

Panel Discussion 1

Prominent Volunteer Organizations and Their Missions

Tanisha Smith of Volunteers of America:

Volunteers of America is a 113-year-old organization and through our ministry we are helping underserved communities and vulnerable populations. And that includes at-risk youth, low-income seniors, homeless individuals, and families. We also serve men and women who are returning to work from prison, and those really looking to help the developmentally disabled. We are reaching out to our communities, again, within 44 states in over 400 communities. The intent of our volunteer program is to reach out and touch our community to the deepest level possible. We feel that we're able to do that by really being in tune and in connection with those who we want to lead and serve.

We've offered the opportunity through thousands of our programs nationwide for individuals to get involved and we want to do it in a way that allows people to give of their time willingly, conveniently, so there are opportunities that exist in terms of virtual opportunities that can be done in 15 minutes or less on a computer remotely. We've created onsite opportunities through long-term and episodic volunteering. People can come and connect with programs in their neighborhood. There's an opportunity also for "volun-tourism" where we want to reach out to individuals to say, we have these programs that are touching vulnerable communities and populations that we want you to be a part of. And we will create for you an opportunity to extend your vacation to lend a hand. So we really want to seek to be able to support our communities by connecting with them.

We really want to be able to extend to everyone the opportunity to grow and to serve and to be part of a better and bigger movement in terms of the mission of service, really making that commitment in terms of our ministry to focus on those communities that need help, so that we can grow together and continue to extend our reach and continue to build as noted, neighbor by neighbor by neighbor to make that connection and establish that community.

Susan Silverie of the Salvation Army:

The Salvation Army served alongside the Knights of Columbus and the YMCA back in 1918 during World War I, servicing the allied troops. So it's wonderful to be back. And many people don't know this but when the Salvation Army was started by William and Catherine Booth in 1865 in London, England, the actual name of the Salvation Army was a Volunteer Army. The name was changed to the Salvation Army, because William Booth believed in giving soup, soap, and salvation, meeting the physical and spiritual needs. The Salvation Army is an army of volunteers and we have over 3.5 million volunteers nationwide, and here in the greater New York area, we have 22,000 volunteers. The Salvation Army meets the needs of over 34 million individuals throughout the year.

Many people think of the Salvation Army in terms of bell ringers and thrift stores, but we're much more than that. We have homes for runaway teens. We serve the elderly, the veterans, and we have programs for alcohol and drug rehabilitation. We are in 117 countries across the world.

The greatest use of volunteers is during our kettle season. I serve in the Southern California Division of the Salvation Army and this year I oversaw 9,000 kettles throughout southern California. And I was a

little nervous, especially in this economic climate, thinking, oh my goodness, the economy and the recession and we've got 9,000 kettles out there and we need to fund raise. But what was really amazing was we were up 17% in donations this year. This was the week before Thanksgiving until Christmas, which is our number one fundraising time with the kettles. And the reason we were up this year was because we had more volunteers as opposed to paid workers. So we're grateful for that.

We are seeing our food pantries dwindling due to the fact that most people that came to our food pantries were usually single women with children, but now we're seeing people from all walks of life. We had an Operation Feed our Family and food program back in Los Angeles in the Fall, and we just couldn't keep enough food stocked. So we definitely are seeing an increase. The needs are definitely great with food, with rent, mortgages and what we're doing now is stressing the need to help with the volunteer crisis by having our facilities open to serve everybody as best as we can.

Kevin O'Brien of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps:

It's great to be here. The Jesuit Volunteer Corps is a full-time Roman Catholic volunteer organization affiliated with the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, that has been placing volunteers in organizations and agencies for over 50 years. What I mean by full-time is that these volunteers are people who are usually recent college graduates who will take a full-time staff position in a grassroots human service agency or inner city school or any place that works with people in need.

This year there are over 300 volunteers domestically in the United States and we have over 50 overseas in seven different countries. The types of agencies and organizations where we place these volunteers run the gamut. We've got the schools, AIDS hospices, employment services, economic development, housing, refugee services, services to developmentally challenged persons, women's services, youth work, and just about anywhere there's an agency serving a need, we have a Jesuit volunteer usually affiliated with them.

