Volunteering and Mandatory Community Service:

Choice – Incentive – Coercion – Obligation

Exploring the Theme

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1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is usually thought of as unpaid work undertaken willingly for the benefit of others. In contrast, mandatory community service is mandatory unpaid (or paid less than the prevailing wage) work undertaken in the community, usually to benefit the community in general or specific members of the community other than those performing the service. Mandatory community service programs typically involve stiff penalties or denial of vital benefits for those who fail to meet service requirements. It is its compulsory nature which is of greatest interest here.

Mandatory community service programs differ significantly from one another with respect to target populations, objectives, sponsorship and delivery methods. The longest-standing and best-known mandatory community service programs in Canada are government-sponsored:

• the criminal justice system (e.g., alternative sentencing programs that require court-ordered community service instead of time in jail);
• the education system (e.g., minimum hours of service in the community as a graduation requirement);
• the social service system (e.g., community service required to receive or top up welfare benefits, disability pensions or forms of transfer payments).

The 2000 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating reported that eight per cent of Canadian volunteers said that they were required to do so by their school, their employer or as part of the terms of a community service order (Lasby, 2004:10). It is likely that the percentage of Canadians reporting some form of requirement or coercion influencing participation would be much higher if other forms of mandatory community service and more rather than less coerced forms of engagement were explicitly investigated.

A 2000 survey by the U.S. department of Education found 83% of all public high schools in the U.S. already had some form of community service program. There are no comparable national statistics on the incidence of mandatory community service programs in Canada.

It is clear from anecdotal evidence and Internet-based searches on the topic that mandatory community service is increasingly more prevalent here in Canada as well as in many other countries. McCurley and Ellis (2002) predict that the rise in mandatory service will be the most important new trend in volunteering.

The defining change of the next decade in volunteer involvement may likely be the predominant growth of what might be called the "Mandated Volunteer," the individuals whose entrance into volunteering is not by their own choice, but is instead dictated by some outside agency.

Mandatory community service is not only expanding, it is also mutating and cropping up in new places and in new forms. If McCurley and Ellis are correct, it will have an impact rivalling that of episodic volunteering, transforming how citizens connect and associate, and irrevocably altering how community life is constructed and sustained. Despite its potential impact, relatively little attention is being paid to the quiet, transforming growth of mandatory community service through the taken-for-granted realm of volunteering and community involvement.

The non-profit sector's growing reliance on volunteerism to help meet increased demands with decreased resources may be misplaced. Statistics Canada authors Paul Reed and Kevin Selbee (2001) say it is a common misconception that volunteering is a broadly occurring behaviour in Canada. It is not. A disproportionately small segment of the Canadian adult population (11%) is responsible for a disproportionately large portion (77%) of volunteer work. The aging of both the "civic core" and baby boom volunteers, the two generations that have built and sustained the non-profit sector over the last three decades, is expected to erode volunteer capacity in this country over the next decade. The ongoing availability of volunteers cannot be taken for granted.

To date, research on mandatory community service in Canada has been limited in quantity, depth and scope. No empirical data exist concerning the potential impact of the increasing prevalence of mandatory community service programs on people's attitudes and perceptions about community in general, or volunteering in particular. It is hoped that this preliminary look at mandatory community service will stimulate attention, dialogue and further research on the topic.

In the sections that follow, the evolving definition of key terms such as "volunteering," "volunteer" and "volunteerism" is set out. Volunteering and mandatory community service are explored in more detail and it is suggested that these two forms of engagement represent opposite ends of a long and surprisingly complex continuum of community service. The relationship between language, meaning and behaviour is discussed. It is proposed that the prevailing disregard for the fundamental differences between mandatory community service and volunteering, and the associated propensity to use the term "volunteering" in connection with mandatory community service, may damage the long-term well-being and availability of volunteer resources in Canada. Key research and policy questions about mandatory community service and other forms of community service, and about their relationship to volunteering are suggested. A list of references and further readings is provided.

