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From The Hip

Tony Deifell

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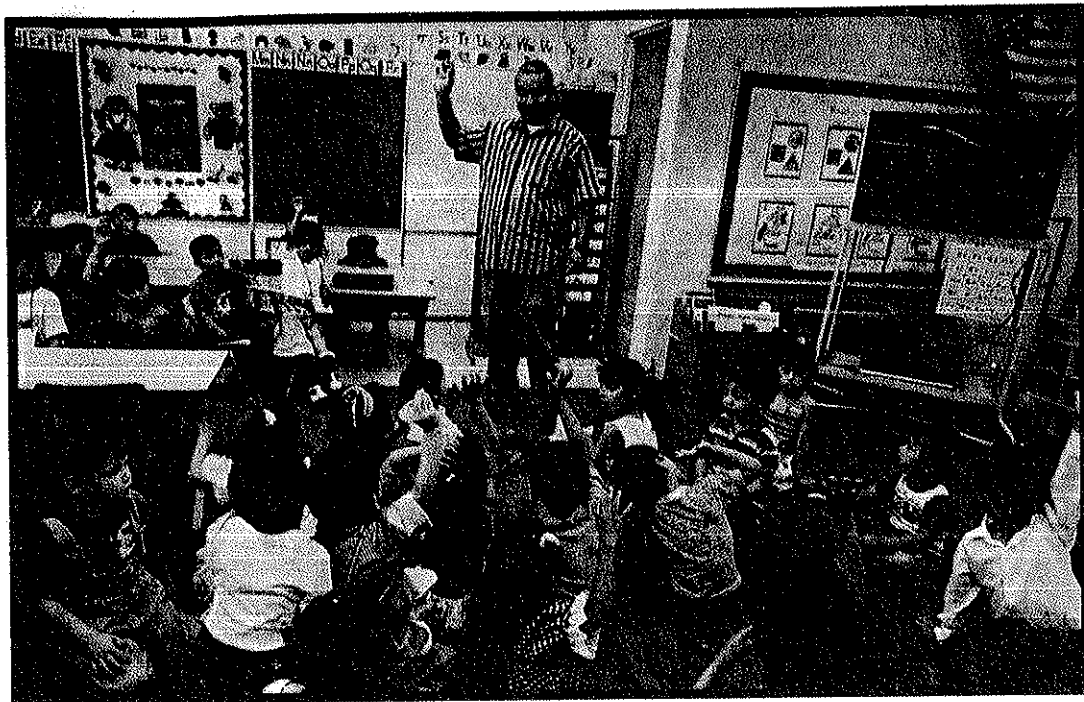
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Deifell, Tony

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After the national training for Summer of Service (SOS) volunteers at California's Treasure Island naval base, Danny Bravo spent his summer with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps working for the Red Cross of East Los Angeles. At Vermont Elementary School, Bravo quizzes a kindergarten class on a video they just watched. Photo by Michael Emery.

"Service" means different things to different people. Throughout this issue of Social Policy, we feature photographs of From The Hip documentary project. Editor and project director Tony Deifell reflects on why it is important to define service broadly.

When *From The Hip* set out a year ago to document the community service movement, we didn't imagine the definition of service would be controversial. With a grant from the Commission on National and Community Service, a group of young people based in Durham, NC, recruited 280 photographers and writers across the country age 25 and under to discover and record what young people are doing in their communities, and how they define service—from the hip, no holds barred.

Some of the stories we got back became the focus of considerable debate. Is a 25-year-old Presbyterian deacon in Eugene, Oregon, performing a service by volunteering *within* her church, while at the same time serving as a reluctant spokeswoman for the gay and lesbian community? What of the owner of the Fusion Café, an alternative for-profit hangout that serves as an informal youth center for teens in Jacksonville, Florida? Would the public service of the nation's youngest county commissioner also be considered national or community service?