In addition to the really 40-plus hours a week of service we also have a formation program that consists of a series of retreats and workshops that deal with not only the personal spiritual lives of the volunteers but also a reflection on their experiences, how to process this experience of meeting the needy and the poor on a daily basis and really reflecting on the causes of what put these folks in this situation.

There is a small cost to the agencies in terms of volunteer room and board and health insurance just in order to live for the year. We place them together in each location in intentional communities so that the volunteers living in a particular locale live together. They share meals. They live in a neighborhood that's very similar to those of the people that they're working with.

So we say our four tenets are simplicity of living, spirituality, social justice, and community. And they spend one full year challenging themselves in those areas. The savings to the agencies we figure is between \$5 and \$7 million a year and it wasn't that long ago that that sounded like a lot of money. Nowadays it's possibly a drop in the bucket.

Many of our partner organizations have seen an increase in demand for these services and consequently there's a demand for more of our volunteers to be able to serve in a staff capacity for them. We have heard a few of the agencies say that they're unable even to financially support a volunteer's living

expenses but that hasn't been widespread so far. There's actually been more of an increase in interest in having our volunteers as they lose the ability to fund full staff positions.

We've also seen a rise in applications to be volunteers and we have seen this in terms of people coming out of college. The opportunities are getting tougher for them in the work force, which provides an opportunity for them to explore this year of service with us. They also find not only can they do the service but it's a great way for them to get a year of really good service working in an agency and developing some of the skills useful to whatever career they end up in, and they will have had their foot in the door.

A challenge that we've have is finding financial resources for our agencies to run our program. This year we are consolidating what had been five regional Jesuit volunteer organizations into one national structure. That's what I was hired to do. So it'll be quite an interesting ride in this economy because it's new for us. We need to try to keep our program going without missing a beat while we develop this new structure.

We do see that the need is greater. We stay committed to finding, placing, and supporting these idealistic young volunteers and continuing to build up these partnerships with the agencies that are serving those in need.

If I had to say what our niche is in this world of volunteerism, I would identify two pieces here that are certainly not unique to us but are what we concentrate on. First is staffing these under-funded grassroots and human services organizations, and then second, developing young leadership for the church and society for the future.

Maureen Curley of Campus Compact:

I firmly believe there are huge opportunities out there for all of us to both grow and be very creative about the way that we approach our work in the non-profit sector.

Most people would recognize that wonderful resources within communities are colleges and universities and that's exactly what Campus Compact is about as well. Twenty-three years ago Campus Compact was started by three presidents who got together and were concerned that colleges and universities were no longer looking at what we call the public purpose of higher education. And that is really to train the next generation of leaders that function within a democracy.

So it is all about what is the responsibility to the society and how in fact do we train young people. They got together and they signed a compact, hence our name, and said they were going to hold each other accountable to make sure that they would open the gates of the university and become much more involved in the community as well.

The first thing they did was really to try to provide service opportunities for students. And that seemed to be the one that went along very quickly. They could go into the community. They could get young people out there. And that became very popular and very good.

Quickly, though, they decided that they needed to connect it with the academic achievements of the students because after all that's what they're in the business of doing, educating. And so we were really credited with putting service learning on the map for colleges and universities. And that then became

very popular and it's continued to grow tremendously where an experience in the community is married with an academic course and the students are able to not only serve but also look into what are some of the systemic issues behind the problem that they're trying to address.

From there, we've even broadened more I guess to what we call civic engagement, which seems to be nowadays a popular word. And for that we really mean again going back to training for responsible citizenship. It's about understanding the issues. It's about voting, running for office, grassroots organizing, any of these things would in fact be included in what we call civic engagement.

Campus Compact has grown through the years. We have 35 state offices. So the way that we function is the state offices really get the memberships from the various institutions. It is primarily a presidential organization and they are the ones that make the commitment to having what we call an engaged campus. The 35 state offices currently represent just about 1,200 institutional members and each state is run actually quite according to the presidents in that particular state and affiliated with the national office.

We have with us today Melissa Quan, who is the Executive Director of the Connecticut Campus Compact and we are pleased to say that our host institution is Fairfield University. So thank you for your support of Campus Compact in Connecticut.

