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# A NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM<sup>1</sup>

BY ROBERT L. SMITH

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With the proportion of youth in the general U.S. population projected to decline during the years ahead, the time is ripe for a brand new approach to reduce delinquency by setting up a National Youth Services Program which would be available for all youth—a kind of vaccine that would inoculate youth against the ravages of joblessness and lawlessness.

*Work experience programs for youths are uncoordinated, expedient, prescriptive programs that lead everywhere and yet nowhere for the youth they are intended to serve. Public involvement in the field is a federal-agency-by-federal-agency, congressional-committee-by-congressional-committee, state-by-state, or city-by-city assortment of unrelated decisions that are as likely to be contradictory as complementary. . . .<sup>2</sup>*

Youth in the 1980's, barring any change in current rates of birth, will be a declining resource that youth serving agencies will fight to serve in order that they, the youth serving agencies, may survive. A diminishing natural resource in the 1980's, today's youth are being offered programs and efforts that are guided by the same growth philosophy that began to diminish other natural resources during the late 1950's and 60's. Nothing being advocated at the national level reflects the fact that the U.S. population reached a zero rate of growth in 1974 and no longer reproduces itself.

The basic guiding principle underlying most publicly supported youth programs is non-intervention unless a need arises from circumstances over which either a child or youth have no control. No public policy exists that is based on the assumption that children and youth are valuable and have rights to certain services that are not controllable by parents such as nutrition, education, health and work experience.

This paper is concerned with the importance of work experience for all youth between the ages of 10 to 17; and with the development of a National Youth Services Program guaranteeing both work and educational benefits. Its arguments are based on the fact that as a group, youth from 10 to 17 represent a

<sup>1</sup> The basic arguments for this paper were developed in 1974 in response to a Federal Bureaucrat's question: "What would you do with a billion dollars for delinquency prevention?"

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Y. Steiner, *The Children's Cause*. The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. 1976. All due apologies to Mr. Steiner for changing his elegant words regarding children and youth to meet the needs of this article.

substantial portion (15.1%) of our current population and have problems, some common, some quite individually unique, that are associated more with age than anything else and call for special action. Our traditional public and private agency responses are not adequate to meet the needs of youth in the late 1970's or 1980's. Old ways of doing business must be modified to meet present and future needs of this group in the world of work experience.

Headlines report (depending on the city involved) that 19%, 25%, 35% of the nation's black and brown youth are unemployed. Politicians and legislators stampede to initiate short term, categorical, prescriptive programs that rarely, if ever, address the basic problem of youth's increasingly limited access to "real" work experience opportunities. Planned, useful and rewarding work experience opportunities is the issue, not just make-work jobs for a specific or critically affected group. The fact that one group or another has a greater disadvantage does not negate the fact that others are also limited in their access to this important "growing up" experience. Work experience opportunities for all 10 to 17-year-olds is and will continue to be one of the critical problems for this decade and the next.

Outside of school, work is the second most important arena of opportunity within which youth must prove themselves. While work may have a socializing function, even more important is the fact that it provides ways for young people to achieve and belong. Work supports positive self-images, provides a means for obtaining material things of value and serves to create a stake in legitimate values and behavior.

Public service jobs for the disadvantaged and delinquent are reactionary and rehabilitative rather than preventive or developmental. Good developmental programs offer work opportunities for all youth, thereby avoiding the problems of labeling, spoiled image, identification as being poor, uneducated, ethnicity, etc., but it does raise a massive problem of its own: how to organize work opportunities on the scale and with the variety which would constitute an opportunity structure for all, or most, youth.

### *The Development of A Position*

*If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do and how to do it.—Abraham Lincoln*

Prior to the 20th century, American children and youth represented an economic asset to their parents and families. In the agrarian society of that time, the family was the basic economic unit. Hands, whether child or adult, were the resources for production. As such, children and youth contributed to the economic well-being of their family through learning to be a worker, responsible adult, etc.