Volunteering and Mandatory Community Service: Choice – Incentive – Coercion – Obligation

Volunteer Canada has produced four documents in this series on mandatory community service:

Exploring the Theme is the first paper in the series. This document is an overview that highlights the central concepts connecting mandatory community service and volunteering.

A *Discussion Paper* is the second part of the series. This document takes an in-depth look at mandatory community service, the evolving definition of volunteering, and the importance of language to how citizens understand volunteering and subsequently act – or do not act – toward it. It includes a lengthy reference list.

Implications for Volunteer Program Management, the third paper, suggests adjustments that may need to be made to best practices in volunteer coordination and to organizational management systems to effectively engage mandatory community service participants.

A fourth paper, *Views and Opinions,* presents some of the current thinking about mandatory community service from the Canadian volunteerism sector. It is based on input elicited through an informal scan of the current experience of Volunteer Centres and the networks across the country established to support the Canada Volunteerism Initiative.

2. WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING? THE EVOLVING DEFINITION

The evolution of the definition of volunteering

While the term "volunteer" might seem self-evident, changing practices and social trends have generated both subtle and substantive challenges to its definition over time. Taken so much for granted, the term is infrequently defined in the growing body of literature (Schugurensky and Mundel, 2005, p. 5), but key transitions in thinking about volunteering can be gleaned from a review of the literature on volunteerism and volunteer program management over the last three decades. Through the late 1970s, a general consensus seemed to have been reached that volunteer work embodied four key elements:

• un-coerced behaviour
• no monetary remuneration
• for a charitable cause
• in service primarily to other

In 1980, Ivan Scheier, a noted expert in volunteerism, added two important refinements in his definition of volunteer work when he inserted the words "relatively un-coerced," and the concept of "work, not play." Scheier's definition of volunteering included four key elements:

• the activity is relatively un-coerced
• the activity is intended to help
• the activity is done without primary or immediate thought of financial gain
• the activity is work, not play
                    (McCurley and Lynch, 1996, p. 1)

The leeway that Scheier added to the concept of "coercion" recognized that a range of factors may propel prospective volunteers towards the possibility of doing unpaid work in the community:

• a physician suggests volunteering might help a patient back to health
• work colleagues suggest the employee group take on a community project together

Scheier's notion of "relatively un-coerced" was an important acknowledgement of how volunteering comes to take place. While the initial impetus for involvement may originate outside of the prospective volunteer, choice and free will can still characterize the decision to participate. Without those, it is not volunteering.

Complexities and blurred distinctions: the introduction of mandatory community service

By definition, mandatory community service involves substantial force applied from a source of power outside of the individual performing the service. It takes place not because the participant freely chooses to do the activity, but because he or she is compelled to do so by either the threat of significant penalty or the threat of withdrawal of vital benefits.

In this paper, three forms of mandatory community service are of greatest interest:

• alternative sentencing
• workfare
• mandatory community service in schools

They are of interest for the three following reasons:

• they are the most prevalent in North America and are spreading most quickly
• they are the most clearly *not* volunteering
• they are the most often called "volunteering" or "mandatory volunteering"

The latter is of most concern.

3. THE CONTINUUM OF VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

To illustrate the remarkably wide array of formats through which people can become involved in community work, a continuum of volunteering and community service has been developed.

A continuum is a continuous whole in which no individual part is fully distinct or distinguishable from adjacent parts. This is precisely the case with mandatory and other forms of community service. There is significant variation *within* forms as well as *between* forms. Consider these examples.

• In a "corporate day of service" program, an employer offers time off for employees who choose to participate in a community project. Participation is completely voluntary. No penalty is levied for non-participation.

• A "corporate day of service" program takes place while employees are attending a work-related conference. The employer has committed a specific number of employee hours of service to a p roject. While employees are told that participation is optional, it is widely understood that opportunities for advancement and other perks are not-so-coincidentally denied employees who chose not to participate.

Participants in both of these "corporate days of service" projects would be called volunteers, and yet the degree of pressure to participate is very different between them. In another very common example, some parents who register their children in a recreation program are offered the opportunity to become a volunteer leader in the program. No pressure is exerted and no guilt is passed on to parents who decline. In another program, parents are told that the program will not operate unless the parent "volunteers" to help. The parent may decline, but knows that his or her child will be denied a valued opportunity, and feels pressure to become a "volunteer" leader.