We represent about six million students. Approximately 89 percent of our campuses have a dedicated office which is staffed for civic engagement and service learning. And that is the touch point for the people that are in between the community, the students, and then also the faculty, who all play a major role in this as well. The institution is able to be pretty strategic about how they interact with the community and how involved they get.

Over a number of years we developed indicators of engagement that have institutions look at the different levels in which they're involved with the community so that there's both short-term one day assignments but also sustainable relationships with the community.

Most of the students, when we look at what they do, do a lot of work with youth. Tutoring, mentoring, as you can imagine, is very popular. Students are there for chunks of time so sometimes it's more difficult to get them involved on an ongoing basis, although we have a huge number of student leaders. One of the best things for community service within higher education is its ability to really train students in leadership and the majority of the service projects on our campuses are done under student leadership, either through clubs or classes.

There are tremendous amount of internships, too. Eighty-six percent of our schools fund internships to go out into the community. It is important to make sure that when you interact there's a recognition that you as part of the community are really co-teachers of the students, that you bring to the experience and to the academic goals of that student a rich knowledge of the community and how it works and the issues that you're dealing with so that the combination of the academic and community experience could really be enriching for the young person.

I want to mention a couple of opportunities that I see. I mean I'm very excited because we're very involved in the new administration and if everybody saw the speech this week you can see that service was front and center. In fact, even the president expressed his interest and his support for the Kennedy-

Hatch Bill, which we have been very involved with from the higher education point of view. This is a bill which is going to amend the National Community Service Trust Act and it tremendously expands volunteer opportunities for people of all ages. So I call your attention to that. I think you're going to see some very quick passage of that soon and there's huge opportunities for everybody here.

A couple of things: Campus Compact sponsors VISTA programs in 26 of their offices. If you know VISTA, which is Volunteer in Service to America, this afternoon you'll be hearing from someone from the Corporation for National and Community Service. This is a one year commitment to service. It's a program with a stipend. And the way that Campus Compact runs is that a state office would apply for a number and then they place them at universities and that becomes one of the strong connections between the community and the college.

In the stimulus package that passed a couple weeks ago, there was an increase of \$200 million for the VISTA program and this is money that's "one-shot" money that's going to need to get out the door between June of this year and the end of September, 2010. So if people have used VISTA volunteers in the past or are interested in it, I think that's a great resource.

They're also going to fund something called VISTA Associates which is going to be a ten week intensive full-time program really targeted at young people that are not going to be able to find jobs this summer. A lot of them can do direct service. They can also do infrastructure building types of activities.

And the last thing I want to mention is a great opportunity that many people may know, the Federal Work Study Program. By law, seven percent of federal work study must go to placements within the community and the average I'm pleased to say of colleges and universities is just over 15 percent. So here is a great resource that is very often on campuses. It's done through the financial aid office or the Federal Work Study Program. But again this would be ongoing, 10, 20 hours a week and it's a wonderful resource because it can be an ongoing relationship between a non-profit agency and the university or college.

Laura Sodano of the Community Foodbank of New Jersey:

The New Jersey Food Bank was founded 30 years ago by a woman of vision who is still there every day with us. Her name is Kathleen DiChiara. As I tell the teenagers when I give this talk, don't ever think that one person doesn't make a difference, because one person in New Jersey did.

She was giving out cans of food out of her car to people in Summit, New Jersey, and we now have grown into the third largest food bank building in the country, a 280,000 square foot facility in Hillside, New Jersey. We distribute 23 million pounds of food a year to over 15 social agencies all over New Jersey. These are soup kitchens, pantries, shelters, after school programs, emergency shelters, battered women's programs, children's camps, etc., all nonprofits. This food comes to us from food drives, from the manufacturers themselves, from any of the large food companies that you can think of in the country. It comes from truckers who are out on the road who perhaps have a load that was refused by one of their customers, and rather than throw it out, they know that food is still good and they'll bring it to us. It comes from salvage warehouses where perhaps these are the dented cans, or the items need something done, they need to be labeled, they need to be repacked, they need to be cleaned off, they need to be looked at for the expiration date. This is all good food that would have otherwise gone to a landfill.