With the coming of the industrial-technological-metropolitan period, America's family unit changed. No longer a "little" adult, and certainly no longer an economic asset, children became financial liabilities. Concurrently, public agencies took over many of the functions previously carried out by the family. Prolonged periods of education, restriction of work opportunities, limitations on adult behavior, and even recreation, fostered the breakup of the synergistic processes of an earlier family life. An equilibrium was disturbed and a schism generated which gave rise to new groups identified as adolescents, youth,

teenagers, etc., with new and different characteristics from those of their predecessors. The differences that separate youths from adults can no longer be understood from the perspective of social class or economic differences. A much broader spectrum of youth are involved, and their problems are felt and must be dealt with by the total society which has generated them.

The issues about which we hear so much—alienation, isolation, dependency, powerlessness, delinquency, etc.,—can be related to the process of slowly but progressively depriving too many children of a childhood and youth of both obligations and opportunities to more fully participate in the life of their communities. Children are expected to become youths at an earlier age, while youth find themselves cared for by a society that increasingly treats them as if they were children. Both groups are nurtured, cared for, educated, recreated and even alienated by strangers and large anonymous institutions within which youth hold no position, exercise no power or have no real commitment. With the takeover by public agencies of functions previously performed by the family, services became highly specialized and fragmented, while they became even less related or understandable to those who were and are the recipients of the services. Progressively, youth have been limited in their ability to participate in efforts to deal with the very problems and issues affecting their lives. Developing new methods of involving and including youth in making the critical decisions must become one of the central concerns of our times.

America is a problem-focused society. Much of our energy is consumed thinking about what we are doing that is wrong rather than what we do that is right. Our concern about the problems of youth are no different—except youth are expected to “grow out of them.” We spend considerable time and resources seeking solutions to the problems of crime, delinquency, vandalism, violence, poverty, energy, poor health, education, etc. We focus on the problems and ignore our knowledge of what succeeds.

People who have a stake in an enterprise tend to be supportive and protective of that enterprise. They become bonded to its activities and values and contribute to its effective operation regardless of whether they are youth or adult. We also know that this condition tends to pertain when a person has had the opportunity and/or chance to actively participate in the development and operation of that enterprise. Stake means participation; and participation, if it is genuine, means learning through doing. All children and youth learn, just as do adults, the only question is what and where? Learning is enhanced by participation, indeed, it probably cannot happen without it. Add to these first two elements of normal development a third—earning. Like it or not, the American free enterprise system is built on the value of money and what it buys. We each measure ourselves to a great extent by what we possess or have the ability to acquire. Earning, like participation, can be learning. It can also be service, a fourth element in normal development. Strangely enough, service to others is frequently overlooked by adults who design youth programs. Youth, like their older counter-parts, need to be a part of something that is greater than themselves, something in which to believe, and to which they can contribute something of themselves. Honor student or institutional delinquent, the need to serve something or someone other than self is an essential and urgently needed part of growing up whole.

Participation, learning, earning and serving were once a routine part of growing up—they no longer are. They are the foundation stones for a national

program of work experience for youth that is desperately needed now and for the 1980's. Self-actualization has been the recurring theme. It is illustrated by others in the following excerpts:

**The supreme goal of man is to fulfill himself as a creative, unique individual according to his own innate potentialities and within the limits of reality.—Carl Jung**

**The healthy man is primarily motivated by his needs to develop and actualize his fullest potentialities and capacities. . . What man can be, he must be.—Abraham Maslow**

**The primary determinant of motivation is the degree of opportunity offered to people for self-actualization and realization both in doing the productive work, in their relations with other people with whom they are associated in the doing, and in receipt of other rewards which they consider consistent with effort expended.—E. Wight Bakke**

**Unless there are opportunities at work to satisfy these higher-level needs (self-fulfillment), people will be deprived; and their behavior will reflect this deprivation.—Douglas McGregor**

**The primary functions of any organization, whether religious, political or industrial, should be to implement the needs for man to enjoy a meaningful existence.—Frederick Herzberg**

Work is one of the significant ways by which people prove themselves and their value. It is as true for youth as it is for adults. Short of the home or family there is no other social institution, except perhaps education, that is as important in influencing how good or bad we feel about ourselves.