Subtle and not-so-subtle gradations of coercion exist throughout community service and volunteer activities. Such gradations make the continuum a good illustration tool to demonstrate the relationship between mandatory community service and volunteering along with a wide range of other forms of community involvement. On this continuum model, 26 more-or-less different forms of community service are located. The primary dimension depicted by the continuum is "choice," although two other dimensions – pay and intended beneficiary – have also influenced the placement of items along its course.

Continuum ranges

The continuum of volunteering and community service has three broadly defined ranges.

1. The "Stick" Varieties
The forms of community service which are more-rather than less-coerced appear at the left of the continuum under the heading of "stick," reflecting their compulsory character. They are either compelled from an outside source of power, or involve such a significant penalty for non-compliance that they cannot be said to be voluntary. The more compulsory or coerced, the further left an item appears.

The essential ingredients missing from all "stick" varieties of community service are free will and freedom from coercion. The denial of an important benefit can be as "coercive" as the imposition of a penalty by an external source. For example, a jail sentence for the offender who fails to perform mandatory community service is surely on par with the loss of entitlement to public housing by a tenant who fails to meet community service requirements. Calling either of these programs voluntary on the basis that participants are free to choose jail time or homelessness is obscene. Not graduating from high school as a penalty for failure to meet mandatory

community service requirements will feel to many students as disastrous as the loss of insurance benefits to a rehabilitation patient who is "encouraged" to perform community service as a work hardening strategy.[1]

2. The "Carrot" Varieties
In the middle range are forms of community service which are not compulsory, but which offer such direct and significant monetary and/or material rewards that they are not only "hard to resist," but strain or contradict the "unpaid" character of volunteering. The term "incentive-involvement" is used to describe this range of community service formats. Note that the majority of rewards of service in this range are extrinsic to the work. Stipended community service programs fall in this area. They all return some form of monetary payment to their participants well beyond what might be thought of as enabling funds (reimbursement for volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses). In addition, many of the stipended programs also offer other material benefits, such as the accumulation of credits towards college tuition, interest free/reduced/deferred loans and relocation allowances. While often called volunteering, most of these forms of community service clearly do not meet the "unpaid" criteria of the term. They may not be mandatory, and most provide important services to the community, but they are not volunteering.

3. The "Altruistic" Varieties
At the right end of the continuum is a range of community service forms that are neither compelled nor materially compensated. While these forms of service offer important benefits to those engaged in them, the rewards are intrinsic to the work and, for the most-part, non-monetary in nature. These forms of service embody at least some measure of service to others. It is the combination of three features – the

absence of coercion, the absence of financial motivator, and the opportunity to help others – that moves these forms of community service into the range of traditional volunteering, ever closer to altruism in the terminal position.

Four forms of service – pro bono work, employment retraining, stipended service and service-learning – involve such internal variation that each appears at multiple points. Most important is the sense of a graded progression from mandatory at the left, through coerced and incentive models, to volunteering and altruism at the opposite terminus. Note that mandatory community service is as far from the "traditional" forms of volunteering as possible.

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[1] Work hardening is a rehabilitation technique that assists employees who have been injured or disabled to gradually readjust to the demands of a job. The employee practices job-related tasks in a modified environment at reduced levels (e.g., slower, lighter) suited to their individual capacity. Volunteer involvement is an ideal work hardening opportunity because it can offer a wide range of choice, less stress, more flexibility, shortened hours, and freedom from the pressures of efficiency and profit-making that typify the marketplace.