So I like to tell our volunteers when they come to our food bank that we save the environment because all this food isn't being thrown out, and we save people because these are people who really need it. We have found, and our pantries are telling us, that the need is up 30% in New Jersey. I don't have to tell all of you how expensive it is to live in this metropolitan area. If you're a young mother or father making \$8 an hour in New Jersey, that's not going to put gas in your car to get to work. If your kid gets sick do you stay home or do you go to work, put food on their table, and put school clothes on their back and buy them school supplies. So these are all issues that are facing young people today. And our senior citizens are trying to make a choice between their medicine and their food. It's just not pretty out there.

So what do we do? We get our volunteers to come to our warehouse and sort these food items to get them ready for distribution. We also like to tell our volunteers: just because someone lives in a shelter doesn't mean they don't have the same dignity as you or I. Treat them as if they were a member of your family, and indeed they are a member of your human family. So last year we had 20,659 volunteer visits, for a total of 50,000 hours. I know Dr. Anderson gave his hours, \$19 an hour. We're a nonprofit. We say \$10 an hour. So that would be \$504,000 worth of time, which is very special to us.

Our volunteers come every day. We do offsite things. We collect food at food shows, at Giants games, Devils games, Springsteen concerts, other celebrities who have joined and partnered with us. We have great partners in a lot of our corporations in New Jersey, which we're very proud of. We have a lot of team building exercises. If you're a company which wants to have a day of sharing rather than go to a conference center or something like that, you can come to the food bank. There your volunteers really bond because you know that you're helping someone.

Our food bank exists by these people coming to our warehouse. What's also good is some of the volunteers have said to me, I want to volunteer somewhere where I can kind of hop in and hop out. The training is very simple. If you're an office volunteer or if you're in the warehouse sorting these food items, if you're in our kids divisions putting together outfits for poor kids in shelters, our staff can show you how to do it right there and then. Then you can sign up and come and go as you want. So it's not a long time commitment that maybe people can't make. One thing that we're finding is that volunteers are coming in who were laid off by their corporations, and they've said to me I need to keep busy, I don't want to get depressed, and you're the first person that I thought of. So we're very busy and very glad to have them.

Bertina Ceccarelli of the United Way of New York City:

On behalf of United Way, I just first want to thank Knights of Columbus and Fairfield University for convening us on such an important topic and at a critical moment in history. United Way has long supported the idea and the practice of volunteerism. In fact, it really is interwoven in everything that we do. We consider ourselves a highly volunteer driven organization, from our board to our committees, to the people who are doing very grassroots work with our community-based organizations we support. And I'll tell you about our mission and why that volunteerism is so central to accomplishing that mission.

A few years ago we became much more refined and focused in the work that we do in local communities. And our practice is really to help low income working families access the basic building blocks for a better life, including access to a good education, quality healthcare, and income supports to help them meet needs month to month. And our goals are very ambitious. Nationally, we've come out with ten year goals where we want to be able to increase the graduation rate by 50%; we want to be able to decrease by a third families and individuals who are exhibiting unhealthy, unproductive

behaviors, and also be able to increase by a third families who are achieving economic stability. And those are big, bold goals that we cannot achieve by ourselves, which is why we partner with local governments, many local nonprofits, and most importantly, the volunteers in our communities.

What I'd like to do is just spend a couple of moments on some of the trends that we are seeing with the partners we are in contact with each day, and also just give you a very brief snapshot of the types of volunteer opportunities we offer in New York City. I'd say that the first trend is that increasingly we are seeing people who have been laid off, and who want the spiritual, emotional and physical connection of being with other people, but also to really keep their skills refined. So we're seeing people who want just general opportunities, whether it might be serving in soup kitchens or food pantries, or whether it's more skill-based opportunities, where they can fine tune and keep fresh their professional skills.

We're also seeing on the corporate front, particularly where there have been massive layoffs and some morale issues, companies who come to us and say we want some team building exercises for our employees. They bring together cross functional teams, they bring together teams between companies, so there have been recent mergers, to really just have a day of caring where they feel good about the work that they're doing, but then also walk away feeling good about each other and good about their company. We're hearing both anecdotally and through some of the research that those kind of opportunities help substantially with retention. So one could argue within the corporate environment there's a strong business case to be made for really advocating volunteerism in the workplace and in the communities where those companies live and work.