### ***How Large is the Target Population?***

As many of our public schools have only recently become uncomfortably aware, children and youth are a declining resource in the United States. Those who have traditionally made their living by "serving youth" will find it harder to serve youth in the future. This decline in total numbers as well as percent of the total population makes the development of a youth work opportunity policy urgent if we are to reallocate or manage our programs for youth more effectively in this country. Obviously the natural tendency is for the youth serving institutions to survive and grow stronger even though the client population declines. This need not happen, however. Programs for youth that have been talked about for years can become realities during the 1980's by reallocating existing educational and employment resources to implement a comprehensive Youth Services Program.

The total population of the United States on July 1, 1976, was estimated to be 215,118,000. Of that number, 32,502,000 or 15.1% were youth between 10 and 17. Of that number boys and girls were roughly equal in number. The white population constituted about 83% and other ethnic and racial groups represented only 17% of the 32.5 million youth of our nation who were 10 to 17.

On July 1, 1982, the total estimated population of the United States is

expected to reach 226,341,000 of which 28,784,000 or 12.7% will be youth between 10 and 17. Sex and ethnic distributions are projected to be down in gross numbers but proportionately the same within this youth group. The important issue is that the youth population is expected to decrease by about 11% as a percent of the general population. Numerically the decrease is a little over four million.

On July 1, 1987, the total population will have increased about 10% over 1976 to 237,226,000. Again, the youth population will have decreased by about six million and is estimated to be about 26,602,000, or 11.2% of the total population. Down by over 18% from 1976, this population shift could permit the reallocation of existing resources to youth development programs or work experience efforts. Minority populations will increase proportionately in this age group, but only by 1 or 2% as a factor within the 10 to 17 age group.

Providing these mid-range projections from the Federal Bureau of the Census hold up, the United States will never have a better time than now to begin developing a human ecology program for the 1980's. The 1970's taught us that our resources are not infinite, that energy is not limitless and that decisions we make or do not make today affect the nature and quality of life in the future. True of natural resources and true of human resources, we need to develop ecologies that are in tune with our times. A National Youth Services Program is but one example of human ecology that is appropriate for now and the future.

### *The Need for a New Logic for Youth Programs*

Americans, as no other people in the world, seek quick solutions to complex social problems. Yet any activity to generate a national youth policy to guide program development generates relatively little political attention. The absence of theory, the paucity of tested ideas and the division of responsibility for youth programs impedes evolution of a focal point of concern about policy. Unlike universal programs for older Americans, youth programs are selective responses to selective needs. We would argue that the need for work experience for youth is a problem that would best be resolved by a universal rather than a specific response. It is a problem of sufficient magnitude to become a focal point and initiate a new logic for youth programs.

America has an increasing propensity for inventing instant programs to resolve the symptoms of significant problems. The problem is we tinker with the edges rather than the core of the issue. There are alternative logics that can be applied to program development. The one presented in this section is subsequently used to develop a specific program proposal for work experience. The concept presented is a philosophical planning base; it provides the framework within which effective programs can be designed and implemented. For lack of a better title, the logic is called the "denominator" approach.<sup>3</sup>

A given event that deviates from the common good is frequently expressed in terms of the incidence or prevalence of that phenomenon. How often a given event occurs is the incidence related to the phenomenon; the prevalence is the frequency which that same phenomenon has within the population at large. For example, the prevalence of alcoholism in this country is said to be about 4.2% of the population. This number is generated from a fraction that has roughly 9 million in the numerator (the number of "alcoholics") and 220 million in the

<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Donald Muhich of AFI in Los Angeles for this concept.

denominator (the approximate population of the United States, including the alcoholic population).

Programs to reduce the prevalence of alcoholism could be generated that would attack the "numerator" of the fraction, or programs could be developed to place a major emphasis upon the "denominator." Traditionally, in spite of poor evidence that numerator approaches are successful in altering prevalence figures, most of the humanitarian industry has focused on numerator approaches to the incidence and prevalence equation.