THE CONTINUUM OF VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

"STICK"				"CARROT"		"ALTRUISTIC"
MOST COERCED		PERCEIVED OBLIGATION			INCENTIVE	COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY
(Compulsory)	(Penalty)	(Denied Benefit)	(Perceived Pressure)	(Reward Too Big To Refuse)	(Significant Reward)	(Altruism)

Mandatory Community Service (Alternative Sentencing)

Mandatory Community Service (Truancy)

    Mandatory Community Service (Schools)

      Mandatory Community Service (Public Housing)

      Mandatory Community Service (Rehabilitation/Insurance Benefits)

    Workfare/Welfare Reform

        Parents Obliged To Volunteer For Children's School (public; private; fundraising)

        Parents Obliged To Volunteer For Children's Recreation Program (program; fundraising)

          Corporate Day of Service

          Parent-Co-op Daycare

          Prerequisite for College Entrance

            Pro Bono Legal work

            Loaned Executive

              Corporate Volunteer Programs (selected, depending on model)

              Employee Volunteer (volunteers for employer)

              Service Club/Membership Association Project

                Physician/Therapist Referred (physical/emotional)

                Rent Credits For Service (Price)

                  Voluntourism

                  Volunteer For Bikes

                    Pro Bono Legal work

                      Scholarship Qualification

                      Employment Retraining

                        Stipended Service

                        Service-Learning

                          Pro Bono Legal work

                            Volunteer "For Self"

                            Volunteer For "Other"

(items also appearing toward the coerced/penalty end of the continuum:)

Service-Learning

Employment Retraining

Stipended Service

Service-Learning

Forms of community service

Of the 26 variants of community service on the community service continuum, only those in the mandatory range are relevant to the current discussion, and these are briefly profiled below.[2]

1. Mandatory community service – alternative sentencing

Imposed by the courts, this form of mandatory community service is arguably the furthest from "voluntary" since it is court-mandated and carries a clear and unavoidable penalty for non-compliance, up to and including a jail sentence.

Variants on this "community service as punishment" theme have begun to spring up outside of the criminal justice system. For example, the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, uses community service as a disciplinary sanction (University at Buffalo – The State University of New York, 2005). Court-mandated community service is now used as a punishment in the Canadian juvenile justice system. And its use has spread into the education system where community service is used as the punishment for truancy for both the student *and* his or her *parents* (c.f. Butte County Office of Education, n.d.; Thurston County, n.d.). Community service is even being used as a consequence for "inappropriate behaviour" among junior school students in Alberta, listed alongside other forms of punishment such as expulsion (Alexandra Junior High School, n.d.). In another variant, parents may be forced into service for the school as a penalty for their children's problem behaviour. In addition to requiring parents to sign a contract to provide ten hours of service per year for every child they have enrolled, parents at Pennington and Porter public schools in Prince William County,

Virginia, are required by contract to provide other services to the school such as data entry and "spring beautification" when their children get into trouble (Samuels, 2004).

Mandatory community service is both spreading and mutating. That community service is in widespread use as a form of punishment is never questioned. Time and again this service is called volunteering, and the offenders are called volunteers. Here is one of thousands of examples found all through the U.S. and Canada:

> *A youth referred to Teen Court appears before a jury of peers, consisting of volunteers from local secondary schools and returning youth who were previously defendants. Evidence from Duncanville and many other cities indicates that young people do stay out of trouble following a Teen Court appearance, and the program saves hundreds of thousands of dollars of community expense. Depending on the teen's offense, mandated volunteer assignments can range from 8 to 64 hours per offense.*
>
> (City of Duncanville, n.d.)

Calling any of this court-mandated community service "volunteering" not only obscures its punitive essence, but also does a great disservice to volunteering. One cannot help but wonder what message is being received when community work is repeatedly and unquestioningly used as punishment.

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[2] As with most aspects of this paper, a more detailed discussion of all of the entries along the continuum can be found in the in-depth companion document, the second paper of this series, *A Discussion Paper.*

2. Mandatory community service – schools

Community service connected to education is increasingly prevalent. In its "mandatory community service" format, students are forced to perform unpaid community service work with penalties for non-compliance up to and including denial of graduation. Such programs exist in Canada, for example, Ontario requires 40 hours of community service; British Columbia and the Yukon both require 30 hours; and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut require 25 hours. Newfoundland is expected to expand its current 30-hour pilot project to a province-wide initiative in 2006. Unlike its service-learning cousin in which the emphasis is on learning through community involvement, the Canadian varieties tend to emphasize service with little to no curriculum support or opportunity to learn through reflection on community experience. Fey (2002) encapsulates the distinction between service-learning and mandatory community service this way:

> *A good service-learning program has three components: preparation, action, and reflection. Community service, technically, consists only of action.*

Based on the laudable premise that early community involvement increases the likelihood of life-long volunteers, the structure of the current Canadian programs are least well suited to achieving that aim. It appears from at least some research results that the program structures thought to increase the chance of success have yet to be adopted here. Mandatory community service in Canadian schools will undoubtedly create positive experiences for some students, while for others it will seem as compulsory and punitive as its alternative sentencing cousins. The fact that students performing mandatory service are consistently and pervasively called volunteers

does not make them volunteers, but it will certainly cement the association between volunteering and servitude in the minds of some.

3. Mandatory community service – public housing

A federal law in the U.S. allows the providers of public housing to require community service work of tenants, or risk eviction. Predictably, the service is called volunteering. This variant has not yet spread to Canada. Ethel Velz, who lives in a public housing development in New York City and is a director of a city-wide alliance of public housing residents, says,

> *"When I think of public service, the language itself is insulting. Mandatory volunteer community service? It's demoralizing. And at the end is eviction if you don't do it. So then you make someone homeless."*
>
> (Quoted in Lamport, 2004)

4. Mandatory community service – rehabilitation/ insurance benefits

For at least three decades and possibly longer, private insurance companies and rehabilitation services have been "encouraging" some of their recipients to perform community service work as part of the rehabilitation plan. How widespread this practice may be is unknown. How much pressure might be applied on patients is unclear. Whether or how often refusal to perform community service results in denial of benefits is not known. It is noted here because Volunteer Centres and community agencies report fielding requests from insurance companies and rehabilitation services for suitable placements for patients.

5. Workfare/welfare reform

People receiving welfare benefits or other kinds of government transfer payments are sometimes required to participate in community service activities. Workfare, as it is called in Canada, is present in other countries as well. For example, in Australia, it is known under the banner of "Mutual Obligation," and in the U.S. the terms "Welfare Reform" or "Welfare-To-Work" are used. Workfare-generated community service is identified as an optional source of experience and training for people who have been unable to find paid work and who are receiving welfare assistance. In some jurisdictions, community service may be compulsory, and in others it is one of a range of options, of which recipients must choose at least one. Typically, continued receipt of benefits is conditional on satisfactory fulfillment of the chosen option(s). Penalties for non-compliance involve loss of welfare benefits, which represents a devastating penalty to people who are already living very close to the margin and thereby removes nearly all semblance of genuine choice that such programs may have intended to embody.

In Canada, Ontario, New Brunswick, Quebec and Alberta have all developed workfare options as part of their social assistance programs, with varying degrees of success. It is often mis-labelled 'volunteering.' Laura Barreiro, Volunteer Developer at St. Christopher House in Toronto, makes this precise point in an online interview about workfare as "mandatory volunteering:"

> *People on social assistance (welfare) are supposed to do unpaid "community placements" (workfare) in agencies. Whatever you think about "workfare," it's an unfortunate side effect that this unpaid work is commonly referred to as "volunteering." The individual really is not contributing their time and skill of their own free will.*
> (St. Christopher House, 2002)

The relationship of mandatory community service to volunteering

Mandatory community service is quite simply not volunteering. Most importantly, *it is the opposite of volunteering.* While a range of other forms of community service may be said to be volunteering, there can be no question that the mandatory varieties that, by definition, involve forced servitude, severe penalties, or the loss of the necessities of life such as housing and money for food are not volunteering. It should be abundantly clear that the confusion of mandatory community service with volunteering is absurd, and yet that is precisely what happens, pervasively, repeatedly. In the minds of the public, there is no clear understanding of the distinctions, and Merrill (1999) suggests the confusion extends to the profession of volunteer program management as well:

> *While there are similarities between volunteerism, service-learning and service, it is important to recognize that each is unique.... We believe the continuing efforts to lump all forms of citizen engagement under a single generic term such as "service" confuses the public and the profession.*

4. BY ASSOCIATION: LANGUAGE, MEANING AND BEHAVIOUR

Why terminology is important

Humans derive meaning through interaction with others and with the world around them. Understanding is therefore neither absolute (one person sees candy, another sees potential cavities) nor static (the child who sees candy at age four views the same object as cavities thirty years later).

Language is one of the most important conveyors of meaning. Consider how the choice of words in these dyads conveys distinct meaning:

She drove her car into her driveway.
She drove her 2006 Rolls-Royce into her driveway.

The childless couple.
The childfree couple.

Words communicate more than meaning. They embody values, generate judgements and stimulate many of emotions. "Crazy," "deviant" and "stupid" are loaded terms. "Dementia," "attention deficit disorder" and "dyslexic" are substitutes that convey very different meanings.

How we understand a situation affects how we behave. An object, perceived as a chair, is a place of comfort and rest. The very same object, wielded menacingly above a person's head, is perceived as a weapon from which one must immediately escape.

Volunteer or else

Mandatory community service and volunteering are not only substantively different, they are polar opposites in the most fundamental sense. Mandatory community service, by definition, eliminates the freedom of choice which is the essence of what we understand volunteering to be.[3] The Community Services Council, Newfoundland and Labrador (2003), makes the point this way:

> …when you take away the element of choice and make "volunteering" compulsory, you take away the very meaning of volunteering.

Mandatory community service program participants are pervasively called volunteers, their behaviour is called volunteering, and their work is called volunteer work. It is not isolated. It is not the exception. It happens everywhere, nearly all of the time. Even Volunteer Centres, integral components of the volunteerism leadership that has been cautioning the dangers of careless terminology for decades, make the same mistake. Over and over, mandatory service is called volunteering. The message – *pick your punishment:* volunteering or jail; volunteering or homelessness; volunteering or failure to graduate. How long before the association of volunteering with anti-volunteering erodes people's understanding of what "real" volunteering is?

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[3] Many mandatory community service programs engage people in socially useful work that can be rewarding and that furthers the common good. That this work might not satisfy a strict definition of volunteerism renders it no less important to society; the workers have no less integrity; and the benefits to the community and members of the community are of no less value.

Volunteer motivation influenced by perception

There is an extremely important underlying truth about volunteering: people volunteer because they want to. When they do not want to volunteer, they do not. As the meaning of volunteering mutates into compulsory servitude or as activity so distasteful that it works as punishment for serious crime, is it not conceivable that volunteering will come to be seen as unappealing and people will, quite simply, stop doing it? The blurring of the two phenomena is not guaranteed to damage volunteering, but surely the potential is great enough that it warrants more care and more attention? Future volunteer participation in Canada is already precarious at best. A serious decline in volunteering would be the equivalent of turning the electricity off in our communities. The energy that fuels everything we know as community life would disappear. The potential consequences for our society, our culture and our community life as we know it are dire.

Community leaders and organizations concerned with the well-being, advancement, promotion, and/or nature of volunteering (and the plethora of its by-products, including social capital, civic engagement, democracy, community development, human service delivery mechanisms, and so on) must, of necessity, concern themselves with mandatory community service and its potential to affect the future shape and well-being of volunteering.

5. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

While there is growing research on the impact on future volunteering behaviour of the mandatory community service programs designed to increase civic engagement, most notably that on mandatory community service in the education system (and its service-learning cousin), the findings to date are contradictory and inconclusive. Very little is known about the impact of other mandatory community service on volunteering behaviour and public perceptions about volunteering. That, along with a few other research and policy questions, emerges from this discussion as in urgent need of investigation.

Impact on public perceptions of volunteering and volunteering behaviour

The evolution of meaning and public attitudes may be imperceptible while in transition, becoming apparent only after significant change has taken place. Intervention after the change may be too late.