I would also say that another trend is that on the topic of skill-based volunteerism, we see both companies who say they want that for leadership development purposes, but also employees who are presently working who say, you know what? I want to do something with my skills that I've developed in the workplace, but I want to be able to apply them in a different environment. Most importantly, I want to be able to use what I've learned on the job to be able to help people, but also maybe to be able to tweak it a little bit because it might help my prospects, either for advancement or if I do lose my job I've got something else I can talk about.

And just kind of an interesting example of where we've seen that play out, particularly relevant now, with tax season upon us, we've got a program at United Way where we work with a number of local VITA sites, volunteer income tax assistance centers, where we have low income families, working families, who qualify for earned income tax credits who don't know they qualify for that tax credit and don't know that they qualify for free tax preparation. So we can use volunteers for the outreach to let people know that those services exist, but then also financial professionals who will go through the process with them, and I admire them greatly because they dedicate two weekend days to be trained on how to be both tax preparers, as well as financial coaches for these families, and just in last year alone we helped about 1,500 families file 1,900 tax returns.

And you might say well, you filed more tax returns than you had families, but some of these families needed to go back a couple of years. And what that represents is about \$2 million to the local communities in EITC tax refunds that then circulate in that local economy. So it benefits the family because it's a large cash infusion oftentimes for people who are making minimum wage. But it's also good for that local economy. So it's one of the programs that we really like to hold up as a great example of where skill-based volunteerism could be incredibly personally satisfying for the individual

doing the volunteerism, but also provides a tremendously helpful service to the families who really need those services the most.

I would also say another trend we're seeing increasingly is people who want volunteer opportunities for their families. It's not just about their own individual fulfillment, but really trying to teach the values of giving back, not just through saving the weekly allowance of a child or their birthday money, but getting them into neighborhoods that they might not normally interact with on a day to day basis. And particularly in Manhattan where there's just such a juxtaposition of extreme wealth and extreme poverty. We see a number of families who say I need my child to understand the privilege they have and that not everybody has that privilege, and that they have a responsibility to return some of the good luck that's been afforded to them.

Lastly, just on a few thoughts around some of United Way's work in volunteerism. We've seen a very interesting trend of what we call affinity groups emerging. So for example we've got a network of professional women who have really enjoyed the collegiality, the networking of coming together around a particular issue, but again, coming from different industries, doing it on weekends and evenings, and picking an issue that they really want to get behind and support. Our Women United in Philanthropy, for example, has said early education is a big issue for us. And these are women, many of whom have run human resources departments for their companies or who have financial expertise or marketing expertise. They've been able to help publicly subsidized daycare centers qualify and become accredited.

These publicly subsidized daycare centers are not just licensed, but really go through a national accreditation where their curriculum improves, their facilities improve, and most importantly, the professional development of the executive director and the teachers improves. And there was this one story I loved, a couple of years ago, one of our executive directors was just shy of getting the accreditation, but she needed to have an HR manual. And she said this is going to take me months to prepare. I don't know how to do this. And one of our women an United Way member said, look, I'm an human resources professional, let me spend a weekend with you and we'll get it done. And that's what happened. The daycare was accredited and there were a lot of benefits that came from that, both for the center, as well as for the kids.

We have a partnership with the mayor's office around a site called VolunteerNYC.org. And I want to mention this because it's available, it's accessible to anybody. Right now it has roughly 1,000 volunteer opportunities and about 10,000 registered users. Anybody, any 501(c)3 nonprofit can go and log in any volunteer opportunity where you might need somebody to help you out. And so it's a free service and it's highly trafficked. You'll see some greater promotion of that service. But the benefit of VolunteerNYC.org versus some of the other online matching services, at least for New Yorkers, is that you can constrain the geography to just a few blocks, so that if you're in lower Manhattan, you can find within your zip code volunteer opportunities that meet both your geographical preferences, as well as your interests and skills. So that's a service I would encourage you to check out if you need volunteers.

And then just lastly, I'll end on something else that we see as a trend, and frankly we struggle with. And that's how do you measure the impact of volunteerism? Many of us in the nonprofit sector are constantly asked to measure the impact of our work, letting many of us become better at some of the very tangible concrete efforts that rise beyond outputs to the real outcomes. But it's much more challenging in the area of volunteerism. And so I would welcome any really great ideas anybody out there has, and successful models on long term measurements for volunteerism.