There is actually no evidence that numerator approaches have ever altered the incidence and prevalence of behavioral phenomena in our society. For example, there is no evidence that a treatment center for mental health, criminal justice, alcoholism or any of the common diseases or deviant behaviors has resulted in a reduction of the incidence and prevalence of these phenomena. This is not to say that numerator approaches are ineffective with regard to individuals; it is simply that it is not possible to demonstrate a prevalence or incidence change using exclusively numerator approaches. Hence, crime reduction programs focused solely on offenders will not change crime rates, unemployment programs for selected groups will not by themselves change unemployment rates.

The medical model is the most cited example used to articulate this concept. Numerator approaches to polio, tuberculosis, and a variety of other infectious diseases were without significant impact upon prevalence; yet denominator approaches, like vaccination, mass screening, and the like, have almost eradicated a number of these diseases. The results have been noticeable, dramatic and long range.

While it is clear that any approach to reducing incidence or prevalence of any undesirable behavioral or conditional phenomena in our society will of necessity be some mix of numerator and denominator approaches and that careful planning will be needed, it is also very clear that we must find new ways to funnel a majority of our resources into denominator programs rather than numerator-oriented programs. By focusing on denominator efforts we will also deal with the symptoms about which we are concerned because the numerator population is always included in the denominator.

Put in somewhat different terms, the fundamental reason most eligibility criteria are inappropriate for youth is that developmental risks are not confined to any specifically defined group.<sup>4</sup> Criteria approaches create inequities. There are for example, families just above the poverty cutoff that may have greater unmet needs than poverty families. There are children in non-poverty families that need services which their families cannot afford or provide. Such inequities illustrate the importance of assessing the needs of children and youth independently of criteria like family income. An alternative is to utilize separate measures; one reflecting opportunity or access. Earlier it was argued that youth by their very numbers and unique characteristics represent a special group requiring special attention in the world of work experience. Any criteria used to deny youth his or her right to services must be based on something more than race or economic status.

Conceptually, the denominator approach makes sense to most people. It is "people sense" that creates the problem of putting the concept into action. It is complicated, not the way we traditionally approach the problem, too grand, not

<sup>4</sup> See Kurt J. Snapper, Ph.D., *The Status of Children* 1975. Social Research Group, the George Washington University, 1975.

problem focused, etc. Simply put, it runs in the face of our experience with national programs for children and youth, "messes with agency turfs," and requires a rearrangement of bureaucratic structures—the last being the most difficult resistance to overcome since the bureaucracy has the power.

Gilbert Steiner has stated the problem of a universal approach much more eloquently in his book, *The Children's Cause*.<sup>5</sup>

The children's policy most feasible—and most desirable—is targeted on poor children, handicapped children, and children without permanent homes; unlucky children whose parents cannot provide them a start equal to that provided most children . . . Unless and until that case is made more persuasively than it has been, however, a children's policy will be successful enough if it concentrates on ways to compensate demonstrably unlucky children whose bodies or minds are sick or whose families are unstable or in poverty.

He goes on to say that reformers and professionals keep trying to avoid the hard choice between limiting their goals and limiting their political strength by not constructing an orderly agenda with defensible priorities.

In issuing his chronology of past efforts, Mr. Steiner also concludes that policy makers are interested in demonstrable, clear, real issues of national importance. It is the clarity of the issue, its strategic importance to political consideration and the soundness of the plan that convert non-issues into real live ones. There is nothing in "The Children's Cause" that says we must accept the inevitability of our past history as the absolute and necessary prologue to an unknown future; nor is there any argument that insists that we ignore comprehensive planning in the development or evolution of specific solutions to specific problems like work experience opportunities for youth. Indeed, it speaks forcefully to encouraging the development of comprehensive policies for children and youth that are issue-focused, demonstrably sound and politically attractive. Work experience for all youth between the ages of 10-17 years is just such an issue.

