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ACTION 1977 ANNUAL REPORT



Domestic Volunteer Programs

ACTION's quarter of a million volunteers who serve their fellow Americans are a small, but highly significant part of the growing volunteer effort in the United States. Each volunteer contributes to a national effort to alleviate some of the more pressing social problems faced by our people.

ACTION's volunteers are one of the best examples of our society's commitment to the diversity of our country and its individual communities. Their work has the dual advantage of fostering a spirit of cooperation and community while developing practical solutions to some of the problems we face. In communities where these volunteer efforts are most successful, a sense of pride and responsibility emerges and serves as the foundation for further progress.

ACTION's goal is to promote those volunteer activities—both within our agency and in the private sector—that result in improved social conditions and a sense of mutual responsibility and community. Volunteer activities that achieve this goal can serve as one of the strongest unifying forces for our people.



VISTA

During the 1960s, VISTA's major goal was to help give people a voice about their own destinies through community organization. This became diluted in the 1970s with a major influx of professionally and technically skilled VISTA volunteers delivering services to individuals. With few exceptions, meaningful efforts in community development disappeared.

One exception is the VISTA project at the Social Action Committee of Twenty (SAC-20) in Kansas City, Mo. Following the riots in 1968, a group of 20 youths feared that their neighborhood would fall apart without a concerted effort to improve it. With community involvement and improvement as their goal, they formed SAC-20, a Missouri not-for-profit organization. Its motto is "Ghetto or goldmine—the choice is yours."

Three years ago, the first VISTA volunteers were assigned to SAC-20. They started out by painting, roofing and repairing homes in the dilapidated, riot-scarred area. They soon realized that they couldn't solve the problems by themselves and redirected their efforts toward organizing block clubs to initiate self-help programs and to circulate information on city-funded resources.

By early 1976, with the help of VISTA volunteers an entire 22-block area had been organized into 14 block clubs. Those clubs then united to form the Key Coalition, which subsequently joined the City-Wide Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations.

"Before the Coalition, the people here had no voice. Now, they do and they want to improve their community so that it is viable," said Debra L. Besse, 25, one of a second group of VISTA volunteers.

Ms. Besse and seven other VISTA volunteers helped residents form paint-up committees under a city-sponsored neighborhood paint-up program, organized block clean-up campaigns, took block club representatives to city council meetings to express their needs and set up a tutoring program.

"A lot of people here may say that we live in a ghetto, but we don't have to think and act like ghetto people," said Ms. Besse, who, like the other volunteers, lived in the target area. "Physical improvement should be there, however, before a mental attitude is improved."

Last year, ten new VISTA volunteers were assigned to SAC-20 and started forming clubs on 20 new blocks to expand the target area. Like the earlier volunteers, they act as resources to the existing clubs, informing the members about funding programs and city council issues affecting them.

Recently, the Key Coalition, supported by the volunteers, succeeded in obtaining a \$271,000 grant from the Kansas City Public Works Department to install new curbing throughout the original target area.

"The only problem with this grant is that it doesn't include the expanded 20-block area," said Ms. Besse. "Encouraged by the volunteers, the Coalition is working on this issue. Forty representatives recently attended a city budget hearing and voiced their concerns on this and expressed other community needs, such as new sidewalks, street lighting and a smoke detection program to curb the high fire rate in the area."

The present VISTA volunteers are now recruiting community people to take over the programs—a newsletter, the tutoring project and two youth groups.

"The volunteers are not going to start any new programs. Instead, they are going to concentrate their efforts into showing the people how to do it and, most importantly, to stabilize and strengthen the Key Coalition," said Ms. Besse. "Their goal now is to get the Coalition to stand on its own as a viable organization representing the people and obtaining their share of funds from the city. VISTA hopes to completely work itself out of a job at SAC-20 in two years."

Since 1965, VISTA volunteers have been working in communities throughout our country to combat poverty and the problems it creates. However, in 1968, the focus of VISTA moved steadily toward one-on-one service delivery, and VISTAs, in effect, became low-paid social workers.

During the first half of FY 1977, ACTION's VISTA staff was further disheartened by the decision of the outgoing administration to request the elimination of the VISTA program in FY 1978. VISTA's strength dropped to the lowest point in ten years and the average number of volunteers serving in



VISTA, approximately 3,960 (including trainees), was the lowest number since FY 1967, the second year of VISTA operations.

The incoming administration restored the Agency's VISTA budget request to its 1977 level plus \$2.35 million. Program development during the second half of the fiscal year resulted in 4,819 VISTA volunteers and trainees serving on 830 projects as of September 30, 1977.