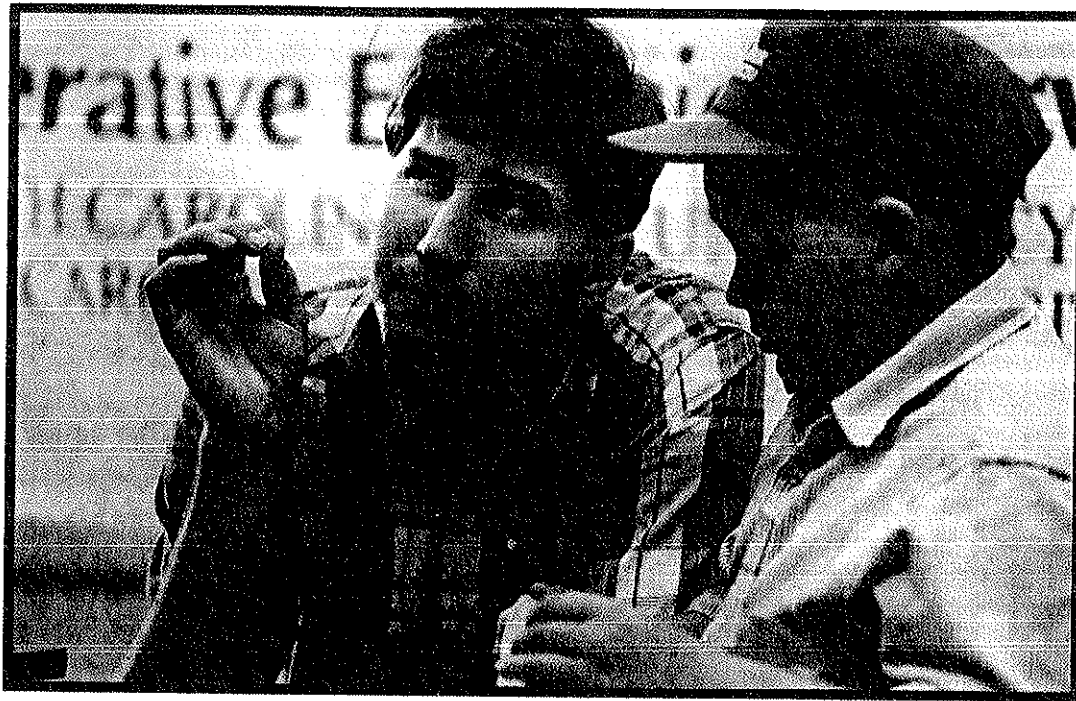
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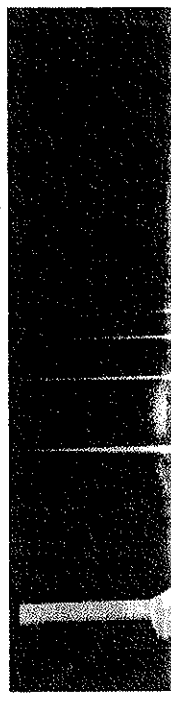
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From The Hip

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At a training session for 4-H students and Future Farmers of America held by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Hickory, NC, Charlie Wright, 9, asks Vance Dalton, 25, a question about livestock judging. Photo by Becky Kirkland.