### ***A National Youth Services Program***

Probably no single legislative act has had as profound an influence on the history of this country as the "G.I. Bill of Rights." Strongly supported for patriotic and economic reasons, the federal government enacted a social/educational policy in the 1940's that enabled this country to go to the moon in the 1960's and 1970's. Eligibility, or entitlement, based on satisfactory service, permitted the mass training of educators, engineers, secretaries, truck drivers and even politicians by providing resources which could be used by veterans for individual and self-determined purposes. No one said what the training must be, when it must be taken, where or even how long. No one identified "the need". No one said that the poor or the rich were more or less entitled to benefits because of their race, social status or income. Each person was eligible because of the public service that had been performed and was entitled to use federal resources to improve himself or herself educationally. A similar effort is needed for youth today and for the same reasons—to preserve the future and to advance the best our society has to offer—our youth.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Steiner, *The Children's Cause*. The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1976.

This section attempts to apply the logic of the denominator concept in a National Youth Services program. In doing so, it deals with a number of other political issues than just jobs for some kids. It touches upon the need for a national policy of human ecology in that it recognizes that human resources, like natural resources, must be preserved, and must be protected from unnecessary loss. It represents a new approach to a fairly old problem and is sensitive to Machiavelli's warning that, "there is nothing more difficult to carry out, or more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things."

The U.S. Congress, in concert with the President, should enact a "National Youth Program" that, on the basis of freely selected work in public service would entitle youth, all youth and not just special or disadvantaged youth, to eligibility for varying degrees of benefits. Some of these benefits might be educational, some might be unemployment compensation and some might be cash bonuses.

Although eligibility would be based on the extent of satisfactory public service, the actual benefit received by the individual would be determined by national priorities. For example, eligibility credits could have a different value depending on how they were claimed: education would have a 100% value, unemployment compensation might be worth only 50% value and a cash bonus worth only 25% of the eligibility value. In this way priorities could be set corresponding to national needs. Individuals would still have the choice of deciding how to use their eligibility credits. Vouchers could be substituted for cash in the education area—perhaps others as well. Both national priorities and length of service could be used to determine long range benefits for which youth public service workers would have an entitlement.

To the extent possible, the national work experience program for youth should avoid trying to find junior adult work opportunities for youth. If the program is predicated on work experience that is competitive with unemployed adults, particularly during a high period of unemployment, then few adults and even fewer businesses can realistically support the effort. Yet, if the 1960's taught the nation anything, it should have been that young people need social, educational and recreational services that are best provided by youth themselves. The drug problem of the 60's was first identified and responded to by youth. Adults and formal agencies of social service could not adequately, or in many cases even intelligently, respond to drug-abusing young people. Street programs, hot lines, peer social service centers, crash pads, counseling efforts, runaway residences, etc. were developed and supported by youth long before adults became concerned.

Many of the subsequent adult-operated programs were modeled after the youth developed and operated programs, but without involving youth in any capacity except as client. Since then youth have been involved in cross-teaching programs, local prevention efforts, and a myriad of other activities that adults do not want to do or don't do well. Letting young people design and implement their own programs for youth respond to the earlier identified principles of participation, learning, earning and serving.

Many, if not a majority of the services through which youth might earn entitlement under this program should address the problems of children and youth (as defined by them). For example, few poor communities, or others for that matter, have sufficient day care centers or nursery services for the young or the old. Youth could and should become the person-power to provide these needed personal services.

Other possibilities include escort services for the elderly to and from banks and stores, food services for meals on wheels programs, housekeeping services and visitor programs. Recreation and the adequate use of leisure time are service areas that offer limitless opportunities for youth services. Work with the developmentally disabled, youth service bureaus, urban restoration teams, ecology work forces, drug abuse centers, crime suppression information programs, delinquency prevention efforts, crisis intervention, aids to police, fireman and justice agencies represent programs in which youth have demonstrated both enthusiasm and interest. Each of these project examples of work experience for youth offer the opportunity for participation, learning, earning and serving—all within the community in which they reside.

The "National Youth Services Program" permits government to offer youth an immediate reward, pay for services rendered, while also emphasizing a national goal and future reward in the form of education or other benefits. With only a little creative thought we can begin to address one of the critical problems of our time, work experience for youth, and do so using a comprehensive approach that avoids the problems of categories or labeling.

In order for the program to work effectively, program design and implementation must be locally determined. Localism, planning, organization and the development of appropriate linkages to important community groups, state agencies and the federal government are viewed as essential features of this program.

The lack of work experience opportunities for youth is national in scope, but variations in the nature and extent of the problem are unique to each local community. The best program strategy for each community is one that the local community has designed to fit its specific demographic, cultural, and historical uniqueness.

Geographic, human, organizational, cultural, and time and space differences between specific communities will have an effect on the organizational structure through which the youth work experience program will operate. Both the federal and state governments are remote from the immediate scene in which youth are unable to work. In the past, federal or state organized programs have not been responsive to community needs. Local government is more aware of the specific nature of their own youth employment problems and they are also politically accountable for their decisions. Local persons are better able to predict the probable success of a particular program or strategy as well as assess its results. Organizing the operation of direct service programs at the local level allows these assets of local government and individuals to be best utilized while also generating greater responsibility. Local control over the planning, implementation and operation of services not only generates new jobs for adults but also for youth (if they are participants and not just advisors). It provides an opportunity for community residents, including the youth, to have a greater feeling that their input is likely to have an impact upon program operation, and thereby encourages greater participation and commitment.

While it is true that the federal and state governments are remote from actual unemployment of the street, it is also true that these two levels of government have available a great amount of resources for programs to generate youth work experience programs. Billions are available to underwrite the cost of such

programs in Labor, HEW, Education, HUD, and the Office of Juvenile Justice within the Department of Justice. An administrative mechanism for the coordination of programs and policies of this sort even exists in the form of the Federal Coordinating Council for Juvenile Justice—though it is not used.

It is through the inter-linking of the resources of the federal, state and local governments, in the form of money, people and ideas, that this problem of limited opportunities for youth work experience can be substantially resolved. The federal and state role is to facilitate the local efforts through support in the form of money, technical assistance, training, and research. Furthermore, support should include a willingness to forego unnecessary guidelines and requirements that interfere with locals taking advantage of options not anticipated by federal and state officials.

Youth must be involved in the design and implementation of the local work experience program for at least two reasons: (1) it is a new and important way to provide new work experience to youth; and (2) it generates commitment through genuine participation. It may also stimulate new ideas and personal growth by both adults and youth, but these are secondary to the main purposes of work experience and personal commitment.

The actual mechanics of the program can follow the prime sponsor model of labor, special revenue sharing or even block grants, formula grants, etc. The procedural processes are less important than the design which must be voluntary and maintain the integrity of localism and self determination, youth involvement, equality of opportunity for all youth, and the principles of participation, learning, earning and serving which are essential to the healthy development of all youth.