The new VISTA leadership is refocusing the programs to emphasize community advocacy. They, and many who were trying to save VISTA in the past, believe that community advocacy makes the most productive use of the limited VISTA resources. It enables a relatively small number of VISTA

volunteers to work with large numbers of people collectively on issues of common concern. In the future, VISTAs will work with citizen organizations to help develop ways for low-income people to solve their own problems.

Community Based Sponsors

A concomitant of this emphasis on citizen participation and organization building is the development of community-based sponsoring organizations for VISTA programs. This approach contrasts with the previous trend toward established institutions as sponsors.

A recently authorized capability to expend up to 20% of VISTA's appropriation on grants or cost-share projects reflects these new directions. At the close of FY 1977, VISTA awarded its first national grants to three coalitions of grass-roots, community-based organizations that work to develop community advocacy groups. The organizations which received these grants were the Community Organization Research Action Project (CORAP), The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, and the Midwest Academy.

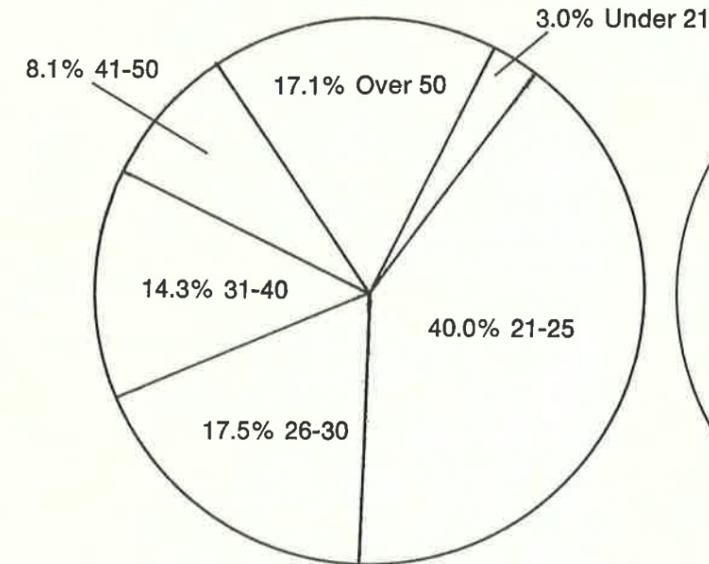
VISTAs assigned to CORAP will be active in a seven state area that includes South Dakota, Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Florida. They will work with neighborhood groups that are combating problems of mal-distribution of city services, lack of health care facilities, utility rate reform, sub-standard housing and increasing crime rates in low-income neighborhoods.

Volunteers assigned to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives will focus their activities in the single area of co-op and credit union development, management and expansion. They will work throughout the South in a 12-state area including Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Missouri, Georgia, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

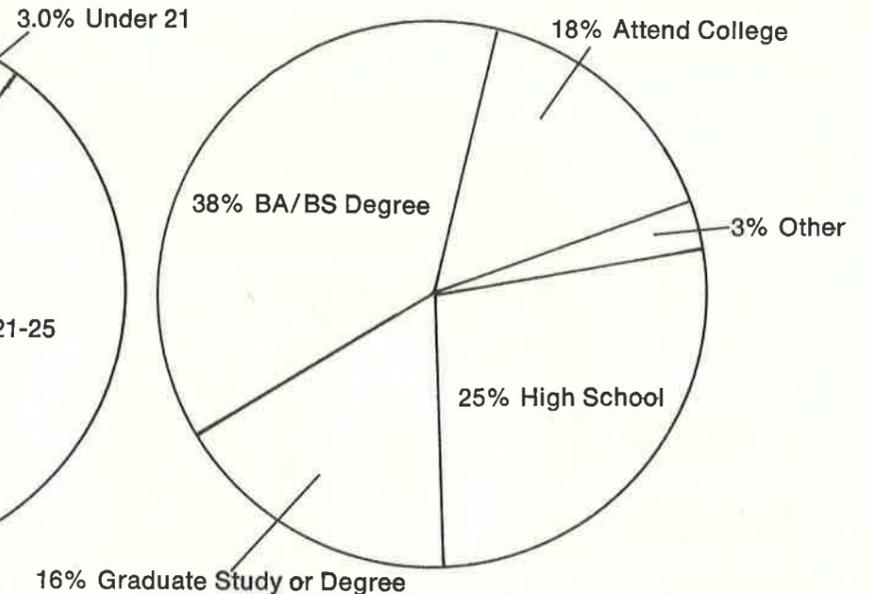
VISTAs assigned to the Midwest Academy, a training institute, will work with individuals at the academy on community development issues. Their aim is to help low-income communities build issue-related community organizations. These volunteers will be serving in 15 states including Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Minnesota, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, California and Oregon.

4819 VISTA Volunteers and Trainees
3181 Women 66%
1638 Men 34%

AGE PROFILE



EDUCATION PROFILE



BASIC HUMAN NEEDS
VISTA
FY 77