• Is it possible that the public perception of volunteering may be undergoing such an evolution?
• Is volunteering being damaged?
• Might a transition in the meaning of volunteering into something compelled or rewarded in material terms have an impact on the deeply embedded Canadian tradition of community involvement?
• What would our communities look like if all community service needed to be either compelled or remunerated?
• Does it matter if workers are compelled or paid less than the prevailing wage as long as the work gets done?
• What kind of research would help us to understand if volunteering is being altered by its association with compulsory forms of community service?

What is at stake?

• What is the value of volunteering? To date, most conceptual and research efforts to identify and quantify the value of volunteering have been clumsy at best and misleading at worst (Graff, 2005).
• What would be the consequences of a significant decline in civic engagement?
• What would community life look like without volunteers?
• Is volunteering sufficiently important in Canada to warrant investment in understanding its evolution and ensuring its long-term viability?

The well-being of volunteerism

Just as the voluntary *sector* in Canada has received more attention in recent years, so too does volunteering merit specialized consideration and support. Based on the elusive truth that the voluntary sector and volunteering are *not synonymous,*

• How can those who know about the special value, dynamics and challenges of the latter find their way to the policy table if the ongoing availability and viability of volunteering in this country is to be ensured?
• Is there an effective, but as yet elusive, way to convey to governments and funders and planners both the importance of volunteering and the ease with which it can be damaged?
• Is there some way to ensure consultation with those who actually understand *volunteering* (and not just those who understand the voluntary sector) when community service programs are being planned?

The questions raised here in relation to this single dimension of community involvement and the associated potential shifting in the nature of voluntary action are but one small piece in an increasingly urgent and complex policy dialogue.

The broader view: learning from international experience

Volunteering is not universally naturally occurring. There are many countries in the world where volunteering has not naturally appeared, and in many of these countries, governments are actively studying volunteering and attempting to stimulate its development. It is clear from efforts in central Europe and Asia, for example, that volunteering can be "manufactured."

• Is it possible that the spirit or ethos of volunteering can just as easily be damaged, discouraged and or altered beyond recognition?
• Can Canada learn from international experience? If so, then careful study of the global shifts and developments in volunteering must be undertaken, and findings integrated into Canadian policy and program initiatives.

Volunteering in Canada is distinct from volunteering elsewhere. It shares features in common with its manifestations elsewhere, but it is, like Canadian culture, unique to Canada. Mandatory community service is growing and evolving differently in Canada, and while much can be learned from the successes and failures elsewhere, it is critical that research and monitoring take place on volunteering here.

Community service program ideas pioneered in one locale are adopted elsewhere with increasing speed, owing in large part to global communication and increasing interest in volunteering world-wide. An important opportunity exists to influence how young people understand and appreciate the non-profit sector, voluntary participation in the community, and the larger issues of civic participation. Done right, volunteering can be supported by service-learning initiatives. Done poorly, mandatory community service in schools holds the potential to do a great deal of damage to the Canadian ethos of community

involvement. Careful scrutiny of mandatory and other forms of community service around the world will increase the likelihood of developing successful programs in Canada.

The role of government

Volunteering has traditionally been a bottom-up phenomenon, shifting and evolving over time, reflecting the interests and commitments of citizens to one another and to collective well-being.

• If volunteerism, by definition, arises out of the un-coerced willingness and motivation of the individual, how might government stimulate, promote and safeguard the active involvement of its citizens while still both respecting and protecting the fundamental essence of volunteering as freely chosen acts of individuals?
• How might government promote this foundational aspect of civil society?
• Are there potential hazards associated with the use of volunteering to meet needs that have traditionally been in the government domain, such as criminal justice and education?
• Will legislative or regulatory intervention help or hinder?

Since the bulk of mandatory community service arises from government programs (e.g., justice, welfare, education), dialogue with government ministries should be opened.

• Clarification of the potential impact of mandatory service on volunteering and, by extension, on the voluntary sector is critical.
• A review of mandatory service program design and terminology would be a profitable beginning point.
• Ongoing consultation with the non-profit sector is critical when mandatory community service programs

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are developed and evaluated, and in particular, consultations would be particularly effective if the expertise of managers of volunteers were tapped concerning the impact that the engagement of mandatory community service participants may have on existing volunteer involvement and volunteer coordination systems.

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