Third Edition. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1996.) The non-profit sector includes, for example, professional associations, arts groups, churches, research institutes, homeless shelters, and trade unions. The ASDP is concerned with the sub-set of non-profits that deliver social services, often called *social welfare agencies*.

2. Hall, Michael, *et al.*, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 1998, p. 10.

3. The adjective *voluntary* is useful, but may obscure the fact that many non-profits have professional staff, sizeable budgets, and do not rely solely on volunteer donations.

4. Hall, Michael and Paul Reed, "Shifting the Burden: How Much Can Government Download to the Nonprofit Sector?" Paper presented at the 1995 Annual ARNOVA Conference, Cleveland, Ohio, November 2-4, 1995, p. 3.

5. The Report of the Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector, *Voluntary Action: Sustaining a Civic Society in Ontario*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1997, p. 4.

6. Participants were asked to fill in a form about the number and type of staff employed by their organization – 45 participants completed the form.

7. Participants were asked to provide financial information by sending financial statements or filling in a form – 56 participants sent financial statements or completed the form.

8. The mean for agencies that provide emergency services for women is \$930,000, and the median is \$513,000 (n=30). For agencies that deliver child welfare services, the mean is \$2.4 million, and the median is \$983,000 (n=26).

9. Potential participants were selected from lists of agencies funded by provincial departments responsible for social services and a list of BC agencies that provide emergency services for women funded by the BC Ministry of Women's Equality. Hence, all of the agencies that took part in the survey receive at least some government funding.

10. References to volunteers in this section exclude board members.

11. Data related to the number of volunteer hours excludes the six agencies that have no volunteers. In addition, 22

respondents were unable to calculate the number of hours contributed to their organization by volunteers. Hence, the number of valid cases is 44.

12. It is important to remember that these figures are based on the average number of hours each volunteer contributed over the course of a year. This masks the variation that exists among individual volunteers. For example, one volunteer may contribute 10 hours in a year, another, 100 hours, and a third 1,000 hours yielding an average of 370 hours. It is also important to note that volunteers may contribute all of their hours at once (during a fundraising campaign, for example), or they may contribute them on a more regular basis over the course of the year (two hours per week, for example).

13. The Report of the Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector, p. iii.

14. Hall, et al., *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*, p. 37.

15. Because trend data are not available, we only have a snapshot of the current situation and cannot determine whether or not there is a downward trend in the use of volunteers due to the influence of government. Participants were asked about their use of volunteers five years ago, but a significant number of respondents were unable to provide specific figures. As a result, the data do not provide a reliable indication of trends in this area.

16. The Report of the Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector, p. ii.

## New CWF Study on Non-Profits and Gaming Revenues

A growing funding source for the non-profit sector is gaming revenue. A 1995 survey of Canada's non-religious charitable organizations found that 44% used charitable gaming as a fundraising activity, making charitable gaming the sector's third largest revenue source. Since this 1995 study, charitable gaming opportunities across Canada have increased. In addition, as gaming revenues have doubled, a number of provinces have created or expanded grants derived from gaming revenues. While these monies provide important funds for the non-profit sector, concerns have been raised regarding the stability and ethics of this revenue source.

To explore the issues surrounding non-profit gaming, the Canada West Foundation initiated the **Non-Profit Gaming Study** in November 1998. The study, one part of Canada West's **Gambling in Canada Project**, combines the Foundation's strengths in the areas of non-profit sector and gaming research, and is the first national study of gaming and the non-profit sector. Questions to be explored include:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of gaming funds for the non-profit sector?
- To what extent is the non-profit sector dependent upon gaming funds?
- Does the non-profit sector experience ethical dilemmas due to this funding?
- Is gaming revenue a stable source of funding for the sector?
- What are the policy alternatives for funding the non-profit sector?

The **Non-Profit Gaming Study** research will include studies of gaming/lottery grant recipients, charitable gaming, and the role of non-profits in gaming lobbies. The first report will be released in the summer of 1999. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Loleen Youngman or Gambling in Canada Project Director Jason Azmier toll-free at 1-888-825-5293.

## ***Appendix I: Survey Method***

Over the summer of 1998, a questionnaire was designed to collect information on the extent to which non-profits exhibit characteristics that give them a comparative advantage in the delivery of social services (e.g., flexibility, volunteers, community responsiveness). The questionnaire also investigated the impact of provincial government funding arrangements, and allowed for feedback on how non-profits see themselves and their role in society. Initial drafts of the questionnaire were pilot tested with five non-profit agencies operating in the Calgary area.

A primary methodological concern was how to capture the diversity and complexity of the non-profit social welfare sector without compromising the validity of the results. In order to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, a limited number of categories and policy contexts were chosen. The study focused on non-profit agencies that were receiving provincial funding in 1998 to deliver social services in two areas: (1) counseling, crisis and emergency shelter services for women; and (2) services for children and youth.

The following provinces were included in the study: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Individual cases were randomly selected from comprehensive lists of agencies receiving provincial funding provided by the provincial departments responsible for these services: British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families and Ministry of Women's Equality; Alberta Department of Family and Social Services; Saskatchewan Social Services; Manitoba Department of Family Services; and Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

The interview process was divided according to the two identified social service areas: the women's crisis services were completed first followed by the children and youth services. Twenty organizations in each province and for each service type were randomly selected. The directors of the first eight agencies on each list were sent contact letters describing the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. If an agency did not want to participate or the interviewer was unable to contact the potential participant, the next agency on the list was selected as a replacement and a contact letter sent. Of 152 agencies invited to take part in the study (includes refusals, cancellations, and unable to contact), 72 agreed to participate yielding a response rate of 47%. The refusal rate was 27% and refers to the agencies that were contacted and did not desire to be part of the study.

A qualitative approach uniquely suited to the needs and constraints of the study was designed to capture the experiences of the participating agencies. For each case study, in-depth, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted. To facilitate thoughtful contributions, a summary version of the questionnaire was sent to each participant prior to the scheduled interview. The participants were also asked to provide any available supplementary information such as annual reports, financial statements, or descriptive information about the organization or the services that it delivers. The interviews lasted an average of 75 minutes. In total, 72 interviews were completed: 38 with women's crisis agencies, and 34 with children and youth service agencies. The names of respondents and the agencies for which they work are confidential.

Some methodological caveats must be stated. First, as with any interview-based study, the responses are influenced by a self-selection bias. That is, only those individuals interested in participating in the study chose to do so. Individuals who were either disinterested or unavailable were not included in the sample. Second, due to the fact that interviews were randomly selected from government lists, the study can be seen to be representative of women's crisis and children and youth service agencies in five provinces. The findings can then be extrapolated to make generalizations about social welfare agencies as a whole, and the non-profit sector as a whole. The validity of such extrapolation is dependent upon the degree to which the selected case studies are representative of the non-profit social service sector. As with any qualitative research study, the Alternative Service Delivery Project emphasizes the internal validity of the research data (i.e., are the data accurate?), while accepting weaknesses in the external validity (i.e., representation) of the overall findings.



**The Alternative Service Delivery Project Logo:** The image of a modern windmill symbolizes the project's examination of alternative methods of delivering social services. Just as wind power is an alternative to other sources of energy, the non-profit sector is an alternative to government. The map of the world points to the fact that government funding of non-profits to deliver social services is not unique to Canada, but a common feature of welfare states around the world.