

PRIME MINISTER

You should see Patrick Jenkin's attached letter to Mr. Prior about opportunities of voluntary work for the young unemployed.

In his final paragraph, Mr. Jenkin suggests that the more worth-while voluntary work opportunities will require a commitment that would in theory make those involved ineligible for unemployment benefit. He therefore suggests that they should be paid through the voluntary agencies at a rate marginally above benefit level. There would presumably be some additional cost to public funds in this way, but I am sure that some arrangement like this will need to be devised if much is to be achieved in this direction.

Content to leave this to be argued between Messrs. Prior and Jenkin and Treasury Ministers for the present?

Yes me

MP

30 July 1980



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon James Prior MP
 Secretary of State for Employment
 Caxton House
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Price - has seen.

28 July 1980

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29/7*

Dear Jim,

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

As requested in Mr Lankester's letter to your private secretary of 8 July, following the Prime Minister's meeting with representatives of Community Service Volunteers (CSV), I am commenting generally on the measures that might be taken in my field to encourage the flow of volunteers including unemployed young people to the health and personal social services; and specifically on the two points raised by CSV about these services.

I am keen to see many more young people, otherwise without employment, able to direct their energies into helping others through voluntary work. But for the reasons I explain below, the accent should I believe - at any rate as far as health and social service is concerned - be on locally led expansion of opportunities, primarily (though not entirely) through the voluntary movement itself.

General Issues

At present, both health and social services authorities use volunteers (including young ones) through a variety of mechanisms - direct engagement (particularly through YOP and STEP), arrangement with local voluntary groups, and through placement by local or national organisations - notably CSV at the national level - which specialise in such arrangements. In addition - and on a more significant scale overall - the voluntary movement in its own right is a major provider of service through volunteer activity - particularly in personal social services. Voluntary organisations recruit their manpower from a wide variety of sources, but many use young volunteers, and, like statutory authorities, some are beneficiaries of Manpower Service Commission programmes.

There is a good deal of sensitivity about the use of volunteers by health authorities. It is certainly desirable to encourage them discreetly to make the maximum use of YOP and STEP, including any enlarged opportunities for engaging young people that those programmes may in future offer. There has already been a useful discussion between NHS Regional Personnel Officers and the Manpower Services Commission and arrangements are being made for the Commission's officers to follow this up in the Regions and to seek ways of expanding opportunities through these programmes for service by young people with health authorities.

E. R. .

For the personal and social services provided by local authorities, the considerations are broadly similar. They, too, are fairly heavily unionised and there is the added complication that authorities hostile to us politically may not wish to co-operate with any overt Government pressure which they would see as a threat to employment prospects.

I think, therefore, that any major and overt Government move to increase the use of young volunteers directly engaged by the statutory agencies in my field would be ineffective, and might very well put at risk the arrangements that now exist. The initiative must come locally, and we should concentrate on encouraging the wish to be helpful where it exists locally; and take complementary action in the management of the MSC's programmes.

However, given the right approach, I am sure that the independent voluntary movement offers more scope for action, and I have in mind a programme as follows:-

- i. encouragement of selected individual national voluntary organisations with local networks to consider whether they could make use, or more use, of young people not at present in employment, through YOP and STEP where possible, but also through other methods of which the CSV have given examples.
- ii. since it is in the end local initiatives which count, to discuss with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Volunteer Centre ways in which we might be able to help them encourage the placement of young volunteers through local Councils of Voluntary Service and Volunteer bureaux.

For both (i) and (ii) above we may be able to offer help with administrative and supervision expenses through our voluntary grants vote. But it would be important for the MSC to be active in taking complementary action in its own programmes.

The timing and presentation of discussions with the voluntary movement would need careful thought. I would be inclined to present it not so much as part of a Government "package" to deal with youth unemployment, but one is a series of policy developments which we are taking here to stimulate voluntary provision in the health and personal social services.

CSV

My Department contributes to four CSV programmes aimed at groups in my field. Though not involving many people they are effective. I should certainly be willing to consider further support very sympathetically, and to discuss with CSV - in the context of the general approach I have outlined above - ways in which I could help them. I gather, for example, that they are particularly interested in schemes to help unemployed young disabled and mentally ill people provide voluntary service. I am anxious to encourage such schemes.

With regard to the two points the CSV raised at No 10, I do not think it would be sensible to set up a mechanism separate from the normal allocation arrangements for health authorities for funding and engagement of volunteers by them. It would be cumbersome and artificial and union leaders would not be slow to spot that the sources of money were ultimately the same. However, there may be some scope for increasing our financial help in relevant ways to voluntary organisations providing health service volunteer placements (including, of course, CSV, and some of the voluntary organisations I have in mind to approach).

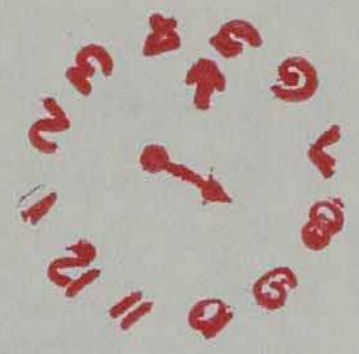
E. R. .

On the question of "competitive tendering" by local authorities for the provision of meals on wheels, residential and day care services, authorities are at the moment free to make whatever arrangements they consider to be most suitable and economical for the provision of these services. Many of them already make extensive use of volunteers (particularly for meals on wheels and day care), and there would be little point in encouraging them to displace their existing and stable volunteer forces. However, any voluntary organisation is welcome to approach any authority with proposals.

Payment of Volunteers: Supplementary and Unemployment Benefit

As you know, it has long been a fundamental condition for the receipt of benefit that an unemployed person must be able to show that he is available for employment if a vacancy arises. Unpaid voluntary work which does not involve the volunteer in an unbreakable forward commitment is, therefore, perfectly compatible with the availability rules but worthwhile voluntary work must often require such a commitment and will be incompatible with them. To broaden the rules will inescapably broaden the scope for abuse. The way round the difficulty is I think to arrange for the volunteers to be paid by the voluntary agency at a level a little above the benefit level. This would of course make them ineligible for benefit; and the community will in effect get the produce of their work for the cost of the marginal addition. As regards individual voluntary work different considerations arise and as Reg Prentice recently told the House, we are considering referring questions about the benefit entitlement of voluntary workers to the new Social Security Advisory Committee when it is set up.

Yours ever
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28 JUL 1980