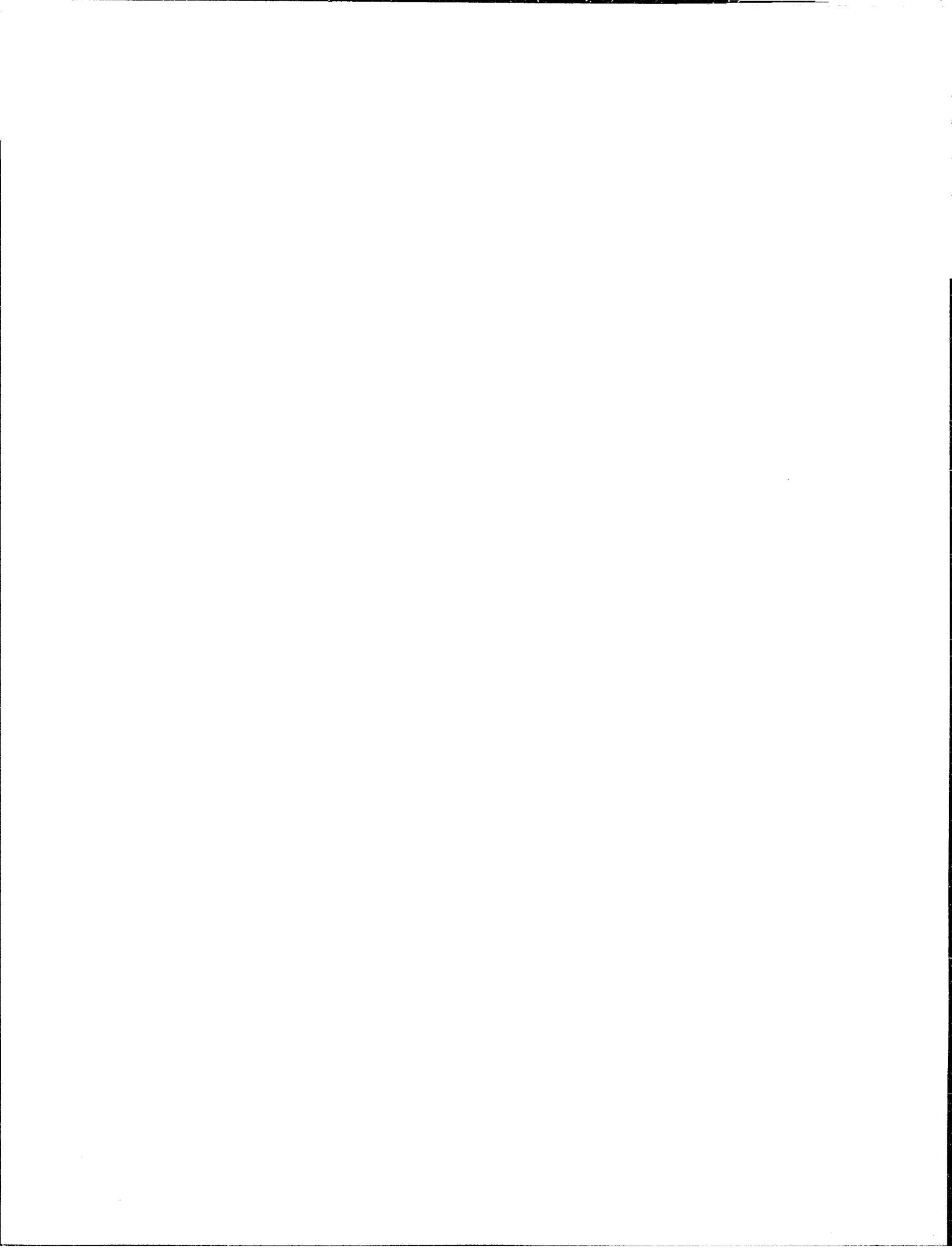
Whether the program addresses the real target population, the 10-17 year old, or a more immediate target group like the 15-17 year olds is a political choice that, like all such choices, will be a compromise. Whether it is the 1976 target population of 32.5 million 10-17 year olds or the 12.6 million 15-17 year olds, the problem is one of manageable proportions. Either number can be successfully programmed for, if the Federal government is willing to accept the fact that local people are better able to design work experience programs than the skilled technicians employed at the federal and state level. The immediate and long range implications for education and national development are immense, but no greater than those now being experienced in Japan and Russia, two countries that have programs designed to provide work experience for youth. The United States values youthfulness in adults, the unanswered question is do we value youth?

Operationally, the budget to implement a Youth Services Program should have certain general limitations on the amounts to be spent for administration and physical construction since this is a program of service by and for youth. Service to people by youth is the primary and constant focus.

Control or guidelines for expenditures might look something like this:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Operation cost for programs through which youth</b> |            |
| <b>establish eligibility (wages) . . . . .</b>         | <b>50%</b> |
| <b>Future youth entitlements . . . . .</b>             | <b>40%</b> |
| <b>Administration and overhead . . . . .</b>           | <b>10%</b> |

The program we have outlined is adaptable to local, state and national needs, is responsive to the needs of youth, and addresses the core problem of youth work experience. It gets us out of the categorical "bag" government has been in for so long. Most important, it leaves the issue of what kind of service programs to state and local community residents and the decision to participate to individual youth. It is workable and policy-based. It is one example of a denominator approach to one of the most critical problems facing America and its youth in the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's and early 1990's. It is in fact, A National Youth Services Program designed around the need for youth, all youth, to have work experience opportunities that provides for participation, learning, earning and serving.



**END**