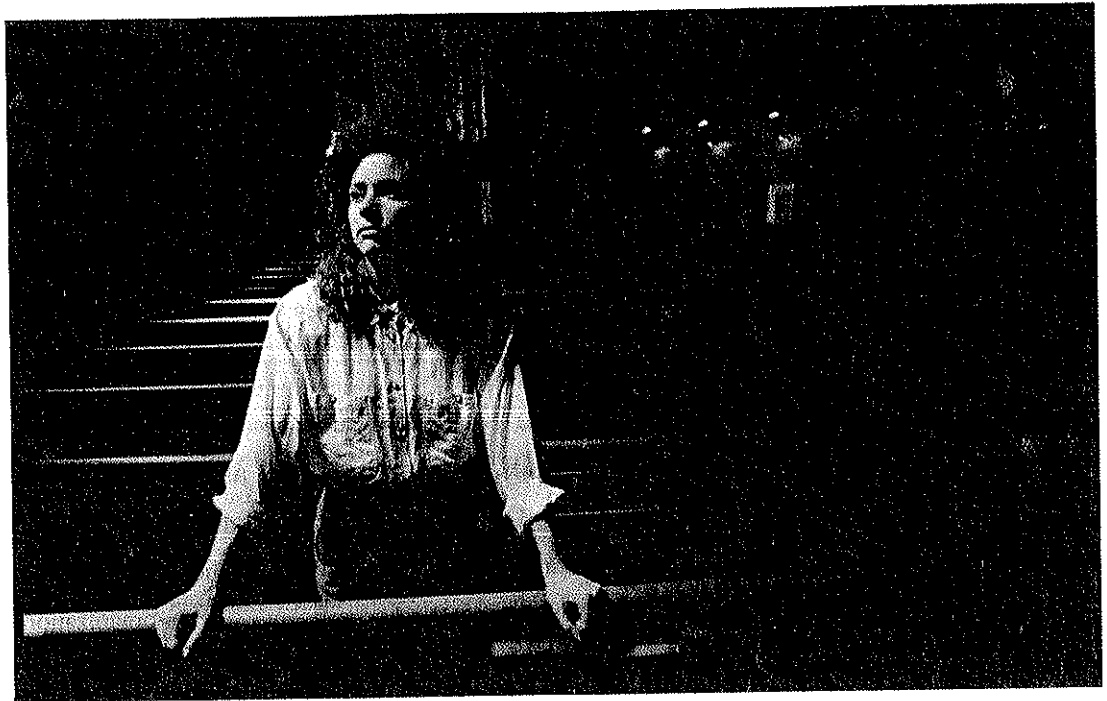


Heather Boonstra teaches Sunday deacon, Boonstra have been alien think that's what

As we collected and edited the stories, we learned that young people don't believe service is tied to a particular set of tasks. Service, to them, is an ethic that defines people's lives and work. Ultimately, *From The Hip* attempts to show that we would better serve our neighborhoods if we promoted this service ethic among all institutions and individuals. Many people get so stuck on a narrow conception of "community service" that they are unable to address their community's unmet needs. Just imagine community service as a common principle reaching beyond volunteerism to include advocacy, business, health, community leadership, education, public service, politics, and religion.

National service, a powder keg of good intentions, worries me. Among the many concerns advocates have voiced, I hear little discussion about how narrowly "community service" is being defined.

Now that Congress has allocated \$1.5 billion over three years through the National and Community Service Trust Act, there is a danger of codifying a narrow interpretation of what national service means. The more money the government invests in service, the more it risks reinforcing its own definition—influencing com-



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Heather Boonstra, 25, of Central Presbyterian Church in Eugene, Oregon, visits shut-in elderly members, teaches Sunday school, and through the church helps people who are homeless. When nominated to be a deacon, Boonstra's homosexuality spawned much debate. "There's a whole group of people out there who have been alienated from Christianity because the church won't accept them," Boonstra says. "I don't think that's what God intended." Photo by Karen Ballard.

community groups applying for federal grants to conform to a restrictive federal definition of service. The government should consciously avoid this risk by making sure the national service program offers a platform for continual dialog recognizing the diverse array of activities young people call service.

We hope *From The Hip* will be one of many catalysts for further debate about conventional beliefs, assumptions, and definitions of community service. If the administration wants to involve unprecedented numbers of participants in its AmeriCorps service program, leaving the door open to continual debate will be a key to attracting a broad range of young people for reasons other than simply paying off their college loans.

—Tony Deifell

A selection of 34 stories and 160 images of From The Hip will be presented in a book and traveling photography exhibit in 1994. For more information, contact the project at 413 East Chapel Hill Street, Durham, NC 27701. From The Hip is a project of the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL).